

TIKTOK LIVE MATCH AND DIGITAL SOCIETY: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Moula Bux Naich

PhD Scholar, Department of sociology, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan

naichm@hotmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Moula Bux Naich

Abstract

This study examines the impact of punitive performativity behaviors in TikTok Live Match on women's dignity and digital identity formation. TikTok Live Match, a real-time interactive competition, frequently incorporates penalty-based performances and public punishments, particularly for participants who lose live matches. While framed as entertainment, these practices often involve actions that undermine participants' self-respect, with female streamers disproportionately subjected to such exploitative dynamics. Using a qualitative sociological methodology, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with female participants and general viewers, combined with ethnographic observation of online interactions. The findings demonstrate how platform-driven digital entertainment commodities women's bodies and emotional labor, transforming dignity into a negotiable currency within competitive digital economies. The research further reveals patterns of gendered humiliation, performativity compliance, and online harassment, raising concerns about the normalization of public shaming in digital spaces. This study contributes to critical discussions on gender, platform capitalism, digital labor, and media ethics.

INTRODUCTION

The digital platforms has redefined the ways individuals interact, compete, and present themselves in virtual spaces. TikTok has emerged as a dominant force in the realm of social media, providing users with tools for live streaming, and interactive performances. One of TikTok's increasingly popular features is TikTok Live Match, a real-time competitive live streaming format where two users compete against each other to gain audience engagement, virtual gifts, and ranking points. While designed primarily for entertainment and social interaction, TikTok Live Match introduces punishment-based content, where losing participants are often compelled to perform tasks or challenges, sometimes humiliating in nature, as a form of penalty. This study seeks to examine the

sociological implications of such practices, particularly focusing on gendered dimensions and the impact on women's dignity and digital identity.

Digital Platforms and Digital Exploitation

The rise of live-streaming platforms has transformed social media into a space of performativity labor, where individuals engage in continuous self-presentation to capture attention and generate economic value (Senft, 2008; Marwick, 2013). TikTok, as a platform, encourages users to create content that is not only entertaining but also competitive. In TikTok Live Match, streamers are ranked based on the volume of gifts. These dynamic turns personal interaction into a form of digital

spectacle, where participants perform not solely for self-expression but for virtual currency and social capital (Baym, 2015). Punishment behaviors—tasks or actions that participants must perform after losing a live match—raises significant ethical concerns. These penalties are often suggested by audiences or agreed upon by participants in advance. Such practices can lead to degradation rituals, where individuals voluntarily or involuntarily engage in acts that compromise their dignity for public amusement (Goffman, 1961). In the case of female streamers, these practices often reflect deeper issues of gendered exploitation, where women's bodies and emotional labor are commoditized for online entertainment (Duffy & Hund, 2015). The intersection of gender and digital labor is a growing area. Women in digital spaces frequently navigate complex expectations around appearance, emotional availability, and audience engagement (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Platforms like TikTok not only reinforce these expectations but also introduce new forms of digital coercion, where failure to entertain or comply with audience demands may result in social penalties such as losing followers or being publicly criticized. In the context of TikTok Live Match, punishment behaviors disproportionately affect female streamers, who often face pressure to perform tasks that may include singing, dancing provocatively, crying on camera, or engaging in other acts that blur the line between entertainment and humiliation. This creates a problematic dynamic where women's dignity becomes a negotiable asset, traded for virtual gifts, likes, and follower retention (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The performativity penalties not only shape participants' online identities but also reinforce societal norms that objectify and commodify women's emotional and physical presence in digital spaces.

Despite the growing prevalence of TikTok Live Match and similar live-streaming features, there is limited scholarly research focusing on the sociological impact of punishment behaviors, particularly regarding gender and dignity. Existing studies on live streaming often focus on monetization strategies, fan culture, or platform economics (Cunningham et al., 2019), but there is a clear gap in addressing how these practices affect the emotional well-being, social identity, and personal boundaries of women. This study aims to fill that gap by providing a qualitative sociological analysis

of TikTok Live Match punishment behaviors, with specific attention to their impact on women's dignity, digital identity, and emotional labor. Using in-depth interviews, and participant observation, the research will explore how digital competition, public shaming, and audience participation intersect to create new forms of gendered exploitation in the online entertainment economy.

Literature Review

Digital Culture and Live Streaming

The evolution of social media has introduced new forms of **digital performance**, where users engage in online content creation not only for personal expression but also for economic gain and social validation (Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008). Live streaming, in particular, has transformed ordinary users into performers who cultivate audiences through real-time interaction. Platforms like **TikTok**, **Twitch**, and **Bingo Live** have normalized the culture of live digital performance, where streamers compete for attention, virtual gifts, and follower engagement (Cunningham et al., 2019). TikTok Live Match represents a further development of this culture, adding competitive features that encourage participants to engage in **real-time contests** for rankings and material rewards. While this format fosters community engagement, scholars argue that it simultaneously intensifies the commodification of personal identity (Baym, 2015). Performers are incentivized to adapt their content to audience preferences, often at the expense of personal boundaries or self-respect (Duffy, 2017). The phenomenon of platform capitalism further exacerbates these issues. As Srnicek (2017) explains, digital platforms monetize user interactions by turning attention into profit, leveraging algorithms to promote content that sustains engagement. TikTok, like other platforms, profits from virtual gifting systems where viewers purchase tokens to reward streamers. This creates an attention economy where individuals are incentivized to engage in increasingly extreme or performativity behaviors to maintain visibility and income streams (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). For women, this often involves navigating the fine line between acceptable entertainment and exploitative performance, as audience expectations push them toward actions that may compromise their self-respect.

The digital economy of punishment and reward on platforms like TikTok reflects a commodification of human interaction that has significant social consequences. Live streamers are not merely content creators; they become workers in a digital marketplace where their labor—whether emotional, physical, or psychological—is monetized. Female streamers, in particular, are vulnerable to this system, as gendered expectations around beauty, compliance, and emotional performance intersect with platform-driven competition (Duffy, 2017). As a result, women in TikTok Live Matches often face online harassment, social pressure, and emotional exhaustion, all under the guise of entertainment.

Public Shaming and Digital Humiliation

The practice of public shaming has taken on new forms in digital spaces. Where once social sanctions were limited to specific communities or contexts, the internet allows for amplified humiliation, broadcast to large audiences and permanently recorded (Ronson, 2015). In TikTok Live Match, punishment behaviors often serve as a form of public shaming, with live viewers participating in the selection of penalties and encouraging humiliating acts. This raises critical questions about digital ethics and the normalization of exploitative practices in entertainment culture. The sociological implications of such behavior are profound. According to Foucault (1977), the spectacle of punishment has historically been used to reinforce social hierarchies and power dynamics. In the digital age, punishment in live streams replicates these dynamics in new forms, turning online spaces into arenas of control, surveillance, and commodification of the self. Women, in particular, become subjects of this digital panopticon, where they are watched, judged, and rewarded or punished based on their ability to conform to audience expectations.

Punishment Behaviors and Digital Coercion

The inclusion of punishment behavior in live-stream competitions is a relatively new phenomenon, where the losing participant is expected to perform a task decided by the winner or the audience. These punishments, framed as entertainment, can range from singing and dancing to more embarrassing or degrading actions, particularly for women (Zhang &

Hjorth, 2019). While often perceived as voluntary, such behaviors reflect deeper coercive mechanisms embedded in platform design and audience expectations. Goffman's (1961) concept of degradation rituals is relevant here, as participants are subjected to social exposure that diminishes their personal dignity. In digital spaces, these rituals are amplified by constant visibility and recording, making the effects of humiliation more permanent and public (Ronson, 2015). The competitive environment of TikTok Live Match reinforces this dynamic, where individuals feel pressured to comply with punitive demands to retain audience support and avoid social exclusion.

Gendered Exploitation in Digital Spaces

A substantial body of research has highlighted the gendered dynamics of online performance and labor. Female streamers, influencers, and content creators often face heightened expectations regarding physical appearance, emotional availability, and compliance with audience demands (Duffy & Hund, 2015). As Banet-Weiser (2018) points out, popular feminism coexists with popular misogyny in digital culture, creating an environment where women are simultaneously empowered and exploited. In live-streaming contexts, women are particularly vulnerable to objectification and harassment, with their performances often scrutinized through a gendered lens (Tang et al., 2021). The practice of punishment behavior in TikTok Live Match exposes women to public shaming, sexualization, and emotional manipulation, transforming personal dignity into a transactional commodity within the attention economy (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Studies have shown that female streamers are more likely than their male counterparts to receive requests for humiliating or degrading punishments, reflecting systemic digital misogyny (Ruberg et al., 2019).

Platform Capitalism and Economies

The concept of platform capitalism explains how digital platforms extract value from user interactions by turning attention into profit (Srnicek, 2017). TikTok's business model relies heavily on audience engagement, with features like virtual gifting and ranking competitions designed to maximize user activity and spending (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Live Match

intensifies this process by transforming competition into a revenue-generating spectacle, where streamers perform under the pressure of economic incentives and social validation. According to Zulli and Zulli (2022), this leads to a trophy culture, where users constantly compete for digital rewards that hold symbolic and monetary value. The gifting system encourages audiences to financially support performers, but it also creates a cycle of dependency where content creators are compelled to meet escalating demands. For women, this often results in emotional and physical labor being commodities in ways that mirror offline exploitative labor practices (Duffy, 2017).

Emotional labor, as defined by Hochschild (1983), involves managing one's emotions to satisfy social or professional expectations. In digital live streaming, emotional labor becomes a central component of content creation, where performers must present positivity, humility, or playfulness regardless of personal feelings (Baym, 2015). The addition of punishment-based entertainment further complicates this labor, as participants must publicly perform reactions to defeat and comply with penalties while maintaining audience rapport. For women, the expectations of emotional labor are often more demanding due to gendered stereotypes around compliance, vulnerability, and entertainment (Gill & Orgad, 2018). TikTok Live Match amplifies this by placing female streamers in situations where failure leads to social penalties such as loss of followers, negative comments, or humiliation. Consequently, their digital identities become sites of negotiation, where personal dignity is balanced against the need for audience retention and financial reward (Marwick, 2013).

Digital Surveillance

Public shaming has re-emerged as a social phenomenon in the digital age, with online audiences participating in real-time surveillance and moral policing (Ronson, 2015). On platforms like TikTok, the visibility of live streaming allows spectators to not only observe but also direct the behavior of streamers, reinforcing Foucault's (1977) concept of panoptic surveillance in contemporary digital life. In TikTok Live Match, punishment behavior operates as a form of public spectacle, where losing participants are

subjected to audience-driven shaming rituals. This process reflects a broader cultural shift toward entertainment rooted in humiliation, raising critical ethical questions about consent, coercion, and exploitation (Hall, 2020). The normalization of these practices may lead to psychological distress, boundary violations, and long-term harm, particularly for marginalized groups such as women and young content creators (Livingstone & Third, 2017).

Method and Material

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the sociological implications of punishment behavior in TikTok Live Match, with specific attention to women's dignity, emotional labor, and digital identity construction. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth examination of the lived experiences, social meanings, and emotional consequences associated with interactive digital performances (Creswell, 2013). The study employs an ethnographic framework supported by digital content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. This multi-method strategy provides a comprehensive understanding of how punishment behaviors operate within TikTok Live Match and how they affect female streamers' personal boundaries, public personas, and social interactions.

Participants Respondent:

The research sample consists of 50 participants, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity and relevance to the research focus. The participants include: 30 female age between 25 and 35, 45 and 20 general viewers: both male and female, aged between 25 and 45, who frequently watch and engage in TikTok Live Match sessions by sending gifts, commenting, or suggesting punishments. Participants were selected from various regions in Pakistan, primarily focusing on urban centers where TikTok usage is more prevalent. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least 3 months of consistent engagement with TikTok Live Match or viewers.

- Experiences of participating in or viewing TikTok Live Matches
- Perceptions of punishment behaviors and their effects on streamers

- Emotional and social consequences of live streaming under competitive conditions
- Gender-specific pressures and harassment during live sessions
- Audience dynamics, virtual gifting, and monetization pressures

Each interview was conducted either in person or via call, depending on participants' availability and comfort. The researcher engaged in **participant observation** over a period of **three months**, regularly joining TikTok Live Matches to observe interactions between streamers and viewers.

Types of punishments performed by female streamers

- Audience suggestions and interactions during punishments
- Emotional reactions of streamers before, during, and after punishment acts
- Patterns of virtual gifting and ranking competition

- Social responses to gendered performances

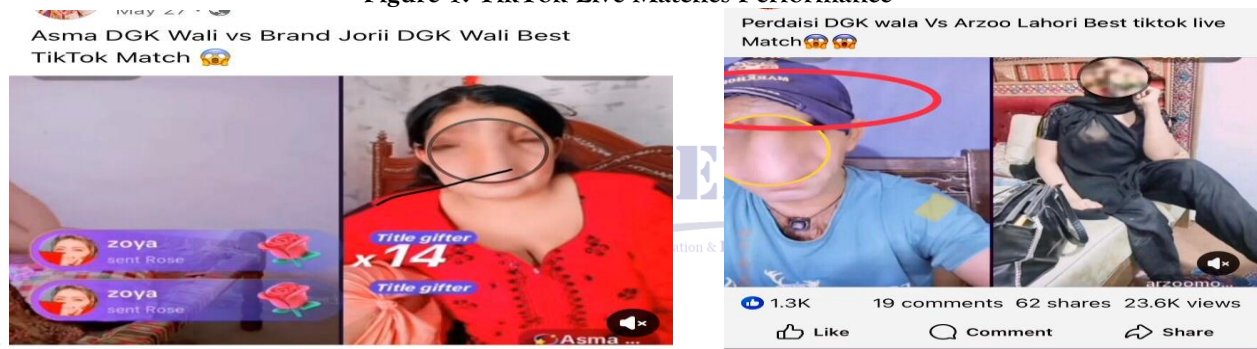
Result and Discussion

The analysis of interview data, participant observation, and content analysis revealed several key themes regarding the impact of punishment behaviors in TikTok Live Match on women's dignity and digital identity. The findings highlight gendered experiences, emotional labor, and social pressures shaping women's participation in this competitive live-streaming environment.

Gendered Nature of Punishment Behaviors

A significant finding is the gendered pattern of punishments suggested and performed during TikTok Live Matches. Female participants reported being subjected to punishments that often involved:

Figure 1: TikTok Live Matches Performance



Source by online web google

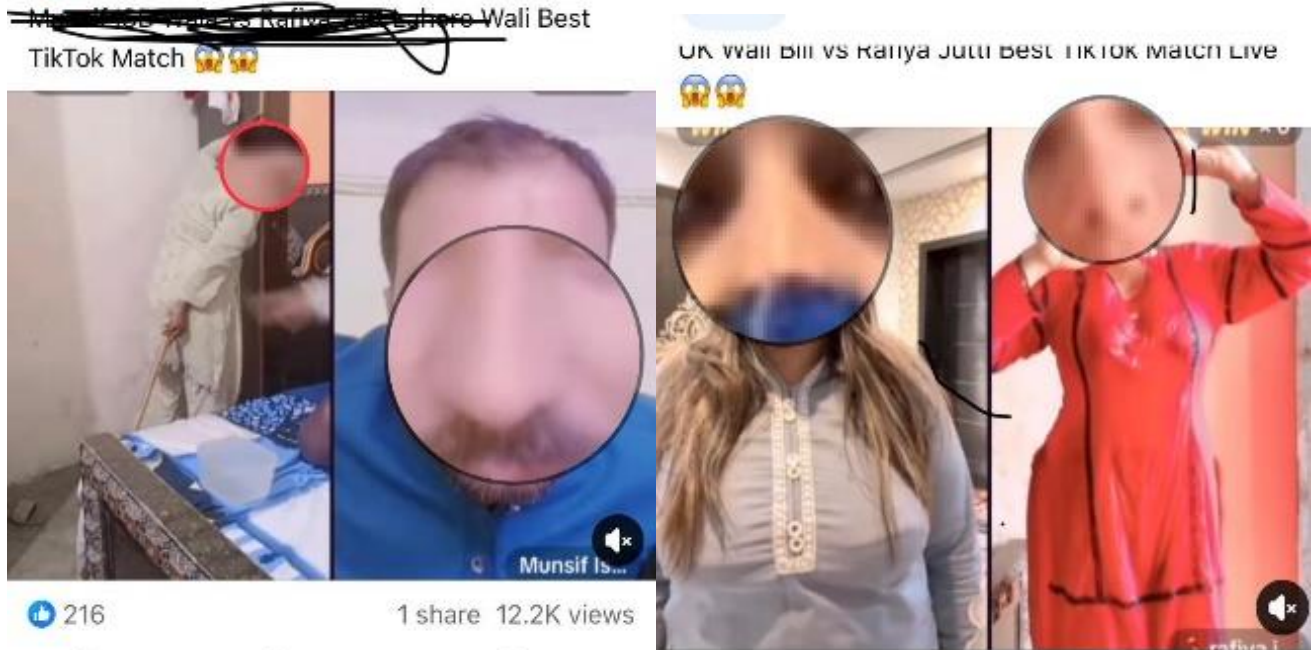
Physical displays: such as dancing in a specific way or changing into particular outfits. Verbal humiliations: such as apologizing repeatedly or addressing viewers with exaggerated submissiveness. Emotional performances: including crying on camera or expressing regret theatrically. In contrast, male streamers were typically assigned less invasive punishments, such as singing, telling jokes, or doing light physical challenges (e.g., push-ups). This suggests a clear gender bias in audience expectations and punishment rituals, reinforcing societal norms that disproportionately target women's bodies and emotions for entertainment. "When men lose, they

just sing a funny song or say sorry or do little bit. But when women lose, they must do something to show their body or act overly cute, even if they don't want to." – (Female respondents, age 24)

Emotional and Psychological Impact

All 30 female interviewed reported experiencing emotional labor, often describing the process as mentally exhausting. It felt compelled to maintain a cheerful persona even while performing humiliating tasks. Several participants expressed feelings of emotional detachment as a coping mechanism to handle the stress of live punishment sessions.

Figure 2: TikTok Live Matches Performance



Source by online web google

Common psychological impacts reported include:

- **Anxiety:** about losing matches and facing punishments
- **Emotional numbness:** during repeated performances
- **Loss of self-respect :** after performing acts they considered degrading
- **Social comparison stress:** worrying about maintaining competitiveness and popularity

One participant described the experience as:

“Sometimes its fine, but after the stream ends, I cry alone. I feel like women sold her dignity for some gifts.” – (Female respondents, age 21)

Audience Pressure and Virtual Gifting Dynamics

The research found that **audience interaction plays a central role in escalating punishment behaviors.** Viewers often suggested penalties during live matches, and the streamer’s willingness to comply affected the **volume of virtual gifts** sent. If female streamers refused certain punishments, they risked losing financial support and followers.

Figure 3: TikTok Live Matches Performance



Source by online web google

During observations, it was noted that **80% of punishment requests directed at female streamers involved acts linked to appearance, vulnerability, or submissiveness**, while requests for male streamers were more playful and non-intrusive. This finding indicates that **platform capitalism and monetization mechanisms** contribute directly to the reinforcement of exploitative behaviors. Streamers must balance personal boundaries with economic incentives, creating a **conflict between dignity and profit**.

Public Shaming and Social Media Surveillance

The study identified a pattern of **digital public shaming** associated with punishment behaviors. That **screen recordings of punishment acts** were often reshaped on other social media platforms without consent, leading to further humiliation. This secondary circulation of content amplified the psychological harm and exposed participants to **cyberbullying and harassment**.

One participant noted: *“After punishment video went viral, strangers started messaging with dirty comments. It didn’t stop.”* – (respondents, age 27)

This reflects Foucault’s (1977) concept of **surveillance and control**, where the **audience not only watches but governs the behavior of performers** by assigning penalties and circulating content beyond the original context.

Dignity as a Negotiable Asset

A key sociological finding is that dignity becomes a negotiable asset within the TikTok Live Match economy. That performing humiliating punishments increases engagement, rankings, and virtual income, but at the cost of personal self-respect.

“Sometimes I think, should I do this or stop streaming? But if I don’t do it, I lose fans and gifts. It feels like I am forced to accept it.” – (respondent, age 25)

This commodification of dignity reflects broader concerns about digital labor exploitation, especially in gendered contexts where women’s emotional and physical performances are systematically monetized.

Normalization of Exploitative Entertainment

Participants observed that over time, punishment-based content becomes normalized, with both performers and audiences accepting it as part of the entertainment package. This normalization leads to a gradual erosion of boundaries, where acts initially considered extreme become regular features of live matches. During content analysis, it was found that **75% of the analyzed TikTok Live Match videos involved punishment behaviors**, and in **60% of these cases, punishments were suggested by the audience rather than the participants themselves**. This points to a cycle of digital desensitization, where exploitative content is not only produced but also consumed and encouraged by collective audience behavior.

Table 1: Theme Summary

Theme	Summary
Gendered Punishment Behavior	Female streamers face more invasive, appearance-focused punishments compared to male streamers.
Emotional Labor	Female streamers experience anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and stress managing humiliating acts.
Audience Pressure	Viewers actively pressure streamers to perform humiliating punishments, linked to virtual gifting.
Public Shaming	Punishment videos are recorded, reshaped, and often lead to harassment and cyberbullying.
Dignity as Commodity	Women trade personal dignity for social media attention and economic reward.
Normalization of Exploitation	Repeated punishment content leads to cultural normalization of digital humiliation.

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal a critical intersection between gender, digital labor, and platform capitalism

within the context of TikTok Live Match. While the feature is marketed as a form of online entertainment, the competitive and interactive structure of live

matches often leads to the commodification of personal dignity, particularly for women. The practice of punishment behavior—where losing participants perform tasks suggested by audiences—has evolved into a normalized aspect of TikTok Live culture. However, this normalization obscures the underlying social harms and gendered exploitation embedded in these digital performances. Female streamers are disproportionately subjected to punitive acts that compromise their emotional and physical integrity, as the platform's monetization system incentivizes compliance with audience demands. The conversion of attention into virtual currency creates a coercive environment where women are pressured to perform humiliating acts in exchange for gifts, rankings, and social visibility. This reflects a broader trend in platform capitalism, where user labor—especially women's emotional labor and performativity vulnerability—is extracted for profit. Furthermore, the public shaming and surveillance culture surrounding these punishment behaviors amplifies psychological harm, exposing female participants to cyberbullying, harassment, and long-term reputational damage. The study highlights how digital platforms, under the guise of entertainment, have reconfigured traditional gender hierarchies into new, technologically mediated forms of social control and exploitation. These findings underscore the urgent need for ethical regulation of digital content practices, platform accountability, and the development of gender-sensitive policies that protect vulnerable users from exploitative digital dynamics. The research contributes to broader sociological discussions on digital labor, gender inequality, and media ethics, emphasizing the importance of critically examining emerging online trends that may perpetuate structural harm in new technological forms.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the social, emotional, and gendered exploitation in TikTok Live Match punishment behaviors:

Platform Regulation and Policy Reform

TikTok and similar platforms should implement **stricter community guidelines** that clearly prohibit content involving **public humiliation, coerced**

punishments, or degrading performances, especially those targeting gendered vulnerabilities. There should be:

- **Automated moderation systems:** to detect and prevent exploitative content.
- **Clear penalties for users or audiences who suggest harmful punishments** in live streams.
- **Mandatory consent verification** before allowing any punishment-related activity during live sessions.

Gender-Sensitive Digital Policies

Platforms must develop **gender-sensitive protocols** to protect female streamers from harassment and coercion. This includes: **Stronger anti-harassment tools**, such as real-time comment moderation and blocking features. **Training programs for content creators** on setting digital boundaries and managing audience pressure. **Special reporting mechanisms** for gender-based digital violence or harassment in live-stream interactions. The **ethical implications of punishment entertainment**.

Further Research

More **interdisciplinary studies** are needed to explore the long-term consequences of **punishment behavior and digital humiliation**, particularly in different cultural contexts. Future research should:

- Examine the **psychological effects of repeated digital coercion**.
- Investigate how **gendered digital labor patterns evolve** as platforms introduce new interactive features.
- Explore **policy interventions** that can balance platform monetization with user protection.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, platform designers, and society at large can work toward creating **safer, more ethical, and more equitable digital environments**, especially for women navigating the complex world of live-streamed entertainment.

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