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Platforms and Cultural Production

Precarity revisited: Exploring camming work in Brazil and experiences of precarity in platform-based (erotic) content production

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Abstract

The article addresses labour precarity in platform-based cultural production from the perspective of Brazilian camming work, examining it through cammers' perceptions and experiences. Precarity has been a framework for assessing work conditions in platformised cultural industries. This framework stems from a normative standpoint of standard work and employment, which neither represents labour markets nor marginalised cultural labour in the majority world. This article tackles precarity from marginalised Global South cultural producers' perspectives. Drawing on 15 in-depth interviews with cisgender female cammers, I show that local work and employment realities, and the positionality of platforms within them, are critical to cammers' sense-making of labour precarity. For the cammers, the parameters for evaluating quality and precarity are unstable and adjusted according to their position within and outside platform economies. Conclusions suggest that precarity is situated and derives its meaning from a complex articulation of workers' experiences and positions across various economies.

Keywords

camming, erotic content production, Global South, labour precarity, platform-based cultural work

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Introduction

This article explores how labour precarity is shaped and channelled in camming work, defined here as a marginalised form of platform-based cultural production. Focusing on the Brazilian camming industry, which has flourished in recent years, the article analyses cammers' experiences and perceptions of labour precarity and how they assess it through various parameters of job quality.

Scholarship on platform work has largely focused on discussions of the precarity embedded in platform-based workplaces, intending to assess the quality of work in those spaces (Campbell, 2022). Even immaterial and cultural labour is said to suffer from increasing precarity due to progressive platformisation (Duffy et al., 2019) despite the volatility, informality, and insecurity that have traditionally been part of cultural industries (Poell et al., 2021). Most of the literature has been based on a 'developmentalist paradigm' (Xia, 2021), which takes as a normative assumption a contrast between standard and non-standard work and employment, from which the parameters for evaluating working conditions are derived (Huws et al., 2018).

Although there is a robust literature on the multiple facets of precarity in platform-based cultural labour (Cunningham and Craig, 2019; Duffy et al., 2021), including its ambivalences and contradictions (Mehta, 2019; Poell et al., 2021), most of it is based on the realities of the Global North. And so far there is limited research that revisits and destabilises the concept's normative background and its labour quality parameters. In addition, the intricate meanings of precarity in marginalised forms of platform-based creative work, particularly those involving sex and eroticism, need further investigation.

This article aims to address this gap by exploring the case of camming work in Brazil, a Global South country where this industry is thriving and where standard assumptions about labour and employment are challenged. The adult webcam industry is considered one of the most important forms of platform-based erotic content creation nowadays (Velthuis and Van Doorn, 2020). In Brazil, the camming industry counts on two national platforms, Camera Hot (CH),[1] founded in 2010, and Camera Priva (CP), founded in 2013. For instance, CH and CP count on around 100,261,000 million monthly visitors, 496.551 thousand registered users, and 7000 active cammers, generating US$3–4 million in revenue annually (Similarweb, 2023a, 2023b; Vivan, 2020). The Brazilian camming workforce comprises predominantly cisgender young white female cammers from the south and southeast of Brazil, the country's wealthiest regions (Machado and Alvim, 2019).

Brazilian camming developed amidst a labour market of 'amplified informality' (Krein, 2022: 14). The 2022 National Continuous Household Sample Survey shows that Brazil had a record level of unemployment: around 14.8 million workers were outside of the formal and informal labour markets, representing 14% of the country's workforce. The survey defines informality as a structural feature of national labour markets. In this sense, platform-based labour like camming finds a context in Brazil where it can grow and thrive (Grohmann, 2023). I contend that in this scenario, it is even more difficult to assess precarity through the prism of conventional employment and job quality standards.

Analysing Brazilian camming provides an opportunity to understand the multiple elements that converge to define precarity in platform-based creative labour and the multiple meanings it assumes within a context where regular employment is the exception. Given that the Global South constitutes the majority world (Singh and Guzmán, 2022), where the interplay between platforms, informality and precarity is contradictory in cultural industries (Zhou and Liu, 2021), this article contributes to a further understanding of precarity in platformised cultural work in such locations.

Drawing on qualitative interviews with 15 cammers, I argue that labour precarity in camming acquires its meaning in comparison to the broader context of work and employment in Brazil, from which cammers derive their perception of their current working conditions. Precarity is assessed using parameters that attempt to capture levels of stability, autonomy, protection from discrimination, financial satisfaction, consistent income and good pay. Through these parameters, cammers describe camming as a high-quality job, downplaying its precarious side. The way cammers make sense of labour precarity follows a tortuous path, where neither precarity nor its parameters are straightforward.

From this analysis, the article aims to question the current scholarship on precarity in platform-based cultural production, arguing that it is locally situated and perceived through experiences that cut across multiple labour and employment markets. The article contends that the parameters of labour precarity are not stable but set and assessed in relation to a specific context of work and employment. As a result, the worker's position within platform-based cultural creation and broader labour markets is crucial in defining the extent to which precarity is experienced.

Theoretical background

Precarity as a framework for assessing platform labour

Precarity has been a dominant notion in evaluating long-term changes in the quality of working relations. Driven by normative assumptions about regular and standard work based on Western realities (Huws et al., 2018), precarity is seen as a disruption of labour markets that were once characterised by high levels of employment stability and improved working conditions. As platform labour has proliferated, debates on its precariousness have expanded, with platforms being seen as 'accelerants of precarity' (Vallas and Schor, 2020: 208). The same is true for platform-based cultural labour scholarship, which has identified rising levels of precarity in creative work (Poell et al., 2021). Notions such as 'platform precarity' (Cunningham and Craig, 2019) and 'nested precarity' (Duffy et al., 2021) attest to this reality, revealing how embedded precarities in cultural work have become amplified and intertwined, making such labour even more contingent and unstable.

In this scholarship, precarity is related to the deterioration of working conditions, and platform dependency and lock-ins (Cunningham and Craig, 2019; Duffy et al., 2019), which intensify the workload and limit the control over working hours (Glatt, 2022), amplify the volatility and instability (Arriagada and Ibáñez, 2020; Poell et al., 2021), and cause financial distress and insecurity (Gill and Pratt, 2008). These affect more marginalised creators who, because of the nature of their content (Are, 2022) or because they belong to social minorities (Are and Briggs, 2023; Duffy and Meisner,

2022), suffer from stratification processes that harm them and reduce their work opportunities. Although the processes described by the literature are critical parameters for evaluating the material and subjective experiences of labour precarity, there is an urgent need to assess them within different social realities and backgrounds. Most scholarship is grounded in Global North realities and its analysis derives from these situated contexts. Furthermore, marginalised forms of cultural labour in developing economies tend to be overlooked in the scholarship.

A global South lens on labour precarity

Global South realities have disrupted debates on precarious work. Several authors have pointed to a fragility in the dominant precarity paradigm in platform labour studies, which attests to a linear increase in precarity (Grohmann, 2023; Purcell and Brook, 2020). This criticism is based on the fact that precarious work has always been prevalent in the majority world, and the criteria for assessing it must differ. Xia (2021) argues that the extant literature draws on a developmentalist standpoint that takes labour relations in the Global North as the normative background for defining precarity and its parameters. The linearity is also contradicted by studies that attest to the ambivalent ways in which precarity manifests itself within and across platform labour markets in the Global South (Li, 2022).

A similar argument is developed in the literature on creators from the Global South. It has highlighted the deep ambivalence of precarity and its occasional generative side in historically informal and stratified creative labour economies (Mehta, 2019; Zhou and Liu, 2021). On the one hand, this scholarship takes into account the specific geographies and contexts of content creators and their diverse positions within platform-based economies (Zhou and Liu, 2021), suggesting that precarity is not a singular phenomenon or experience, even for creators from social minorities (Ye et al., 2022). On the other hand, it addresses the multiple ways by which creators experience and refer to labour precarity (Mehta, 2019; Ye et al., 2022), revealing that what is deemed precarious has multiple layers and is comparatively driven.

Hence, the Global South lens offers two critical insights into how to examine precarity considering its multiplicity. First, precarity needs to be contextually located, rather than based on a normative standpoint, especially in contexts where it is not a disruption and where different levels of precarity are materialised and experienced. Second, precarity must be considered in relation to broader labour markets and workers' experiences of varied forms of (precarious) work and employment. Drawing on this framework, the article aims to question the parameters by which precarity is assessed in platform-based cultural labour. While existing scholarship has challenged dominant perspectives on labour precarity, there is still a need to rethink the parameters for determining it.

Precarity in erotic content creation

In this article, I contend that camming is a form of platformed cultural production as it is based on creative practices of sexual content creation. This argument follows recent works that have pointed to the similarities between camming and social media creation,

highlighting their shared working practices and processes (Ruberg, 2022). Although it is part of the cultural economy, it has not been conceptualised as such because it is marginalised. Given this, labour precarity as it operates in camming needs to be considered within the broader framework of cultural industries.

Camming workers are content creators but at the margins of the creators' economy due to the sexual nature of their work. Sex work has historically been marginalised, stigmatised and precarious, and camming follows suit. Studies on platform-based sex labour have paid attention to the embedded precarity in this realm, highlighting its ambivalences. Some research (Berg, 2021; Jones 2020) has identified a dialectic between precarity and opportunity in mediated sex work. Accounts focusing on discrimination and stratification (Blunt and Stardust, 2021) have also considered the complex nature of precarity in such work. This picture is complicated when sex workers are from developing economies and geographies (Jones, 2020), as is the case for Brazilian cammers.

In Brazil, sex work is embedded in an intricate labour market dominated by informality and instability, in which '*viração*' (hustling) is the tonic (Manzano et al., 2021). '*Viração*' is understood as a modus operandi in developing economies, where formal labour is scarce and must be supplemented by side gigs (Telles, 2006). Historically, formal labour and employment in Brazil has been supported by informality, as they are marked by overall low pay, limited benefits, and deep workforce stratification (Krein, 2022; Leite and Salas, 2014). As Leite and Salas (2014) explain, Black and brown people and women have been systematically excluded from formal employment in the country, and rely mostly on informal and low-status work.

From 2010 on, Brazilian employment markets underwent a drastic transformation, which culminated in 2017 with a labour reform[2] that institutionalised informal and intermittent labour relations (Manzano et al., 2021). The unemployment rate rose from 4.5% in 2014 to 10.6% in 2018. The 2022 National Continuous Household Sample Survey shows that Brazil had a record level of un- and underemployment: around 14.8 million workers were outside formal labour markets, representing 14% of the country's workforce. Along with this, Brazilian workers have experienced an 8% income loss from 2014 onwards, and the potential to earn a stable income decreased for less than 24% of working people (Krein, 2022). As Krein (2022) shows, workers from social minorities are more vulnerable to these shifts in labour markets. This is the scenario in which platform labour and camming work developed in Brazil.

The two main Brazilian camming platforms became popular around 2016 (Souza, 2020). CH and CP have a similar business model to international premium camming platforms – which has been extensively covered in the literature (e.g. Jones, 2020; Velthuis and Van Doorn, 2020). Nonetheless, they have adapted such a model to respond to the local reality based on '*viração*', where the combination of informality and a certain degree of security is key. Thus, camming platforms have devised innovative ways to combine on-demand, flexible work with some job stability and consistency. For that, CH implemented the 'goldshow'[3] and CP 'exclusivity', understood here as platform 'market devices' (Van Doorn and Velthuis, 2018) that enable the platforms to organise, manage and control the trade.

Although both market devices serve similar purposes, they operate differently. The CH 'goldshow' is a 10-to-30-minute pre-scheduled show, before which users must

place pre-set bids to unlock it. Camming workers set up the show's theme, the date and hour, the limit of users, and the unlock price. Only paying users have access to the show, and it is implicit that they must send tokens as gifts as the show unfolds. The 'goldshow' was introduced as a new feature that performers could use to build up and increase their following, and to accrue more visibility within CH – in sum, a tool for 'making one's name'. Success in the 'goldshow' comes with advantages such as flexible maintenance fees and increased visibility – although the platform does not disclose these publicly.

In turn, the CP 'exclusivity' is a semi-formal agreement between the platform and certain cammers. To become 'exclusive', cammers must agree to register and work solely on CP in exchange for benefits such as low maintenance fees, flexible cash withdrawals, and preference within CP's homepage. Some promotions and campaigns offering even lower fees or more tokens are only available for 'exclusive' cammers. 'Exclusivity' has no set rules or standards; each cammer is invited to make a specific agreement with CP through the mediation of an account manager. The only common denominator is that 'exclusivity' is designed to make camming work more stable and consistent, with continuous profit forecasting, encouraging cammers to work with CP for longer periods.

In this context, precarity manifests itself in an even more ambivalent way and is perceived and experienced unevenly. This article therefore interrogates precarity through the lens of marginalised cultural workers and their experiences. It focuses on cammers' sense-making of precarity, which is embedded in a context of complex and contradictory forces. While camming workers have been absent from debates on precarious work in platform-based creative industries, I argue that they are important actors in reinterpreting the concept of precarity as it stands in the literature.

Methods

Results come from ethnographic research on the Brazilian camming industry (2016–20), based on in-depth interviews with cammers. The research was submitted to and approved by an ethics committee in February 2017 (CAEE 59900016.0.0000.5404).

Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with cisgender female cammers (2017–18). Cisgender women were the predominant camming workers at the time of interviews, and they remain the primary workforce in Brazilian camming. Cisgender men and transgender people started working in camming only around 2018, making them difficult to contact for interviews. Even today, they comprise only 29% of the camming workforce (Machado & Alvim, 2019). The sample has limitations as it represents the experiences of only a proportion of the current camming workforce. Nevertheless, it includes the dominant camming labourers, those for whom the market is intended and who have been involved in the trade for the longest time.

Interviewees were recruited through private messages on Twitter and snowball sampling. They were from the south and southeast of Brazil, with the majority self-identifying as white (n = 13), in their twenties, working in camming for an average of 28 months, full-time cammers (n = 14, including the two Black cammers), and entirely dependent on camming for income (n = 10, including the two Black cammers). Most work in CP (n = 13). Prior to camming, participants worked as salespeople (n = 8, including one Black cammer), part of the waiting staff (n = 4, including one Black cammer),

freelance professionals (n = 2), and public sector employees (n = 1). Each interview lasted about one hour and was conducted via Skype. Informed consent forms were signed by interviewees and pseudonyms were used to protect their privacy and integrity.

Questions cover three themes: work trajectories in erotic content creation, labour dynamics and conditions within platforms, and stratifications and inequalities in camming. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed through open thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Thematic clusters were identified in two codification rounds and divided into material aspects of camming and workers' perceptions of them. This article focuses on the clusters on labour precarity.

Results and discussion

Cammers develop a set of criteria drawn from their experience to assess quality and precarity in camming. On the one hand, they consider camming working conditions in contrast to their previous work experiences, broader expectations and perceived social stratification in the Brazilian formal labour markets. On the other hand, they evaluate the role of platforms and their market devices in bringing quality and precarity to camming. Judgments are made on parameters such as the degree of autonomy, stability and protection from discrimination, as well as financial satisfaction, consistent income and good pay.

Camming working conditions and local context

Interviewees' narratives position camming as a high-quality job that strikes a fragile balance between precarious hustling and a degree of stability. At the core of this argument is the sense of autonomy associated with camming. Angelica explains that camming gives her a rare opportunity to 'work voluntarily because I want to and I like it, based on what I'm willing to do, considering my disposition'. For her, 'I don't have a set time to go online, nor do I have a set time to leave my room, because it's my choice. I can be disconnected for 21 days, as happened.' Autonomy only emerges as an important factor in contrast to cammers' previous work experiences in formal labour markets. Previously a retail salesperson, Angelica finds that camming gives her a sense of freedom as she can control her schedule and the work she performs. While work in formal employment is seen as confining and driven mainly by the need for income, work in camming is interpreted as a matter of choice and disposition.

In the interviews, camming is only mentioned as a source of autonomy when compared to the Brazilian formal economy and the positions cammers held before performing. Anelise, formerly a clothing store salesperson, summarises cammers' viewpoint: 'I was looking for a job where I could set my own schedule and make my own money, and then I found camming. It's not like my previous job, and that's what I like most about working in this sector.' Camming acquires its qualities when compared to the worst conditions of standard work, which is seen as coercive and lacking in autonomy for workers.

In addition, camming is seen as stable and is referred to as a 'job' rather than a 'gig'. It is said to allow for 'work standards' rather than a 'hustle'. Jennifer outlines the understanding of most interviewees: 'If I had to compare, I think camming is more consistent

than my other jobs' because 'I can see myself working as a cammer for many years as I know what works for me, what I need to do to be in the business, how to keep my regulars, and all without neglecting my needs'. She adds that 'within the platform, I feel super secure because I'm able to run my business without taking too many risks, and the platform gives me the support I need.' This perspective relates to the feeling of a lack of opportunities to progress and achieve a stable position in the formal economy that fulfils workers' expectations. Interviewees understand that, in formal work, their fate is determined despite them and their needs.

Cammers show that precarity is contextual and experienced in contrast to its other side, quality. In order to identify quality and precarity, camming is compared with national formal labour markets, which are taken as inherently precarious. In this sense, what is understood as quality and precarity is locally embedded. Amidst prevailing precarious working conditions, as in the Brazilian context, the quality of work lies in its potential to minimise precarity.

Studies have shown that workers ascribe a passionate nature to platformed cultural work in order to undermine its inherent precariousness (Cunningham and Craig, 2019). Elements such as autonomy and self-determination are key in this regard (Gill and Pratt, 2008). In contrast, Brazilian cammers do not see camming as a high-quality job per se but draw their interpretation from a balance between their previous and current working conditions. Precarity is not taken as a 'state of affairs' but is defined in relation to other labour markets where they could or would find a position in the local context. This does not mean that camming is considered non-precarious work; rather, it is seen as offering more room for managing and minimising precariousness than formal work.

Cammers' perceptions of precarity are reinforced by the stratifications they observe in the Brazilian formal economy. Lucia, a Black cammer who worked as a waiter at events and parties, compares camming to her previous job: 'I had many problems in my previous positions. I'd say I was mistreated and had the worst schedule. I wasn't able to avoid harassment and insults.' Without explicitly mentioning race, Lucia implies that her previous working conditions were related to it. She describes why she chose camming: 'When I was looking for something else, I found camming, and it won me over because I knew I'd be able to respect myself and my time.' Lucia says she feels protected from discrimination because the platforms have 'clear mechanisms to ban or stop offensive users'. She explains: 'When I decided to perform, I did my search and checked to see if it was reliable enough', which was decisive because 'my previous job didn't protect me, and there was no mechanism to deal with harm. Working as a performer, I know I count on safety measures, even against prejudice.'

Although Lucia contests the idea of camming as a democratic and harmless industry, she feels that its biases are more 'diluted' and 'faded' than in the traditional labour market. And although she recognises the 'disadvantages of camming', she feels that they do not prevent her from exercising her autonomy and maintaining her 'self-respect'.

Another example of how stratification affects Brazilian labour markets comes from Manuela's account. A former civil servant who was laid off, Manuela began performing because she found it difficult to secure another position in the formal economy with the same pay and working conditions due to her age. Manuela's experience was of being

excluded from the formal labour market and welcomed into camming. She says: 'That's what I like about camming: its openness! Because it's available to everyone and everyone can decide how they want to work in this job!' Her experience adds another layer to the idea that camming enables protection from persistent discrimination in formal labour markets. She explains: 'I wasn't successful in my search for other jobs, but then I found camming, and there's no criterion about how and when you can work on a platform.' Interviewees see camming as high-quality work because it combines autonomy with some protection against discrimination, at least on the surface. As their experience with formal labour is of rejection and/or discrimination and low autonomy, camming appears to be an attractive alternative.

It should be noted that the position of workers in different labour markets matters for their interpretation of precarity – an aspect that the current literature on platformed cultural labour has yet to consider. Studies have focused their analysis on precarity in relation to top-notch and marginalised creators within the platformed creative economies themselves (Duffy and Meisner, 2022; Glatt, 2022), describing internal stratification processes.

On one hand, interviewees' previous jobs are low status in Brazil, and generally have stricter working conditions, relying on '*viração*' to make ends meet (Leite and Salas, 2014). This affects cammers' interpretation of precarity, as they feel they have more autonomy and stability with camming – although it is still low status and also stigmatised. Their situation as workers in camming is regarded as better than in the formal economy. In addition, stratifications perceived in traditional labour markets are viewed as worsening the position of some cammers in those economies. In contrast, they think camming provides them with a job that, at least on the surface, has some protection from discrimination and gives them more opportunities to work in a less harmful environment. This adds to the extant literature on stratification in platformed cultural work by showing that the precarity of social minority workers must be assessed not only within but also across economies.

The income variable

Income is another fundamental element for cammers in evaluating quality and precarity in camming. It combines with their perceptions about working conditions to define camming as high-quality work. Interviewees find Brazilian camming financially rewarding, and most of them enter the industry because they see it as profitable and providing a stable income. Finances also contribute to the sense of autonomy and stability, as cammers see their income as 'guaranteed', 'satisfactory', and 'manageable'. Nicole illustrates the common interpretation: 'I got into camming because I needed a steady source of income. I thought it would be ideal for me, and it turned out to be because I make a good living from it and don't need another job.' She says that most cammers have the same perspective as her because camming is 'very good financially because I have stability and don't work too much'. It is fundamental to their understanding of camming as less precarious than the formal economy, where a stable income is not synonymous with making ends meet.

Their experiences with income in the formal economy inform their view of income in camming. Income is another element that needs contextualisation, which is fully understood from the local reality to which it corresponds. Carolina explains, 'There's no other

job like this, not even close. There's no job that pays anything like what I make in camming.' This statement makes sense considering Carolina's income prior to camming and her expectations of the formal economy. She was a secretary and then a freelance accountant, and according to her, her income was insufficient or less stable than in camming.

Two more elements contribute to the idea of camming as financially satisfactory. First, the combination of workload and financial remuneration in camming is seen as superior to the formal economy. Cibele illustrates the point: 'There're days when I earn R$500 (about US$100) for being online for one or two hours. I don't think any other job would give me this much, working from home, two hours a day, can you imagine it?' She explains that 'I can choose to work one day a week or every day, but it depends on how much I want to make and my mood, and I can choose how much I want to make in a month.' Interviewees consider formal work to be exhausting, with heavy workloads and rigid schedules, and with pay that is not commensurate with workers' efforts.

Second, income in camming is deemed 'manageable' insofar as cammers can establish and meet financial goals. Most interviewees claim to be able to reach their weekly and monthly earning targets. Fernanda explains, 'there's a significant financial advantage because the figures we can obtain are relatively interesting, especially because we can meet our money goals'. In addition, 'there's the money and other benefits that come with it, and that gives more comfort than other jobs'. For Fernanda, 'we set goals to be able to earn a living and have something more, some leisure or buy something we want, which is not the case in other jobs'. Cammers believe they do not have the same opportunity to manage their income in formal employment, where income is contractually fixed and insufficient or inconsistent.

However, some interviewees question narratives of financial reward. Manuela considers that 'today, this job is just enough to get by, and I also need to work as an escort to have a good income'. For her, 'it's not my main source of income because I'm not in my twenties and I have a higher cost of living'. She says this is because 'I don't have many regulars since I don't devote much time to performing, and I think that young girls have an advantage in gathering a following.' Manuela shows that finances are a complex area where the slightest difference in cammers' positions counts to change their view on income. Thus, income is not a stable but an ambivalent variable.

Apart from Manuela, the two Black cammers, Lucia and Gisele, were the only ones to dispute positive views on income. Lucia explains that 'my current income is the same as what I earn in a traditional job, but it's enough for me. I take other circumstances into account. Making money is only one aspect of a job.' She adds, 'In the end, it comes down to having a stable income, good working conditions, and some freedom. Overall, camming is just fine.' Although Lucia acknowledges that she earns just enough to get by, she emphasises that in camming, she is able to respect herself and avoid the discrimination of traditional labour markets: 'I found camming and knew I'd be able to respect myself and my time. I'm not very active, and I work when I can and want, and it's been possible to make a living this way.' Cammers consider additional factors when determining camming profitability. Income is contextualised and situated within the labour reality, which influences their perception of good or bad income.

General working conditions play an important role in reflecting on income in camming. Gisele is another cammer who says she earns just above minimum wage from camming. For her, 'my earnings are regular, like most cammers, and not like some people portray', but 'as a performer, I'm well known, I have a sizeable fanbase, I don't work much, and I still have a good, steady income'. Gisele explains that her income is 'good' because 'I had other jobs in the past, and I don't want to return to them. I dealt with much crap, which was quite unfair.' In her narrative, she subtly refers to instances of discrimination she witnessed or experienced. The cammer understands that although income is similar, working conditions are not, which is why camming is seen as providing 'good' income.

The combination of working conditions deemed 'pleasant' and 'favourable' with a somewhat stable income leads to camming being considered economically satisfactory. Although some interviewees question the extent of profitability, they all agree that camming provides a good, stable income. Most literature on platformed creative work focuses on workers' unstable working conditions and the resulting financial distress (Gill and Pratt, 2008), which tend to disproportionately affect marginalised creators (Are and Briggs, 2023). However, the way that cammers interpret income complicates this argument. Their perception is established against an economic background with high levels of informal and underpaid labour and with most workers experiencing a decline in wages and purchasing power (Manzano et al., 2021). Experiences of financial satisfaction and definitions of good pay are related to how different forms of informal and precarious work manage and combine working conditions, income, stability and autonomy.

Furthermore, experiences of discrimination in different economies inform workers' views on income satisfaction. Cammers' narratives align with the literature (Are and Briggs, 2023) in that they show a stratification of income distribution in camming. However, they find their income satisfactory. As camming allows for combining 'respect for themselves' with a sufficient income, it is seen as more financially rewarding than the formal economy. It demonstrates that workers' perceptions of income are dependent on how stratification is managed and how discrimination is experienced in and along labour markets.

Platforms: between quality and precarity

Cammers recognise that platforms are key players in shaping quality and precarity. They understand that platforms are particularly interested in promoting stability and consistent income in order to attract and retain cammers, strengthening their businesses. Platforms' market devices are crucial in this respect as they accurately balance quality and precarity and inscribe camming in the '*viração*' rationale.

CH's 'goldshow' was a tool available to all performers to increase their visibility and followers. There was no requirement to access it. Since it was CH's trademark, whoever wanted to use it needed to be registered and active on the platforms. Beatriz explains, 'anyone can perform a goldshow as long as they work and stay on the platform. It's different from the chats because you reach a larger paying audience, which tends to fuel your private shows on CH.' She adds, 'What I know is that you get followers and a lot of money with goldshows. I know models who gained high visibility on the platform, which is a dream in this business.' The 'goldshow' helped to retain cammers on CH,

making the platforms more attractive for them. It should be noted that since the Brazilian market only has two big platforms, there is a tendency for cammers to stay on the one where they are successful.

The increased visibility and high pay facilitated by the 'goldshow' led to a steady income and job stability. Eliane, a cammer famous for her 'goldshows', testifies that the tool allows for a steady gross income in a working environment where working conditions are stable: 'I became famous for my thematic goldshows, and because of them I have an expressive following who don't miss any of my shows. My regulars help me make money and guarantee a stable income every month.' She concludes: 'The goldshow has given me a flexible and stable working environment with a good income.' It reveals that the 'goldshow' is seen as a tool that encapsulates the best features of camming, contributing to the perception of it being good quality work.

Cammers who are 'exclusive' on CP have a similar perspective. 'Exclusivity' is offered to cammers when they register or become visible in the trade. In principle, it is open to everyone, as the platform wants as many cammers as possible to work only there. An account manager contacts them and makes a verbal agreement that they will only work on CP in the national market. If they are seen on another national platform, they are excluded from 'exclusivity'. The agreement has no fixed terms but is determined on a case-by-case basis, leaving room for inequalities in the benefits cammers have from 'exclusivity'.

'Exclusivity' is seen as a feature that helps cammers to grow and stay in camming, making it more stable. Besides Manuela, all interviewees who work on CP have 'exclusivity'. Angelica summarises it: 'Exclusivity makes me more prominent and brings me a large following, and I earn much more money because of it.' For her, being exclusive means having stability within the trade, as it has brought 'users who go into my room every day and pay for my shows and premium content'. 'Exclusivity' is seen as an essential tool, without which camming is seen as precarious.

Lucia and Gisele, the two Black creators, consider that camming only pays off because they were 'exclusive' from the start. Gisele explains: 'I'm exclusive, so I see the platform as a partner. It gives me visibility and facilitates my commercial exchanges. I believe that exclusivity gives me a stable workplace where I can stay much longer.' According to Gisele, most cammers accept 'exclusivity' when offered because it is the way to make camming a consistent, stable, and rewarding job. Gisele recognises that 'exclusivity' helps Black cammers to have stability, as she feels that without it, they tend to have less traffic to their rooms. Being 'exclusive' and 'more active' on the platform is the way to maintain and increase their presence in camming, making it an attractive trade.

However, platforms' market devices are seen as creating deep dependency and immobility for cammers, preventing them from finding alternative workplaces and having other income sources. It makes cammers recognise the instability of camming and question their precarious position within the trade. Eliane contends: 'I know I have stability because of my fame and loyal audience. But how did I get it? And what if I decide to quit my job on the platform and abandon goldshows?' For her, building and maintaining a paying audience on a platform is the hardest but most important part of camming, as it is a means to achieve stability and good pay. Although the CH market device encourages this, it also locks cammers into that platform. Eliane adds: 'It's hard to leave the platform,

or even work on another one simultaneously, because users are used to what you offer as a service on that space.' Otherwise, 'I run the risk of disengaging my audience and losing touch with them, and if that happens, I can't guarantee a good income.' Platforms' market devices are recognised as promoting an uneven commercial exchange between cammers and platforms, which confine cammers to them in order to minimise the precariousness of the trade.

Interviewees say that platform dependency and lock-ins are a drawback to camming stability and consistent income, seen as disruptions to the quality of camming. Gisele comments that 'exclusivity' makes cammers 'more attached to the platform because we rely on it to get users and income, and to be successful in the trade. You feel you have no alternative.' For her, 'if the platform doesn't accept you and you can't be exclusive, you're on a big hustle'. Gisele understands that platforms' market devices bring a hustle to camming by playing on cammers' desire for stability. The devices are seen as exploitatively managing stability and instability in such a way that cammers fear losing them. She adds: 'We're dependent on platforms in a sense, and sometimes it seems we're done without them', implying that cammers feel they would be less able to work on camming without the market devices. There is a widespread belief that the same system that provides stability and consistent income produces precarity in order to perpetuate its existence. Thus, cammers understand that precarity comes from the devices and not from the work itself.

Finally, dependency and lock-ins impact income since cammers depend on platforms' market devices to achieve their financial goals. Outside the platforms and without their devices, income becomes uncertain. Carolina elaborates: 'With time and exclusivity, you get more clients, and you can earn much more money, basically a regular income. It's profitable in the long run because we have exclusivity, but exclusivity is required!' Because cammers rely on regulars for a stable income, regulars that they get by using platforms' marketing devices, they become more tied to platforms to make camming sustainable. Lucia says that 'exclusivity' means that cammers do not have to worry about their income because they will always have regular customers. She says: 'I have about ten of them, and they regularly pay for my shows and content, which is sufficient for my needs. I don't need to be online every day because I'm exclusive and have a following.' However, she adds, 'I'm not very active on the platform […], so I see I need exclusivity more. But anyone who wants a good income and to make money needs it.' Interviewees recognise that camming becomes more unstable as they become completely dependent on platforms' market devices for a regular income. This is the most precarious aspect of the job for them.

Platform-based cultural production has been considered highly precarious due to platform dependency (Poell et al., 2021) and lock-ins (Duffy et al., 2021). While this is partly the experience of Brazilian cammers, their take on it is more ambivalent. Platforms appear in their narratives as sources of both stability and instability, consistent income and financial distress. Cammers draw particular attention to how platforms facilitate camming, providing quality work by ensuring a stable workplace and income stream, but the platforms also facilitate precarity by locking them into their infrastructure. This is because cammers do not see precarity as an isolated phenomenon but rather as a pair with quality. As platforms adapt to the '*viração*' modus operandi, in which some

compensation must be given for precarious and underpaid work (Telles, 2006), they adjust to a labour rationale specific to that local reality. How platforms shape precarity to fit a particular local labour reality is therefore analytically important.

In addition, although cammers use the same parameters to assess platform precarity as those addressed in the literature, their interpretation differs. For instance, while dependency and lock-ins are seen as major causes of instability, insecurity and poor working conditions (Cunningham and Craig, 2019; Duffy et al., 2021), cammers interpret them as disruptions to a system that brings quality to their work. While the literature treats precarity parameters as stable and universal, cammers do not. And since most of the scholarship comes from 'Global North' countries, their situated realities are brought to the fore as normative backgrounds for setting the parameters and evaluating precarity elsewhere. Against this normative standpoint, the results show that analysis of labour precarity requires contextual sensitivity, including its very parameters.

Conclusion

Labour precarity is a multifaceted phenomenon. When it comes to platform-based cultural work, this article argues that a diversity of backgrounds and experiences need to be brought to the fore. On the one hand, the article shows that precarity is established contextually and in relation to previous work experiences of cultural producers. It should be added that a significant proportion of cultural producers in platforms do not necessarily come from traditional creative industries (Poell et al., 2021) but rather from other sectors of the economy, as is the case with content creators. It is essential to take this into account because it is from this context that precarious working conditions are assessed. On the other hand, the article points out that workers' experiences are central to understanding the parameters of precarious work. Insofar as precarity is experienced and sensed (Campbell, 2022), so are the parameters defining it.

Ultimately, the article challenges the normative assumptions about formality and informality, standard and non-standard labour from the Global South standpoint. There is an underlying interrogation of the realities and forms of labour that such normative assumptions serve, as they do not consider the majority world and peripheral creators (Mehta, 2019; Zhou and Liu, 2021). Finally, the article contends that normative assumptions have neglected marginalised forms of cultural production, such as camming, which have a lower status within platformised cultural industries and assess precarity differently.

The discussion makes room for future studies that seek to rethink precarity in the cultural industries in a context of platformisation. Particularly, it invites further investigation of marginalised forms of cultural production and the experiences of peripheral creators. Nonetheless, the article has limitations. On the one hand, it is limited in scope as it does not analyse the material and structural constraints that exacerbate precarious conditions. More studies combining experience and materialities are needed, especially in the Global South. On other hand, it focuses on top-tier cammers, who are centrally cisgender white women, and does not account for gender, race, and body diversity in the industry. Research that captures such diversity is crucial to adding depth and breadth to the understanding of labour precarity in (marginalised) cultural industries, especially those located in contexts of intrinsic plurality.

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Notes

1. In May 2023, CH was shut down due to financial problems.
2. Brazil's labour reform was approved in 2107 under Law 13,467, which made rules on pay, career plans, and working hours more flexible, essentially allowing for more precarious working conditions as informal and contract-based work became the norm (Krein, 2018). It should be added that the law only institutionalised a long movement towards informalisation of work in Brazil.
3. The 'goldshow' was discontinued in 2020 due to a complete restructuring of CH. The platform shifted its focus to combining camming services with subscriptions. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the 'goldshow' was responsible for the growth of this platform in the national context, making CH one of the market leaders.

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