

Indian women on adult webcam platforms

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INTRODUCTION & SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Adult webcam platforms are digital platforms that allow webcam models to livestream explicit content to an audience in exchange for payment. Currently, the information on Indian women who are webcam models is extremely limited. This work entails a number of risks that are not fully understood or disclosed due to its social and legal status that renders it invisible. Despite this invisibility, webcam models are still threatened by large-scale collection of highly sensitive data and information that could expose their identity and threaten their well-being. Further, the policies and systems of such platforms affect the ability of webcam models to earn an income. This research study will investigate these issues in the Indian context, and suggest ways in which adult webcam platforms can be held accountable and improve their policies by taking into consideration the needs of workers.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES & QUESTIONS

The main aim of this research study is to understand the impact of digitalisation on the sex work industry by exploring how Indian women utilise adult webcam platforms as a source of income. The objectives are:

- To quantify the typical earnings on such platforms, as well as losses due to unpaid labour and barriers in payouts.
- To assess the risks associated with working on such platforms with regard to data privacy, anonymity, and security, and the ways in which Indian webcam models alleviate these risks.
- To understand the practices and preferences of Indian webcam models.
- To open a discussion on community and technology based policy solutions to address the concerns of Indian webcam models.

The main research question is—How are Indian women utilising adult webcam platforms as an income source? Below are the subsidiary research questions:

- Are adult webcam platforms generally used for full time work or part time work by Indian women?
- What are the typical earnings from such a platform?
- What are the risks of working on such a platform as understood by Indian webcam models, and how do they alleviate these risks?
- How do they maximise opportunities and income?
- What are their experiences with the platform design in terms of how they work and how they are paid?
- Would they consider adult webcam modelling full-time or do they intend to exit after amassing funds?
- If relevant, how do they compare in-person sex work to adult webcam modelling?

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach will be used for this research project. First, a quantitative analysis will be conducted through manual observation of multiple webcam streams. The site of research will be a popular adult webcam platform, after filtering for Indian webcam models. The data collected from performers will be as follows: username, hours of activity, amount of tokens collected (the in-website currency used for transactions), and number of individuals in the audience (those with tokens and those without). All of this data is publicly available on the platform and requires no

special permissions to access. The information obtained will be analysed to indicate general trends in terms of earnings, hours of work, audience size and number of paying members.

Then, cohorts will be established based on the amount of time spent streaming (low, medium, high); high earners and low earners (based on comparative analysis); and popularity of the streamer (based on audience size). Besides this, quantitative analysis may produce other interesting cohorts which will also be considered.

Next, a qualitative approach will be used. Stratified sampling will be used to select approximately 3 to 5 participants from each cohort. These users will be approached through private messaging first (each user requests a different amount of tokens to initiate contact). The research study will be explained and their consent will be obtained. If the user consents, they will be paid an equivalent amount of tokens to conduct interviews that may last between 30 minutes to 1 hour. These questions will broadly cover themes such as the circumstances that led them to adult webcam modelling, whether they see it as full time and sustainable work, their ability to access technology, the risks they encounter and how they alleviate it, the extent to which they perceive the work as lucrative or desirable, their future plans to exit or stay on the platform, and their experience with the systems and policies of the platform.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study will explore the security, privacy, income, and labour concerns of Indian webcam models by drawing from literature in three domains:

- The platformization of labour and the impacts of platform capitalism
- The sex work industry and its digitalisation
- Feminist perspectives on the role of gender in the digital economy

EMERGING FINDINGS

- Information regarding audience size and distribution, anonymity practices, and number of performers, has been recorded for 75 users.
- The vast majority of Indian webcam models appear to use some strategy for maintaining anonymity—they either wear masks or place the cam below eye level. Some of them do offer to show their face for additional tokens, or on private shows (in which they charge tokens by the minute). This suggests that maintaining anonymity of identity (specifically, by not revealing the face) is a significant concern for most Indian webcam models, but can be negotiated in exchange for payment.
- Among the audience, only a tiny proportion of viewers (approximately 2%) on a stream actually have tokens. An even smaller number among them actually tip the model while they are on a stream. This suggests that webcam models may not only be subjecting themselves to higher risks by displaying themselves to a larger audience, but also remain under-compensated for their labour.
- Streams that had multiple performers appear to do better in terms of audience size as well as tokens earned.
- In some streams, multiple voices could be heard in the background. Some of them seemed to be women discussing tips, private shows, etc., indicating that there may be some kind of shared or studio set-up.