



The Impact of Digital Culture on the Cinematic Experience: Vertical Cinema and New-Generation Audiences

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Abstract

This study examines the rise of the vertical format in the digital age within the context of social media-based viewing and production practices and aims to discuss how this transformation has shaped the media habits, aesthetic perceptions, and understanding of cinema among new generations of viewers. The focus is how young audiences perceive vertical cinema, use it, and evaluate its aesthetic possibilities. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted through purposive sampling; eight were selected for in-depth thematic analysis using MAXQDA 24. The findings indicate that participants were frequently exposed to the vertical format and primarily associated it with social media practices. The vertical format is preferred for short, fast, and mobile-friendly content and is valued for its practicality and ease of production. However, it was perceived as limited in terms of narrative depth, visual composition, and emotional conveyance, and was therefore viewed as falling outside the realm of cinematic art. Vertical cinema was found to be both a product of digital culture and a medium that reproduces it. The study suggests that, within this sample, vertical cinema embodies a dual character: it encourages creative participation while remaining distant from traditional cinematic values.

Keywords: vertical cinema; vertical video; Generation Z; mobile spectatorship; digital culture; audience perceptions; smartphone filmmaking



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Introduction

As digitalization permeates everyday life, the concept of digital culture (Deuze, 2006, p. 63) extends beyond online environments, signifying a cultural transformation that reshapes how individuals think, feel, communicate, and construct meaning. Also referred to as cyberculture, electronic culture, or virtual culture, it now describes a context in which technological tools merge with everyday experiences to generate new forms of subjectivity (Koç, 2022, pp. 500–508). This transformation has profoundly influenced cinema, altering production techniques, viewing practices, perceptual regimes, and the relationship between audiences and content. As McLuhan (1994, p. 7) stated, “the medium is the message”: the medium shapes both the form and content of communication. In the digital age, the cinematic experience evolves alongside the platforms that deliver it.

A prominent example of this transformation is vertical cinema, which has emerged with the widespread adoption of mobile devices as an alternative to the traditional horizontal format. Tailored to audiences’ mobile viewing habits, it redefines the spatial, temporal, and narrative

relationship between audiences and content (Evans, 2019; Millman, 2017). This shift challenges the traditional model of cinema as collective viewing in darkened theaters, replacing it with individualized, portable experiences. Smartphones, once mere communication tools, have become spaces where users act as both producers and consumers, embodying Toffler's (1980) notion of the "prosumer." The audience now actively interacts with, shapes, and even reproduces content. Vertical cinema is both a product and a practice of this shift, fostering an experiential space within participatory culture where producer–audience boundaries blur. Thus, it is not merely a technical novelty but an expressive form reflecting the cultural logic of the digital age, audience engagement, and evolving cinematic narratives.

In the past quarter-century, advances in digital technology have given rise to a generation immersed in digital environments, shaped by networked spaces and unique digital media perceptions. Concepts such as "digital immigrant" and "digital native" (Prensky, 2001a, p. 3) continue to frame generational differences in online behavior. Building on these shifts, this study examines how digital culture has transformed the cinematic experience, focusing on vertical cinema and new-generation audiences. Following Casetti (2011) and Denson and Leyda (2016), who describe how the post-cinematic era has reshaped viewing practices, cinema has moved beyond narratives tied to darkened theaters and has evolved into a multilayered experiential domain spanning various platforms, formats, and modes. Vertical cinema thus

represents not only a formal divergence but also a complex cultural configuration that reflects changes in audience perception, the attention economy, and narrative continuity. Understanding this requires analyzing its impact on young audiences, who reconstruct cinematic experience through both production and reception. These perspectives collectively suggest that contemporary cinematic experience should be understood through the interaction of mobile media environments, participatory production practices, and changing modes of spectatorship.

Studies on the historical development of the vertical format and aspect ratio changes (Cossar, 2009; Ryan, 2018; Clayton, 2022; Balcı Gülpınar, 2022; Çalışkan, 2022; Anadolu and Koparan, 2023; Navarro-Güere, 2024) often focus on stylistic transformation within technical frameworks, while largely overlooking audience experience. While these studies provide valuable insights into the technological and stylistic evolution of the vertical frame, they tend to leave relatively underexplored the ways in which audiences interpret and negotiate vertically oriented cinematic experiences within everyday digital media environments.

In the digital age, the audience is no longer passive but an active subject that interacts with, shapes, and reproduces content. Prensky's (2001a) distinction between "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" is key to understanding generational modes of interaction in online environments. The new generation, raised within digital culture, engages more naturally and

intensively with vertically produced content, thereby critically influencing the transformation of the cinematic experience. This study aims to reveal how new-generation audiences' relationship with vertical content reshapes cinematic perception. By drawing on audience experiences, it analyzes the implications for the film industry, narrative forms, and cultural representations. It assumes that in the interactive, multimodal, and mobile media environment of the 21st century, digital culture transforms cinema beyond technical aspects—affecting aesthetics and meaning-making. These developments indicate that the rise of vertical formats is closely linked to broader transformations in contemporary screen culture.

Within this context, this study argues that vertical cinema occupies a liminal position within contemporary screen culture, in which the cinematic image increasingly circulates across multiple digital screens and viewing environments rather than remaining tied to the traditional theater screen (Friedberg, 2006; Casetti, 2015). While vertically oriented audiovisual content has become normalized as an everyday visual practice through mobile devices and social media platforms, it continues to be perceived by audiences as aesthetically and narratively external to conventional cinematic aesthetics. By examining the perceptions of young audiences raised within digital culture, the study demonstrates that vertical cinema reflects the participatory logic of mobile media environments while simultaneously revealing tensions between emerging screen practices and established cinematic aesthetics. In this sense, vertical cinema should be

understood not simply as a technical variation in aspect ratio but also as a post-cinematic interface practice that illustrates the ongoing transformation of cinematic experience in the digital age.

Digital Culture and the Viewing Experience

The widespread adoption of mobile devices has accelerated digital culture's integration into everyday life, transforming individuals' cultural production and consumption practices. This shift has notably redefined both production and reception practices in cinema. Benjamin's insight that art loses its "aura" through technical reproduction provides a foundation for understanding cinema's evolution into a mass commodity within modernity (Benjamin, 2008). Since its inception, cinema has functioned as a medium of collective storytelling, enabled by modern technology, serving both mass consumption and cultural construction roles.

However, under the influence of digitalization, this collective experience has shifted toward a mode of viewership that is increasingly individualized and transcends time and space. As Pedró (2006) observes, the individual emerging from digital culture—marked by shortened attention spans, a digitized social environment, and growing everyday isolation—has altered the perception of cinema. The viewer is no longer bound to physical venues but consumes films on personal screens, schedules viewing according to individual routines, and can pause and resume content at will. Thus, the viewer has evolved from a passive observer into an active user

who directs content flow, with engagement shaped by conditions of digital environments.

With traditional cinema halls replaced by digital platforms, cinema has shifted toward new forms of content production and audience culture. Hauser's (1994, p. 55) emphasis on cinema's capacity to reconstruct reality through dramatic and technical elements has expanded with digital technologies, transforming the construction of cinematic works. In particular, computer-assisted production, visual effects, and digital distribution have, as Casetti (2011) argues, restructured cinema's production–consumption cycle. Ekinçi (2020), in his examination of YouTuber movies, also draws attention to the changing relationship between new media and mainstream cinema. His study demonstrates how the growing influence of online media environments extends into cinematic production and genre practices, illustrating the increasingly interconnected nature of digital culture and conventional film production. Thus, digitalization has not only provided new tools but also redefined narrative aesthetics, viewership rhythms, and audience engagement practices.

Screenings on digital platforms have transcended traditional temporal constraints, allowing audiences to engage with content at any time and in a more interactive manner. Cinema has thus become available on demand and open to user control. The viewer is no longer merely an observer of a film's theme or aesthetics but a user capable of pausing, replaying, or

adjusting the pace of content. This shift reflects increasingly individualized, fragmented, and flexible viewing practices compared to earlier periods (Erdem, 2019, p. 537).

Concurrently, screen-use practices have evolved. Today, audiences primarily access content via mobile devices. Evans (2019) reports that 60% of videos are viewed on phones or tablets, with 94% of users holding their devices vertically. Consequently, content is increasingly produced in vertical rather than traditional horizontal formats. Millman (2017) notes that even when content is horizontal, users rarely rotate their devices, suggesting that formal choices are driven more by user habits than by aesthetic considerations. Similarly, Mulier et al. (2021) demonstrated that vertical mobile video advertisements can generate greater consumer interest and engagement than horizontal videos, with these effects also varying across generational groups. Their findings highlight the importance of screen orientation and mobile viewing practices in shaping audience engagement with audiovisual content.

The rise of the vertical format reflects a viewing habit aligned with the rapid, short-form content consumption characteristic of digital culture. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat have popularized this format, thereby expanding the boundaries of the digital cinema experience. As Gere (2008, pp. 17–18) notes, digital technologies are not merely tools but active components of participatory culture. Vertical cinema, as a visual expression of this participatory

structure, introduces a new narrative mode that is centered on the user.

Within this framework, cinema has transformed in form and experience, with the audience evolving from passive consumers to active producers and interactors. Digital culture has thus become a multidimensional sphere shaping global lifestyles and cultural production, including cinema. Cinematic practices shaped by mobile screens, vertical formats, and digital platforms reposition the viewer as an interactive, selective, and personalized subject. This shift redefines cinema's formal, cultural, social, and aesthetic dimensions. Consequently, digital culture provides a dynamic foundation for cinema's future, necessitating continual reassessment of its narrative structures, modes of representation, and viewing habits.

Vertical Frame: Format Transformation from Past to Present

In today's digital age—especially with the widespread adoption of smartphones—vertical cinema has become increasingly important as an alternative to traditional horizontal cinema and is often presented as a “new” visual form. However, vertically oriented images are not entirely unprecedented within the history of cinema (Bordwell, 2009; Anadolu & Koparan, 2023; Balci Gülpınar, 2022). In general terms, vertical video refers to audiovisual content whose vertical dimension exceeds its horizontal dimension and is designed primarily for portrait-oriented viewing environments (Anadolu & Koparan, 2023, p. 257). The spread of digital technologies has also transformed audiences into more active participants in the production, circulation, and

interpretation of visual meaning within contemporary digital culture (Kırmızı & Çağıl, 2023, pp. 278–282).

Historically, however, cinematic images have predominantly favored horizontal framing. As Bordwell (2009) notes, classical film composition was largely structured around the lateral movement of objects across the frame, reflecting broader visual traditions—such as painting and graphic design—that privileged horizontal composition. During the 20th century, the film industry gradually standardized horizontal aspect ratios. The Academy Ratio (1.375:1), widely used between the 1930s and the 1950s, became one of the most influential formats before widescreen ratios such as 1.66:1 and 1.85:1 gained prominence with the introduction of CinemaScope and Panavision technologies (Ryan, 2018; Clayton, 2022; Brown, 2012).

Vertically oriented frames occasionally appeared within experimental filmmaking, particularly in the Expanded Cinema movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but such practices remained marginal within mainstream cinematic production (Anadolu & Koparan, 2023). In contrast, the rapid adoption of smartphones and mobile media platforms in recent years has normalized vertical viewing practices in everyday digital environments. As mobile screens have become multifunctional devices used for communication, entertainment, and information exchange, their orientation increasingly influences how audiovisual content is both produced

and experienced (Buckley et al., 2019). Within this changing media ecology, vertically oriented audiovisual content emerges not only as a technical variation in screen orientation but also as a format closely tied to the viewing habits of contemporary digital audiences.

The Transformation of Vertical Cinema in the Context of Digitalization

According to the Digital 2025 Global Overview Report, the world's population reached 8.20 billion, with 5.78 billion mobile phone users, 5.56 billion internet users, and 5.24 billion social media user identities worldwide (Kemp, 2025). This widespread connectivity means that continuous access to content is virtually global. Given this usage, the vertical orientation of smartphone screens—the primary communication medium—has significantly familiarized users with vertically oriented narratives. Although horizontal phone camera use was initially the norm, the rise of social media apps has shifted habits toward vertical shooting (Çalışkan, 2022, p. 13). Many users also rarely rotate their phones to view horizontal videos (Millman, 2017). Additionally, Roettgers (2018) highlights that increased mobile viewing of films and TV series has further encouraged vertical screen consumption.

This transformation affects not only technical habits but also reshapes modes of visual narration. The widespread adoption of vertical screens goes beyond viewing preference, altering both the viewing experience and visual aesthetics. Despite its rapid growth, vertical video has faced criticism from traditional cinematic circles, often dismissed as aesthetically

unsuitable or erroneous. However, current online environments show that vertical images are no longer considered errors (Menotti, 2019, p. 149). According to Anadolu and Koparan (2023), the vertical frame—once seen as a flaw compared to the horizontal—has become normalized through smartphone videos. Studies also indicate that vertical imagery is primarily oriented toward social media for commercial and personal use (Çalışkan, 2022, p. 15). Interpreted within participatory culture and popular creativity, vertical video reflects shifts in twenty-first-century screen culture by emphasizing the creator’s presence and offering greater audiovisual flexibility (Ross, 2014). Digital technologies further enable this by assimilating and refining features of earlier cultural forms (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). Though not yet mainstream in traditional filmmaking, vertical cinema gains traction through social media and digital platforms, allowing new-generation audiences to engage with this emerging aesthetic (Balcı Gülpınar, 2022, p. 119). Vertical cinema’s relative ease and flexibility stand in contrast to the limitations of traditional production. Within today’s “digital language,” new-generation users’ adaptation to vertical aspect ratios—shaped by social media formats—is crucial. As the habitual dominance of horizontal orientation wanes, vertical cinema resurfaces as a productive concept that fosters new narrative pathways. Vertically shot films and videos enhance interaction between audience and content, thereby reshaping cinematic narrative language. Thus, vertical cinema holds a vital position in cinema’s future, both aesthetically and technically. Its integration into daily viewing

habits, intertwined with digital culture, drives the accelerating momentum of vertical cinema production.

The rise of vertical video is driven by its ease of viewing, popularity among creators and consumers, frequent use on social media, and its role as an advertising tool that intensifies competition (Waller, 2018). A crucial reason for favoring the vertical frame is the viewer's focused attention on a single point (Anadolu & Koparan, 2023). With widespread mobile device use, this vertical gaze emphasizes the human face, expressions, and movements, facilitating emotional transmission and fostering intimacy (Ross, 2020, p. 105). Mobile devices' unique viewing practices and formal/content features both shape and emerge from this dynamic, significantly affecting users. Studies show mobile viewers concentrate more intensely than television viewers (Ipsos & Google, 2017, pp. 2–3), helping to convert a short-attention-span generation into loyal viewers through aligned behavior. Thus, the shift in aspect ratio reflects not just an aesthetic choice but a transformation in qualities, spatial arrangements, viewing regimes, and embodied practices (Menotti, 2019, p. 150). Additionally, the convenience of digitalization—offering anytime, anywhere access—fosters a closer connection between viewer and content.

An important finding is that the device used by the viewer to consume content can influence not only the platform on which the content is viewed but also the type of content itself. In particular, a new viewer profile has emerged, characterized by predominantly watching alone during spare moments throughout the day, often using headphones and subtitles, and preferring content with durations of up to two minutes (Bentley & Lottridge, 2019, pp. 4-6). Following television, cinema halls, and computer screens, mobile devices—often referred to as the “fourth screen”—have distanced viewers from the culture of collective viewing, that is, the act of watching as a social event, positioning them in a more individualistic context. Undoubtedly, the rise of video streaming services and social media platforms has played a significant role in this shift. It is impossible to disregard the power of platforms that continuously update themselves and provide personalized content to audiences. In parallel with these developments, the ease of use and multifunctionality of mobile devices continue to contribute to the emergence of these new viewing practices.

When evaluated broadly, Anadolu and Koparan (2023) argue that rather than vertical video becoming more cinematic, cinema itself has adopted characteristics similar to vertical video. According to them, vertical cinema refers to short, experimental, and creative content distributed and exhibited primarily on the internet. In this context, key challenges include the

predominance of short formats, the limitation of exhibition possibilities mostly to mobile devices, and, most importantly, the difficulty of distinguishing vertical cinema from vertical videos at first glance (pp. 269–270). However, since the 2010s, parallel to advancements in mobile device technologies and the rise of social media platforms, the frame size of vertically formatted “amateur” footage has increasingly deviated from a fixed standard. Over time, vertical video—and consequently vertical cinema—has carved out a broader space for itself, not only in experimental and short content but also by beginning to find a place in film festivals.

The first collective vertical-themed screening, *Sonic Arts: Vertical Cinema*, was presented at the Dark As Light Festival in Australia in 2013. In 2015, the Adelaide Film Festival hosted a special event titled *9:16 – A Showcase of Vertical Cinema* (Napoli, 2016, p. 48). The world’s first vertical film festival, the *Vertical Film Festival*, was organized in Australia in 2014. Similarly, in 2016, *Vertifilms*, a festival exclusively dedicated to short films in a vertical format, and *verticalcinema.org*, a website launched by the Austrian Film Museum to exhibit vertically shot content, have been important milestones and resources in framing the current status and future prospects of vertical cinema. Ultimately, it can be argued that vertical format productions offer greater creative possibilities in terms of technical equipment requirements compared to traditional production methods because production can now be recorded more flexibly thanks to mobile devices. Considering both the multifunctionality of these devices and

the production standards of digital media, vertical cinema can be regarded as a new digital development that opens the door to novel genres and styles in contemporary filmmaking. Akser (2015) similarly emphasizes the influence of digital technologies on film festivals, particularly in relation to film submissions, exhibition practices, and the increasing significance of short-film production. From this perspective, the emergence of festivals dedicated to vertical cinema can be considered part of a broader transformation in the production, distribution, and exhibition of audiovisual works.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that the emergence of vertical cinema should be understood within the broader transformation of contemporary screen culture. Post-cinema theory highlights how cinematic experience has moved beyond the spatial and institutional boundaries of the traditional theater, while participatory culture emphasizes the increasingly active role of users in producing, circulating, and interpreting media content. At the same time, studies of mobile spectatorship and mobile media phenomenology reveal how everyday interactions with mobile screens reshape the sensory and spatial conditions of viewing. Within this context, vertically oriented audiovisual content emerges as a media form closely aligned with the affordances of mobile devices and the participatory structures of digital platforms.

From this perspective, and within the broader transformation of contemporary screen culture outlined above, the rise of vertical cinema can also be interpreted through the dynamics of the attention economy and the changing regimes of perception that are characteristic of digital environments. In mobile media contexts where fragmented attention, rapid content circulation, and algorithmically curated feeds dominate, viewing practices increasingly shift toward individualized and temporally flexible modes of engagement. These conditions contribute to what can be described as perceptual fragmentation and individualized viewing regimes, in which audiences interact with audiovisual content through personal screens and within highly personalized media environments. Vertical cinema therefore appears not merely as a technical variation in aspect ratio but as a cultural and aesthetic manifestation of these broader transformations in contemporary viewing practices.

Research

Purpose and Significance of Study

Building on the assumption that the content consumption habits of young audiences have been transformed by digital culture and social media, this study examines the rise of the vertical format in the digital age and explores how this rise shapes its relationship with Generation Z. By measuring Generation Z's interest in and awareness of vertical cinema—often referred to as the new-generation youth—the study seeks to explore how the vertical format is reflected in

their cultural and social interactions. In doing so, it aims to draw inferences from the perspective of the consumer regarding the transformation of contemporary cinema experiences.

The significance of this study lies in its effort to understand the influence of vertical cinema on new media dynamics and the digital cultural interactions of Generation Z. In particular, following the proliferation of digital platforms and social media tools, content produced in formats optimized for smartphone designs has become deeply embedded in daily life. However, in the context of vertically formatted videos and vertical cinema, there remains uncertainty as to whether new-generation audiences possess awareness of this format. For audiences born into a digital world and digital culture, understanding how their perceptions of cinema have evolved, and how they view the structure of vertical content to which they are exposed almost constantly, is regarded as valuable data for assessing the current position of cinema. While existing studies in the literature have primarily focused on the historical development, technical features, and digitalization of vertical cinema, the added value of this study is that it offers an audience-oriented perspective on the subject. In this regard, the following research questions are addressed in the study.

RQ1: Do new-generation audiences have an awareness of vertically formatted content?

RQ2: In what ways does the vertical cinema format influence the cinema experiences of new-generation audiences?

RQ3: Do the viewing experiences of new-generation audiences affect their cultural and social

interactions?

RQ4: How is the relationship between new-generation audiences and vertical cinema connected to digital culture?

RQ5: What is the role of new media technologies in shaping and reflecting new modes of perception, based on the current cultural perception in this period?

Methodology

This qualitative study examines the perceptions of individuals born in 2000 and later regarding the vertical cinema format, specifically investigating how digital culture shapes these views and informs their content production practices. Drawing on participants' subjective experiences, the study aims to gain insights into their meaning-making processes concerning emerging media forms. Accordingly, semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were conducted with participants selected through purposive sampling. The interviews were conducted face-to-face between April and May 2025 and lasted approximately 25 to 50 minutes. Using a semi-structured interview guide, the researcher encouraged participants to elaborate on their experiences while also allowing for follow-up questions when necessary. The audio recordings obtained during these interviews were transcribed and subsequently coded and analyzed using MAXQDA 24 software. For data analysis, the thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied. This six-phase approach involves familiarization with the data, the generation of initial codes, the development of themes from these codes, the review and naming of themes, and finally the production of the report. Themes

were identified through recurring patterns in participants' responses and refined through iterative comparison during the coding process. Based on the perspectives of eight participants, the thematic analysis concerning the relationship between vertical cinema and digital culture was structured around themes corresponding to each research question. Participant statements were presented either directly or in an interpretative form under each theme. The findings are organized into four main themes—each with related subcategories—reflecting participants' media consumption habits, perceptions of the vertical cinema format, and their relationship with digital culture. To ensure analytical reliability, the data were cross-coded by two researchers, and any discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved through consensus.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of individuals aged 18 to 25, born in 2000 or later, residing in Türkiye, and maintaining regular engagement with digital media tools. A nonprobability purposive sampling method was adopted, specifically employing typical case sampling, which enables an in-depth examination of individuals who are particularly information-rich (Patton, 2015; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). This technique allows for the efficient use of limited resources and the collection of high-quality data aligned with the objectives of the research (Yağar & Dökme, 2018). By selecting individuals who meet specific criteria, the researcher aims to interpret and explain the relationships between events or

phenomena through the perspectives of these individuals (Büyüköztürk et al., 2012). Accordingly, participants were chosen from among those who are active on social media platforms, consume cinema and digital content, and have practices of viewing content on mobile devices, in line with the aims of the study.

In total, 16 interviews were conducted in line with the purposive sampling strategy. All 16 interview transcripts were reviewed and compared in relation to the research objectives. The selection of eight interviews for in-depth thematic analysis was guided by three criteria: the depth and comprehensiveness of participants' responses, the diversity of perspectives and experiences represented, and the recurrence of similar responses across interviews. . In qualitative research, the adequacy of the sample is not determined by the quantity of participants but by the extent to which the collected data capture the diversity, depth, and nuances of the phenomenon under investigation. The comparative review indicated that some responses followed recurring patterns, whereas other accounts provided more detailed insights and a broader range of perspectives on vertical cinema and digital media consumption. Accordingly, although 16 interviews were reviewed, eight interviews were selected for in-depth thematic analysis. These eight interviews were selected because they provided detailed and comprehensive responses, represented diverse perspectives and experiences, and offered analytically relevant insights into the research questions. In addition, these interviews contained

substantive accounts of participants' perceptions of vertical cinema, their media consumption habits, and their relationship with digital culture. The selection aimed to preserve the diversity and informational richness of the interview data while reducing redundancy in the analytical material. Accordingly, the findings presented in this article are based on the thematic analysis of the eight selected interviews.

The population of the study consists of new-generation audiences born into the digital age. Various terms have been used to describe this generation, including *students of the new millennium/millennials* (Pedró, 2006), *technological natives* (Monereo, 2004), *net generation* (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Tapscott, 1999), and *digital natives* (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b). For this generation—born into the digital world and internalizing its innovations as naturally as breathing (Prensky, 2001b)—communication is characterized by immediacy in everyday life. New-generation users, who engage actively with the digital realm (Pedrô, 2006), not only control information in new and diverse ways but also demonstrate the confidence to apply it in different contexts. Having grown up in parallel with technological advancements and having been introduced at an early age to social media, mobile video platforms, and user-generated content, these individuals can be considered both the target audience and potential producers of formal innovations such as vertical cinema. Moreover, the post-2000 generation typically

sustains its cinema-viewing habits through personal mobile devices, with a declining practice of attending movie theaters but a high level of engagement with content. For this reason, their perceptions of the vertical format can be regarded as a decisive factor in shaping the future of new media forms. Consequently, selecting this age presents a profile that aligns with the research objectives for both theoretical reasons (digital nativeness, media transitions) and practical considerations (visual habits, proximity to production tools).

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation / Status	Media Platforms Used	Production Experience
P1	20	Female	Student	Instagram, YouTube	None
P2	22	Male	Digital Marketer	YouTube, Twitter	Yes (corporate content)
P3	21	Female	Housewife	Instagram, TikTok	None
P4	25	Female	Student	Instagram, TikTok	None
P5	21	Male	Student	YouTube	None
P6	24	Male	Videographer	Instagram, Netflix	Yes (concert and product editing)
P7	22	Female	Student	TikTok, Snapchat	Yes (sketches, short videos)
P8	23	Male	Unemployed	Netflix, Instagram	None (primarily consumer-oriented)

Table 1: Participant Information.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted with voluntary participants between April and May 2025. The interview form was structured to cover themes

related to perceptions of the vertical cinema format, viewing habits, content production, and the relationship with digital culture. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for textual analysis using the "Dictate" feature of Microsoft Office 365. All inconsistencies between the transcripts and the audio recordings were resolved through a thorough review of the recordings, thereby minimizing the risk of lexical and semantic errors in the transcripts. For the analysis of the written data, the MAXQDA 24 software was used. To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, the data were cross-coded and analyzed by both authors. The data were re-examined to confirm the findings, ensure that the themes were accurately defined, and maintain alignment with the research questions. Any inconsistencies identified were addressed through continued analysis until consensus was reached between the two researchers. At this stage, recurring patterns were taken into account, and common themes were identified based on participants' responses.

Findings

Based on the data obtained, participants' views on the vertical cinema format, the influences of digital culture, and media consumption habits were evaluated through thematic analysis and classified under four main themes: the place of the vertical format in viewing habits, the aesthetic and narrative boundaries of the vertical format, the influence of digital culture and social media, and the future and cinematic potential of the vertical format.

Place of the Vertical Format in Viewing Habits

Platform and Device Preferences

A shift from traditional cinema culture toward digitalization was identified in participants' film-viewing habits. While most participants expressed a nostalgic attachment to movie theaters, their current preferences have shifted toward online viewing. The film-viewing experience appears to have evolved from a cultural event into an activity dispersed throughout daily life, primarily conducted on mobile devices. At this stage, the digital medium emerges as a significant alternative to the nostalgia associated with movie theaters. As access to content has become increasingly mobile- and digitally oriented, all participants except P8 reported primarily viewing content on smartphones.

"I love cinema, but tickets are too expensive now, so I watch at home." (P4)

"I watch on digital platforms on my computer" (P5)

"Instead of going out, I watch short films on TikTok; it saves a lot of time" (P7)

Only P8 stated, "Watching in the cinema is still the best experience for me. I can't get that feeling on my phone at home," indicating that their cinematic experience still favors traditional cinema. The most frequently used platforms are Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which are mobile-friendly and rich in vertical-format content. Even participants who prefer horizontal-format content report choosing this format out of habit, as they typically hold their phone upright. Therefore, it can be concluded that digital platforms are transforming viewing behavior

not only in terms of content but also in terms of form (format).

“When I’m eating, my phone is right there with me, and it’s cumbersome to open my laptop. That’s why I use my phone vertically.” (P1)

“I consume content on my phone more often, so the vertical format feels more comfortable.” (P6)

This finding clearly illustrates the relationship between the spatial transformation of viewing practices and the rise of the vertical format. The fact that content is mostly consumed vertically on phones disrupts cinema’s traditional horizontal frame-based viewing culture, thereby transforming the cinematic experience into a mobile, individual, and mundane habit. This, in turn, shows that the vertical format is not merely a technical preference, but a cultural practice that reshapes the perception of cinema.

Perceptual Effect and Viewing Continuity of the Vertical Format

The majority of participants emphasized that they do not prefer to watch long-form content in vertical format, considering this format more suitable for short videos. According to the participants, vertical format particularly reduces the commitment required for long content, shortens viewing duration, and increases distraction. Participants therefore considered the vertical format less suitable for long-form narratives such as films.

“I cannot watch for a long time in vertical format. I constantly take breaks.” (P2)

“If I see vertical content, I skip it. Horizontal is more engaging.” (P3)

Conversely, it was found that the vertical format experienced by the participants mainly consisted of trailers and short excerpts from films shared on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok.

Therefore, it is not possible to say that they have fully experienced vertical cinema. Participants indicated that content such as music-backed, dialogue-free vlogs, reels, and short sketches is more suitable for the vertical format. Most of the participants' negative evaluations of the vertical format stem from limited usage experience. This indicates that their perceptions are shaped more by media habits and existing viewing practices than by actual experience. Consequently, in addition to the vertical format's compatibility with viewing habits, the sacrifice of visual and emotional depth renders this format debatable. Only participant P6 reported having watched a film in the vertical format, while P8 described the format as "a fast consumption object, far from being art."

Considering the difficulties participants experienced with long-term viewing, attention span issues, and preferences for short videos, these findings indicate that the vertical format disrupts narrative continuity and rhythm in participants' viewing experiences. The relatively narrow structure of the vertical frame limits the creation of atmosphere and was seen by participants as weakening the emotional connection between viewer and narrative. Thus, the vertical format fundamentally transforms the perception of cinema by causing the viewer to move away from the holistic experience unique to cinema and consume content at the pace of social media.

Aesthetic and Narrative Limits of the Vertical Format

Emotional Connection and Composition

Participants perceived the vertical format as inadequate in terms of visual coherence and emotional conveyance. The narrow framing of the vertical screen was considered to be limiting for cinematic composition.

“Horizontal is more emotional and expansive. Vertical is narrow and simple.” (P2)

“In vertical storytelling, scenes become simplified; not everything can be shown. The story remains very limited.” (P5)

“You lose half of the composition. How are you supposed to connect and watch?” (P1)

Participants generally perceived the horizontal format as more appealing. In this context, the horizontal format was especially noted to be more effective in creating atmosphere and composition, with participants emphasizing that it represents cinema in its fullest sense.

“I find everything I watch in horizontal format more organized; my eyes do not get tired.” (P4)

“When watching, I can immerse myself in the story. The events draw me in. But in vertical format, if your eyes move even slightly away from the screen, everything disappears. True cinema is in horizontal format.” (P8)

On the other hand, it appears that participants’ aesthetic and narrative evaluations of the vertical format largely stem from limited viewing experience. The fact that most examples of vertical cinema are encountered through short social media clips suggests that these views are shaped more by existing consumption practices than by exposure to fully developed cinematic

works. In this regard, the negative judgments seem to derive not only from visual experience but also from established viewing habits associated with the conventional horizontal cinematic language.

When participants' assessments of composition and atmosphere are considered together, it becomes evident that the vertical format transforms conventional cinematic aesthetics by narrowing the spatial organization of the frame. The restriction of horizontal space limits the representation of multiple spatial relations and reduces the sense of visual depth traditionally associated with cinematic composition. From the perspective of spatial composition, the vertically oriented frame restructures how visual information is distributed within the screen, directing attention toward a narrower field and often privileging character-centered imagery. In terms of screen phenomenology, this narrowing of the visual field alters the viewer's perceptual engagement with the image, concentrating attention within a limited visual space and intensifying the sense of proximity between the viewer and the on-screen subject. Consequently, the limitations perceived by participants in relation to narrative continuity and emotional immersion may be interpreted not only as technical constraints but also as transformations in the conditions of cinematic immersion within mobile viewing environments.

Character Focus and Viewer Attention

The vertical format was described as more suitable for character-centered narratives but inadequate at reflecting environmental details, offering a superficial and narrow visual field. The vertical frame was considered limited. Participants also emphasized short attention spans and perceived aesthetic limitations associated with this format.

“In the vertical format, you focus more on the character. You cannot understand the events. You see nothing else in the frame but the character.” (P2)

“I connect with the story in the horizontal format, but my attention wanders in the vertical.” (P1)

“The vertical format is not ergonomic for humans. It cannot be watched for long.” (P5)

“Scenes in vertical films are simple; the narration remains weak.” (P6)

In this context, given the perceived limitations of the vertical frame, the horizontal frame is regarded as more effective in conveying the narrative. While P8 stated, *“There is no wide frame; you remain detached from the events. Cinema is an art of composition. Vertical film is like splitting a painting in two,”* P7, on the other hand, found the vertical format more effective because it emphasizes the character. Based on the participants’ perspectives, it can be argued that the vertical format restricts the visual language of storytelling and that the “holistic viewing experience” traditionally offered by cinema has been replaced by fragmented and momentary consumption habits. As an important point here, it is noteworthy that participants’ evaluations of the vertical format are largely derived from their experiences with short and rapidly consumed digital content. Remarks such as “character-centered storytelling” or “lack of spatial

completeness” appear to be shaped less by exposure to fully realized examples of vertical cinema and more by viewing practices rooted in social media platforms. Accordingly, these critiques can be understood not only as reactions to the formal qualities of the vertical frame, but also as reflections of established media habits and a longstanding familiarity with the aesthetics of horizontal cinema.

From a theoretical perspective, this emphasis on character-centered framing can also be interpreted through the viewing conditions created by mobile media contexts. The vertical frame concentrates visual attention into a limited spatial field and foregrounds the human figure, thereby reshaping the dynamics of viewer attention. In this sense, vertical framing aligns closely with the perceptual logic of mobile spectatorship, where individualized viewing conditions and close screen proximity encourage a mode of engagement focused on immediacy and visual intimacy rather than spatial expansiveness.

Accessibility and Narrative Loss

While the most significant advantages of the vertical format are its ease of production and practical viewing, its main disadvantages are limited emotional engagement and a narrow frame. At this point, the screen-swiping habit of the new generation of viewers is particularly prominent.

“Filming with a phone is easy; you can share quickly.” (P7).

"I like the horizontal width; I feel cramped with the vertical." (P5).

Digital Culture and the Impact of Social Media

Reasons for the Widespread Adoption of the Vertical Format

Participants attribute the widespread adoption of the vertical format to social media usage habits and the physical design of mobile devices. From this, it is possible to say that the visual culture of the digital age and social media practices are popularizing the vertical format in both production and consumption. The popularity of this format is directly related to the vertical design of user interfaces and devices. Furthermore, the "scrolling" culture was frequently mentioned as a driving force behind the vertical format.

"Everything we watch on Instagram is vertical. Because phones are vertical. That's how I consume it. I can't turn it horizontal." (P2)

"We constantly watch vertically because we've gotten used to it; the apps force us to." (P4)

"Social media apps have made us get used to the vertical format. When it's horizontal, there's empty space on the sides of the phone, and I get distracted." (P8)

These findings indicate that digital culture not only encourages the vertical format but also reshapes the viewing regime of cinema. The logic of speed, flow, and vertical design embedded in social media weakens the collective and ritualistic nature of cinema, transforming it into an individual, fragmented, and micro-narrative-oriented experience. Thus, the vertical format emerges as a concrete manifestation of how digital culture transforms cinema.

Consumption-Orientedness and the Time Economy

The short duration of vertical content has been found to be compatible with consumer

habits. However, a critical perspective, based on the idea that this situation could harm the art of cinema, was expressed by some participants.

“Everyone constantly wants to consume things quickly. No one has the patience to watch a 90-minute movie anymore.” (P4)

“It feels like vertical cinema would kill cinema.” (P5)

“This culture makes cinema superficial; with an audience so focused on speed, cinema will die.” (P8)

The Defining Impact of Digital Culture

It was determined that the participants agreed that digital culture changes both production methods and viewing habits. There is a general consensus among participants that there is a mutual interaction between digital culture and the vertical format. Participants attribute the spread of the vertical format not only to technological capabilities but also to the shaping influence of digital culture and social media habits. The physical design of mobile devices and platform interfaces shapes users' viewing habits, which, in turn, trigger the evolution of content formats.

“Vertical cinema is a product of digital culture. It became widespread with social media. That’s why people don’t see it as cinema.” (P3)

“With the impact of digital culture, everything has been redefined. People can no longer focus for even a minute. That’s why the vertical format rose.” (P6)

“The two influence each other. But still, vertical video emerged with digital culture.” (P7)

“Digital culture is transforming cinema, but it absolutely shouldn’t. It stops being cinema. Maybe it will have positive outcomes, but it’s risky.” (P8)

From this, it can be said that there is a reciprocal relationship between the vertical format and digital culture: vertical video is both a product of digital culture and it reproduces this

culture.

The Future and Cinematic Potential of the Vertical Format

The Future Role of Vertical Cinema

In the interviews, the general opinion was that the vertical format may become more widespread in the future, but it will not be able to completely replace traditional cinema.

“It can develop, but it won’t replace cinema.” (P2)

“Our attention spans have now decreased. We get bored of everything quickly and want to change it immediately. Because of that, cinema might switch to vertical and a shorter runtime.” (P4)

“For now, vertical cinema doesn’t seem like a real cinema, but it provides ease in content production.” (P5)

“It will kill cinema culture. You can’t make cinema out of a vertical video. Viewers won’t see it as cinema.” (P8)

At this point, contrary to the general consensus, Participants 6 and 7 stated that the new generation of viewers will adopt the vertical format.

“It will change it, because young people can’t watch long films anymore.” (P6)

“Generation Z loves this. Going to the cinema is hard now. It will definitely evolve.” (P7)

Creativity and Ease of Production

Many of the participants stated that producing content in a vertical format is technically easier. Especially for young users who want to produce content for social media, the vertical format acts as a “threshold reducer.” Vertical video production provides users with ease in terms of both time and equipment, and for some participants, it makes creative content production more accessible. Social media content, in particular, stands out in this context. At this point,

Jenkins's (2006) definition of *participatory culture* comes to mind: media production has ceased to be an activity belonging only to professionals and has become an open field for amateur producers as well.

"Filming something vertical with a phone is very easy, which increases production." (P3)

"Anyone can create content because it's not complicated." (P6)

"I also shoot vertical content; it's easier." (P7)

Participants acknowledge that the vertical format has become widespread under the influence of social media culture and functions effectively for short-form content. However, there remains a stronger attachment to the horizontal format in terms of aesthetics and narrative. Vertical cinema is perceived less as a cinematic genre and more as a form of consumption serving the speed and accessibility values of digital culture. Nevertheless, due to its production ease and compatibility with mobile platforms, it creates a low-threshold entry point for creative projects, especially among new-generation viewers. Taken together, these findings indicate that the vertical format is primarily encountered by participants within everyday media environments shaped by social media platforms and mobile viewing practices. However, participants' evaluations of this format are consistently articulated through comparisons with the aesthetic and narrative conventions of cinema. This suggests that even when vertical video is consumed within digital platforms, audience perceptions of its value and limitations continue to be shaped by established cinematic norms.

Discussion and Conclusion

Before discussing the findings in detail, it is important to recall the central argument of this study. As suggested in the introduction, vertical cinema occupies a liminal position within contemporary screen culture. While vertically oriented audiovisual content has become a normalized everyday visual practice through mobile devices and social media platforms, it is still frequently perceived by audiences as being external to the aesthetic and narrative conventions traditionally associated with cinema. The findings of this study support this argument by demonstrating that young viewers encounter vertical video primarily within social media environments and mobile viewing practices yet continue to evaluate it according to the aesthetic standards of horizontal cinematic language. In this sense, vertical cinema emerges as a post-cinematic interface practice that reflects the ongoing transformation of the cinematic experience in the digital age.

This study examines the rise of the vertical format in the digital age within the context of social media-based viewing and production practices, while also discussing how this transformation shapes the media habits, aesthetic perceptions, and understanding of cinema among new generations of viewers. The findings of this study are based on the views of eight participants selected from a group of 16 participants chosen through purposive sampling, who provided the richest content in terms of thematic diversity and depth of the data. Therefore, these results are limited to the experiences of these eight individuals and do not claim to be generalizable. In this context, the assessments presented below are only findings that do not aim to represent a broader population but rather seek to reveal the trends and interpretive insights obtained from this sample.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be suggested that participants' media habits are largely shaped by digital culture and that the vertical format has gained increasing importance

within this transformation. In this context, vertical cinema emerges as both a practical mode of consumption and an accessible environment for media production.

Regarding participants' awareness of vertically formatted content, it was found that those who frequently encountered the vertical format in their daily lives generally associated it with its use on social media platforms. However, this awareness generally remains at the level of "visual content form/video format," and a clear awareness of what vertical cinema represents as an artistic or aesthetic choice is not observed. Although this finding applies only to the sample of this study, it points to a tendency for the new generation of viewers to recognize vertical cinema but not fully internalize it as a cinematic genre. In other words, although they are aware of the existence of this format, they are not fully conscious of its distinctiveness as a cinematic language or genre.

Upon evaluating the effects of the vertical format on the new generation of viewers, it has been found that the use of this format has increased, particularly with the spread of viewing habits via mobile devices; however, it still carries significant limitations in terms of the cinematic experience. Participants in this sample stated that vertical video content is suitable for daily media consumption due to its short and fast-consumable structure; however, they emphasized that cinematic elements such as emotional transfer, narrative integrity, and visual depth remain insufficient in this format. This finding aligns with the view of Leaver et al. (2020) that vertical content is apt for "micro-narratives." The narrowing of visual composition, the limitation of atmosphere creation, and the simplification of narrative are among the effects of the vertical format that reduce cinematic depth. Alternatively, some participants stated that the vertical format could be effective in character-centered narratives. This view indicates that the narrow frame of the vertical format can, in some cases, facilitate focusing on the character.

In contrast, the perceived impact of the vertical format on cinematic experience involves not only narration but also in the form of the connection the viewer establishes with cinema itself. Findings indicate that the cinema experience is shifting away from its traditional collective and ritualistic nature toward a more individualistic, mobile, and fragmented consumption pattern. Participants stated that they mostly consumed films on their phone screens, in between daily activities and disconnected from any social context. This indicates that cinema's dimension of social interaction and shared experience has weakened, while the practice of viewing has taken on a personalized, fast-paced, and fragmented structure similar to social media use. The practice of watching films has been reduced from being an activity to short moments of attention squeezed into daily life. The tendency to watch particularly on mobile devices nurtures a viewing culture that is individualistic, isolated from social environments, and oriented toward rapid consumption.

One of the study's noteworthy findings is that some members of the new generation of viewers find the vertical format advantageous not only for consumption but also for production. A significant number of participants stated that they could produce content using mobile devices without specialized technical knowledge. This trend is directly related to Jenkins' (2006) concept of “participatory culture.” Participants P6 and P7, in particular, actively participate in content production; thus, digital production tools appear to democratize access to cinematic production. However, the ease of production comes with certain aesthetic risks. P8's views illustrate concretely that content produced in the vertical format is often shallow, less impactful, and disconnected from cinematic tradition. This underscores the friction between practicality and aesthetic depth. Driven by speed, accessibility, and instantaneous production, the culture of the digital age clashes with the nature of cinema, which asks for slowness, intensity, and narrative depth.

Participants' views suggest that the vertical format is a product of digital culture. The interface designs of social media platforms, device ergonomics, and user habits stand out as key factors that determine the development of this format and encourage its widespread use. Therefore, digital culture not only lays the groundwork for this format but also reshapes viewing regimes and aesthetic perceptions.

For participants in this study, the vertical cinema format is perceived as practical, familiar, and easy to produce within everyday digital media environments. However, it still receives limited acceptance in terms of conveying cinematic value; it falls behind the traditional cinema format in terms of aesthetic and narrative depth. While vertical cinema may become more widespread in the future, more experimental and creative production is needed for this format to truly establish itself as a cinematic narrative form.

The findings reveal not only changes in viewer habits but also cinema's transition to a post-cinematic regime. Casetti's (2011) emphasis on the changing ontology of cinema in the digital age explains how viewing practices are no longer tied to a specific place and time, but have become mobile, fragmented, simultaneous, and individual. The fact that most participants consume content on their phone screens, individually, and mostly concurrently with other activities, suggests that cinema's ritualistic nature has diminished and become integrated into everyday life.

When evaluated within the post-cinema framework theorized by Denson and Leyda (2016), this formation can be recognized not only as a technical transition but also as a new regime of perception. Post-cinema is not a phase following the “end of cinema,” but rather a period in which cinema is redefined within a differentiated form of existence, across various platforms, forms, and attention economies. In this context, the vertical format has become an instrument for many new audiovisual strategies, including fragmentary narrative, shortened

attention spans, individual interaction, and micro-emotions, and not merely an aesthetic choice for mobile-friendly content. Expressions frequently mentioned in discussions, such as “fast consumption,” “attention deficit,” and “loss of emotional depth,” concretize the effects of this regime on the viewer.

Alternatively, post-cinema does not merely transform consumer behavior; it also lays the groundwork for new narrative forms by democratizing the means of production. When these findings are evaluated as a whole, it becomes clear that, within this sample, the vertical format transforms the cinema experience on three levels: (1) on a visual level, the vertical frame narrows the cinematic space, weakening the compositional integrity; (2) at the narrative level, the short and fast consumption tempo fragments the ritualistic nature of cinema and narrative continuity; (3) at the experiential level, consumption via mobile devices dissolves the collective and social structure of cinema, transforming it into an individual, intermittent, and everyday viewing practice. Therefore, the vertical format represents not just a technical change in framing, but a cultural transformation that redefines cinema's aesthetics, narrative structure, and relationship with the audience. This reflects the relationship between post-cinema's production tools and the production of subjectivity; the viewer goes beyond the position of a receiver and takes on the role of a producer. This establishes an important link between Jenkins' (2006) definition of “participatory culture” and post-cinema.

In conclusion, vertical cinema can be positioned not as a successor to the classical cinematic experience, but rather as both a symptom and a carrier of the post-cinematic era. Rather than marking a normative break from the future of cinema, the vertical format signals the emergence of a new regime of viewing and experiential logic. In this context, the findings presented in this study reveal the need to evaluate the vertical format not merely as a

“shortcoming” or “distortion” to be criticized, but as a hybrid experience that incorporates the aesthetic and cultural codes of the new media era.

For this reason, while vertical cinema is becoming increasingly prominent within the “new media aesthetic” today, the meanings viewers attach to this format are directly shaped by social habits guided by digital culture. This study contributes to both cinema research and media-culture studies in terms of understanding this transition process. Offering current insights into how the vertical cinema format affects the multi-layered media experience of the new generation of viewers, this study places the dynamic relationship between digital culture, cinematic aesthetics, and viewer behavior within a broader context for discussion. Therefore, the future of vertical cinema is not to be limited to technological infrastructure and platform dynamics; it should be considered alongside narrative aesthetics, viewer psychology, and cultural values. These findings are limited by the purposive selection of eight of sixteen interviews and by participants’ limited exposure to complete vertical films. The results therefore describe audience perceptions rather than inherent limitations of vertical cinema.

In this respect, vertical cinema should be understood not simply as a technical variation in screen orientation but as a liminal media practice situated between everyday digital media use and the institutional aesthetics of cinema.

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