

Precarious empowerment on TikTok: gendered digital informality and the paradox of new survival economies.

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Aim

To examine **live shopping on TikTok** as a **gendered survival economy**, where digital labour emerges at the **margins** of welfare, employment, and platform capitalism.

Method

A **mixed-methods** and situated digital ethnography traces live shopping across homes, platforms, and peripheral territories in Southern Italy.

Results & Discussion

Findings reveal live shopping as a space of “**precarious empowerment**,” where domestic, relational, and affective labour becomes visible and monetizable, yet remains informal, unstable, and platform-dependent.

Live shopping normalizes digital informality by transforming the **home** into a hybrid space of **care, performance, and entrepreneurial risk**.

The paradox:

Potentially emancipatory aspect	Related risk
earn from home (independence)	domestic self-exploitation
manage oneself (immediate gain)	complete absence of rights and protections (economic instability)
reinvent oneself (creativity)	continuous performance (pressure)
enter the market (inclusion)	from a subordinate and marginal position (reproduction of inequalities)

Conclusion

Digital labour does not erase inequality; it reorganizes it inside the home!

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TikTok