

# The Impact and Reflection of Vulgar and Ugly Acts in Live Streaming

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the proliferation of vulgar live streaming content on platforms like Douyin and TikTok, focusing on its impacts on individual viewers and societal values. Through case studies of two female anchors, it explores the motivations behind creating such content, audience characteristics, and the resulting consequences. The study recommends enhancing content regulations, fostering viewer discernment, and implementing policies to curb the spread of vulgar content, thereby promoting a healthier online environment.

**Keywords:** Vulgar Live Streaming, Audience Analysis, Content Regulation, Social Impact.

## 1. Introduction

In today's digital era, online live streaming has become an indispensable part of people's daily lives. With the proliferation of the internet and electronic devices among the general public, live streaming has emerged as a rapidly growing phenomenon on the internet, attracting billions of users to participate and share. It has evolved from niche gaming and entertainment platforms, which initially targeted specific audiences, into mainstream, widely popularized social media and mass culture platforms. Unlike other traditional communication channels that have come and gone, live streaming not only breaks geographical barriers like streaming media does through the internet but also flexibly caters to users' diverse interests and needs, as well as breaks the one-way interaction deadlock typical of streaming media platforms, allowing broadcasters to provide real-time feedback and interaction with users. This interactive mode of communication greatly encourages user participation on live streaming platforms, even extending its application beyond entertainment to academic fields.

Different from live streaming platforms with specific targeted content types (such as Douyu), Douyin live streaming offers a wide range of content types, catering to various communication needs of the masses, such as entertainment hosts, gaming hosts, outdoor hosts, and product promotion hosts. According to the report from the China Internet Network Information Center, by the end of 2022, the number of users participating in online live streaming in China has exceeded 70,000. Douyin, as a world-renowned live streaming platform, mainly attracts users aged under 40. Therefore, given the widespread adoption of live streaming as a new medium, it is imperative to promptly address the research gaps in this area. Live streaming, as a newly emerged communication medium, has not received adequate attention in terms of media research theories, which stands in contrast to its rapid expansion rate, warranting focused attention. Additionally, according to statistics, young people comprise 75 percent of the audience on platforms like Jieyin, with a quarter of them being minors. It is evident that young people are a significant demographic on live platforms. In the absence of well-established universal values, exposure to unregulated content on these platforms may have adverse effects on the mental health and values of young people, who may lack the judgment and filtering abilities necessary to navigate online information effectively.

As such socially-oriented communication channels become more popular among the general public, the requirements for live streaming equipment are becoming simpler. The continuously decreasing threshold for live streaming endows users of all ages and backgrounds with the power of exposure, especially those minority groups with low visibility in mainstream internet narratives, such as rural women, homeless people, and the disabled, as well as low-income and low-education groups. For such groups lacking income and cultural resources, today's short video platforms provide them with



easy exposure channels. In the unregulated world of self-media platforms, they utilize their own physical capital and environmental resources to gain traffic through means such as acting silly and pushing boundaries, thus stepping into the public domain to gain exposure and reap desired benefits. It is conceivable that after the novelty of live streaming platforms wears off for the public, and during the pandemic-induced period of isolation, users have become desensitized to the influx of big data information from digital platforms, which in turn has spawned a plethora of chaotic live streaming phenomena aimed at gaining traffic.

As with all gradually popular communication channels transitioning from unofficial to official, live streaming platforms are also undergoing an important stage of transition from the entertainment field lacking platform intervention to orderly platforms that strictly adhere to official operational conditions. According to Douyin's Rules Center, content that violates social morality, spreads negative values, and severely damages national sentiment is considered to be against public order and good customs. This includes content that propagates vulgar and vulgar entertainment, maliciously creates public opinion hotspots, undermines social norms, such as revealing clothing and vulgar language, and behaves to seek attention, causing disorder in values, as well as content that caters to lowbrow tastes such as internet mockery and ridicule. According to the "Douyin Irregular Fans Growth Governance Specification" newly launched in June 2023, if an account exhibits the aforementioned "vulgar" behaviors, the platform will take punitive measures against the account, including erasing the followers gained through irregular content, clearing all followers of the account, and restricting the account from being followed by others. However, according to the Community Guidelines published by the international version of Douyin, TikTok, there are no specific regulations regarding "扮丑" behaviors. As an emerging communication channel, the regulatory system for live streaming platforms is currently incomplete, and official platforms' interventions in the chaotic phenomena that may occur on live streaming and short video platforms are relatively lax. There is also limited research on the communication studies of live streaming. In such a special transitional stage, behaviors such as "扮丑" have become the simplest way for low-income and low-education minority groups to attract attention, and their distorted bodies have become resources they use to enter the mainstream communication field. Therefore, this research should investigate who the audience for such vulgar live streaming is, the reasons why such content is popular, and the impacts it has not only on live streaming viewers but also on society as a whole.

Taking into account these factors, conducting an in-depth study of vulgar live content becomes imperative. The next step involves employing content analysis and case studies. We will select two typical cases and analyze their live audiences, communication characteristics, as well as the impact on both the audience and the creators. Through this analysis, we aim to understand the underlying causes of internet live vulgar content, its audience, and its impact. Finally, based on the findings, we will propose practical recommendations for regulating and controlling the overall chaos of internet live broadcasting.

## **2. Live Broadcasting**

The current chaos in Internet live broadcasting stems from the rapid and pervasive spread of live broadcasting as an emerging form of media in public life. Live Broadcasting, which first emerged around 2005, is relatively young. In 2019, live broadcasting platforms outside of mainland China, such as TikTok and Twitch, introduced classification systems to regulate teenagers' exposure to vulgar live broadcasts, considering their incomplete ability to screen online information. However, these grading systems are relatively new and have not been thoroughly tested or refined over time, lacking standardization and reinforcement.

The emergence of webcasting has also given rise to a new webcasting culture, with different short video platforms catering to diverse audiences and creators. This diversity injects fresh blood into webcasting culture, but also poses challenges in navigating the contemporary cultural landscape. Understanding and managing webcasting is crucial in addressing these challenges, as it represents an

immediate reflection of the big data era and is constantly shaped by evolving cultural norms. Research in this area is essential for preventing the proliferation of vulgar information and safeguarding contemporary cultural values, particularly for individuals subconsciously influenced by the Internet.

Furthermore, studying vulgar content in webcasting is crucial for the development of live broadcasting platforms. The potential spread of vulgar content, including costume and mildly pornographic content, poses significant challenges to the industry, platforms, and other content creators. If webcasting is associated with distorted and pornographic content, it could impede the development of the new media industry and undermine the interests of other content creators.

Moreover, the harm of vulgar and pretentious content in webcasting may have serious implications at both individual and social levels. Individually, exposure to webcasting, especially for teenagers lacking the ability to discern and filter information, increases the risk of absorbing undesirable content. Socially, allowing the spread of vulgar content shapes the emerging culture of webcasting and lowers social and cultural aesthetics. It reinforces stereotypes and exacerbates urban-rural divides and class conflicts. Additionally, the lack of strict regulation on vulgar content blurs legal norms and moral standards, leading to a lowering of societal standards as a whole.

### **3. Case Study**

Therefore, on the basis of the above possible harmful contents, the harm of vulgar and scandalous contents in webcasting may cause relatively serious impacts in both individual and social aspects. From an individual perspective, webcasting, as a new type of communication media with a large proportion of teenagers among the uncommon mainstream audience, may have an unpredictable impact on teenagers in the absence of control and regulation. At an age when teenagers lack the ability to identify and filter online information, premature exposure to the information-saturated Internet world, especially in a highly interactive platform such as webcasting, increases the likelihood of absorbing undesirable information. For example, if the content of the live broadcast includes sexism, racism and other injurious information, the moral norms and definitions of race and gender will be changed accordingly. Secondly, from a social point of view, allowing the spread of vulgar content on the Internet will shape the vulgar development of the emerging culture of webcasting, leading to the downward compatibility of contemporary culture and the lowering of social and cultural aesthetics. If live broadcasts covering "ugly" behaviours continue to be popular, they may reshape the public's aesthetic and aesthetic quality. Acts such as the use of physical disabilities to attract traffic, the use of their bodies to create "spectacle"-style performances, or the deliberate uglification of rural women's bodies, or the creation of light pornographic content, will reinforce the stereotypes that people (especially young people) have of specific minority groups in society, and thus exacerbate the urban-rural divide and class conflict. The urban-rural divide and class conflict will be exacerbated. High-quality videos and video creators will be hidden by user choice and data judgement, and content creation platforms will be further impacted. Finally, without strict regulation, vulgar content will legally blur social norms of behaviour and moral standards. Some harmful content in the grey area can lead to a blurring of the viewer's definition of unlawful content to the extent that the legal norms of society as a whole are lowered.

Therefore, this study will not only look into how the video of dressing up as a scandalous person is narrated and profited in the threshold of the Internet, forming a unique video genre, but also bring to how the Internet has allowed this content to get out of the massive data and in what way it has influenced its audience groups. Based on two representative emerging short-video and live-streaming platforms in China, Jieyin and tiktok, this study selects two representative female anchors (Cihuo Xiaokeai and XXX) with scandalous behaviours in live-streaming based on the benchmarks of content categorisation, audience type, and regional characteristics, and conducts a case study to explore their behaviours, types, and impacts in live-streaming. The case study was conducted to investigate their behaviours, types of behaviours, and the impacts they bring to live broadcasting.

Their characteristics as women also make it necessary for this study to focus on the role and influence of gender as a factor for female anchors in the live broadcasting industry.

Cihuo Xiaokeai is a rural woman from a small village in Jiangsu Province, China. She is a mother of two children, and she seeks some financial support as a housewife in Jieyin when her husband goes out to work for a long time. Due to her limited education and poor family background, she fits the urban public's typical image of a rural woman in China, and the dirty, disorderly and other unpleasant elements of her life that fit the stereotypical image of the rural area become the selling point of her live broadcasts and the characteristics of the videos she creates, making use of the urban public's imagination of the rural woman's "curiosity" mentality, and deliberately creating videos for her. Using the urban public's imagination of rural women's "curiosity" mentality, she deliberately exaggerates and spoofs the gap between urban and rural areas to create a hotspot on the air. As a woman in a small city in Jiangsu Province, China, C often wears a large northeastern flower jacket, which represents the ruggedness of the Chinese countryside in stereotypical terms, or other garments with large red and purple patterns, sometimes with a large red flower pinned on her head and sometimes with a bandana of a working woman who has to go down to the fields to do farm work, with two small ponytails that are obviously not suitable for her age and dress, and with a heavy plateau-red blusher on her two cheeks. In most of her videos, she is eating, grimacing and giggling while deliberately eating with her mouth full of oil. C's main audience consists of lower-income, less-educated people, many of whom, according to their Shake Shack profiles, are young adults and even teenagers no older than 25. And while her audience is spread across China, those in poor rural areas are in the minority, and those in urban or small towns are in the majority.

#### **4. Content Classification**

**Body Scandalism:** C often uses excessive make-up and silly, exaggerated expressions and words to look ugly, and almost all of C's live broadcasts cover behavioural narratives that are ugly and shorten her body, deliberately distorting society's normal aesthetics, which ironically contrasts with the mainstream Internet's aesthetics of a white, young, and skinny child. C uses her characteristics as a rural woman in a small town in China to take advantage of her environment and gender identity to exaggerate the stereotypical image of rural women on the Internet, wearing a symbolic head scarf and working in a silly coat. C uses her identity as a rural woman in a small Chinese town to use her environment and gender to exaggerate the stereotypical image of rural women in China on the Internet, wearing a scarf, a symbol of a working woman, and labouring in a silly coat and jacket, which satisfies the initial impression of rural women for a large number of viewers who seek entertainment and curiosity.

**Eating:** C often dresses up in a vulgar style that fits the urban imagination, and eats the most vulgar and unpolished food in the most barbaric way on live broadcasts. Raw, unpolished food has also become a major selling point for her creative content, in line with her online persona as a low-quality, poorly educated country woman. By showing a large amount of food being cooked in an unhygienic way and then quickly consumed, her food broadcasts satisfy the audience's curiosity, but also cause a great deal of criticism from the audience, and this type of content is often prone to strong reactions from viewers and is the most likely to become popular.

**Sharing chit chat:** C in the live broadcast of other time, often interact with the audience, share their rural life also not lose interaction with the audience to ask for rewards, these chats are usually presented in exaggerated and self-deprecating discourse, which is not lacking in stating their own as a rural woman experiencing the plight of life, the difficulties of women, the output of selling misery and the audience, and will deliberately uglify their own words to exaggeratedly cute way of interaction or acknowledgement of the audience, not only new and cute, but also the audience's interaction and appreciation. The audience interaction or thanks, not only novelty to attract the attention of the audience also further enhance the interaction with the audience, so as to obtain the effect of live broadcast and increase the number of fans.

According to this study's investigation of C's live streaming viewers, rewarding viewers, and video commenting viewers, C's audience may have some of the following characteristics. 1. Younger Age Distribution: C's ugly live streaming content full of curiosity attracts younger viewers, many of whom, such as adolescents and young people under the age of 25, also include minors who illegally rewarded the viewers who received rewards. They are more active on webcasting platforms and are also more likely to be driven by webcast content. 2. Lower education. Among C's viewers, there are more students with a high school education and specialist education, and their lower education level makes them more easily attracted by C's exaggerated content and many of them leave messages in the comment area and pop-up screen to criticise it. 3. Many of the viewers who leave messages in the live broadcasting room and the video comment area are women, and female viewers are more easily attracted by C's maliciously subverting the image of the mainstream women's ugly behaviours, and they are more likely to pay attention to C's behaviours. behaviour. To sum up, most of C's viewers have a younger age distribution and lower education level, and do not have sufficient cognitive level to identify negative behaviours in webcasting; according to Uses and Gratifications Theory, viewers' choice of C's videos can satisfy their needs of escaping from reality and seeking entertainment. Little Flower's video provides a brief escape from mainstream society SEEK NOVELTY. And in the case of stimulus response, the addiction to such low-quality hunting videos affects the individual's online screening ability and aesthetics. The exaggerated urban/rural gap and the wealth gap in the live broadcast content will further solidify the viewers' perception of poor areas and even mock the image of rural women, which will further strengthen the perception gap between the rich and the poor and the urban/rural conflict. In addition, according to Social Learning Theory, viewers not only imitate the behaviours in the videos, but by watching the behaviours of others in these videos, they also learn how to improve their own behaviours in society. Learning to imitate the act of dressing up or making a profit on online platforms through curiosity may have an impact on the social order, especially among teenagers and less educated groups. Therefore, while such content can quickly attract eyeballs and clicks, it may have a negative impact on social values and the behavioural patterns of young viewers. In the process of imitation and social learning, viewers with lower discernment will unconsciously accept and copy the non-mainstream or even negative behavioural patterns displayed in the videos, leading to an increase in the number of so-general live streaming and video creators and audiences, which will also contribute to the platform's Internet disorder, and the people at the bottom of the social ladder, who crave visibility and thus profit, will continue to remain in such a lowly and humble position.

Even though C's video content and live streams ironically captured the attention of mainstream Internet viewers in a hunted and self-destructive way, not infrequently filled with pity and ridicule. But she did gain some traffic, with the video accumulating 512,000 likes and totalling 38,000 followers. As she wrote in her Jittery Voice profile: Thanks to the Jittery Voice platform, it's not easy to bring up a child alone, and it's not easy to be a human being on the stage. c's Jittery Voice page, although it is not bound to any window, and only receives economic benefits through the bounties it receives through the high-intensity live broadcasts every day, in addition to the economic benefits c wants to get the effect of attracting more fans, increasing her own exposure as a rural woman as a non-mainstream internet user and a member of the social underclass. The only way to do this is to rebel against mainstream aesthetics and to exaggerate her "flaws" in order to gain traffic, while their real appearance will be invisible under the construction of capital.

## 5. Case Study 2

In addition to the explicit content in live broadcasts on the domestic douyin platform, following research into the live broadcast content on TikTok, a foreign douyin platform, I encountered a Chinese female anchor named addxemma.6317, also known as lozano29006-00. Lozano's account, with a modest following of 2,000 followers, predominantly showcases scantily clad dancing or singing, alongside interactive engagements with viewers. Despite her limited English proficiency and a modest fan base, her live streams still manage to attract three to four hundred viewers.

In terms of blogger classification, Lozano falls under the category of an entertainment blogger. Her live streams primarily revolve around dancing, singing, and engaging with her audience. She presents herself as a middle-aged woman with heavily made-up features, wearing revealing attire, and frequently incorporating Chinese songs into her broadcasts. Notably, she has been observed wearing only a white sheet to reveal her body to viewers. Due to her language barrier, her interactions with viewers are somewhat constrained, often limited to expressions of gratitude such as "Hello honey, Hello baby" delivered in a broken accent, occasionally accompanied by actions like pulling down her clothing to expose more of her body.

Regarding her audience, unlike other TikTok platforms predominantly catering to Chinese viewers, Lozano exclusively uses English in her live broadcasts, albeit with some proficiency issues. This approach may appeal to viewers from diverse backgrounds, potentially including those interested in Chinese culture and entertainment. As such, her audience comprises both Chinese viewers and individuals intrigued by Chinese culture, spanning various age groups, including teenagers and users of all ages.

The live broadcast content can be categorized as follows:

1. **Dance Performances:** Lozano frequently showcases dance routines in a provocative manner to capture viewers' attention.
2. **Singing Performances:** In addition to dancing, she entertains her audience with singing performances, often featuring Chinese songs.
3. **Interactive Chatting:** Throughout her live broadcasts, she engages in frequent interaction with viewers, responding to their queries and soliciting gifts.

By featuring explicit content, Lozano effectively garners regular viewership for her live account, prompting them to offer gifts to boost her income, enhance her platform visibility, and receive financial rewards. This direct approach not only expands her viewership but also significantly increases her financial earnings. Through such a straightforward incentive mechanism, this financial gain further reinforces her motivation to continue creating relevant content. Additionally, viewers, incentivized by rewards, readily receive feedback from the anchor, such as body exposure, singing, and dancing, satisfying their penchant for novelty. Consequently, both the anchor and the audience experience mutual satisfaction, fueling the cycle of live broadcasts.

Audience analysis reveals the following:

**Age distribution:** Lozano's audience primarily comprises young people, including teenagers, as well as middle-aged and elderly individuals. Particularly, individuals over 20 years old and middle-aged to elderly users are more prevalent, drawn to Lozano's portrayal as a mature woman showcasing dance, music, and other entertainment content.

**Low Education level:** The education level of Lozano's viewer base is presumed to be relatively low due to the focus on low-quality dance and music content in live streaming.

**Western and International audience:** Lozano's typical Oriental appearance and frequent presentation of Chinese songs in her live broadcasts attract numerous Western viewers interested in Asian culture and the Chinese ethnicity.

Based on an observation of Lozano's viewers, it's apparent that many non-Chinese viewers follow numerous Asian female streamers akin to Lozano. These streamers employ their bodies as a means of captivating audiences through live broadcasts or videos, utilizing vulgar and sexually explicit content to garner attention and appeal to Western viewers who perceive the female Oriental body and Oriental culture as a spectacle to be observed. However, if the live content produced by anchors like Lozano lacks quality and relies on body exposure, it not only fails to attract attention effectively but also perpetuates negative stereotypes, ultimately damaging the overall impression of Chinese culture in other countries. Moreover, if viewers find satisfaction in and enjoy consuming this type of content,

platforms' algorithms may inadvertently amplify its visibility, particularly among demographics such as teenagers who may lack social discernment on social media platforms. Consequently, viewers, especially teenagers, may unwittingly adopt and propagate such undesirable behaviors as they engage in social learning, creating a detrimental model for both live broadcast platforms and their viewers.

These instances highlight the role of live-streaming platforms such as Douyin and TikTok in augmenting the prevalence and popularity of vulgar content while simultaneously offering avenues for entertainment and economic opportunities. Therefore, future algorithms and policymaking for new media platforms should aim to attain a deeper understanding of how to strike a balance in the presence of such content, especially concerning sensitive demographics like teenagers. Additionally, society must prioritize efforts to enhance the quality of online culture through education and policy initiatives aimed at mitigating the adverse impact of vulgar content and preventing the proliferation of negative influences among youth.

## **6. Recommendation**

We can offer a series of recommendations to control and regulate the chaos of vulgar live broadcasting on the Internet based on the above findings. Firstly, considering the interactive nature of live broadcasting, it's crucial to recognize that it's not merely a one-way communication process but rather a two-way interaction between creators and viewers. Therefore, it is essential for viewers to selectively filter the content they consume and enhance their ability to make informed choices. This not only impacts the quality of content consumption but also influences the content produced by creators. We advocate for viewers to improve their discernment and understanding of the content they consume, opting for relatively high-quality content. Furthermore, creators should prioritize producing content with positive values rather than pursuing short-term popularity and traffic through distorted content.

Secondly, live streaming platforms play a significant role in content distribution behind the scenes. It's imperative for these platforms to further enhance content regulations beyond the existing measures seen on platforms like TikTok and Douyin. This includes clarifying and reinforcing rules and implementing appropriate punitive measures. In mainland China, adopting normative measures such as a grading system could enhance content regulation. Platforms can also enhance their algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, recommending culturally positive content tailored to viewers' education levels, ages, and regions, aligning with the platform's cultural and educational positioning. Additionally, live streaming platforms have a responsibility to provide training for broadcasters to improve their professional ethics and social responsibility, thus mitigating the production of vulgar and value-distorting content.

From a socio-cultural perspective, given that teenagers constitute the primary audience of short-video live-streaming platforms, it's essential to bolster the entire social education system's ability to identify and comprehend live broadcasts. Specifically, efforts should be made to enhance teenagers' capacity to screen and evaluate web content to prevent them from being misled by low-quality information. Social organizations such as NGOs can play a crucial role in providing guidance and assisting society in managing these issues.

Finally, the government should enact legislation and adjust regulatory policies accordingly. Clear regulations should be established in line with national policies on combating undesirable content dissemination. This includes strengthening the content review mechanism and providing industry guidance. Specialized agencies should be established to regulate platforms effectively. The technological advancement of live broadcasting platforms relies on the collaborative efforts and supervision of both social platforms and the government. Hence, the government should further support live broadcasting platforms with talent and technology in content auditing and data screening to ensure the dissemination of higher quality content to the public.

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