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Profitable Addictainment:

The Mediatized Cocktail of Entertainment, Hate Speech, and Radicalization on *Kick*

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Abstract:

The research investigates the case of new online livestreaming platform *Kick*, owned by recent rapidly growing crypto-gambling company *Stake*. The project demonstrates how livestreaming platforms are capitalizing on the role of entertainment and the rise of hypervisible gambling content online. Investigating how hate speech and hegemonic ideologies get constructed, consumed, and circulated on an online platform by creators and users through the consumable object of entertainment—highlighting the controversial and deeply neoliberal profit-driven practices of digital labor by creators and audiences. Entertainment, which always occupies a dominating ideological place within media structures (Postman, 1985; Frith, 1999; Sun, 2002; Han, 2019). The role of entertainment is investigated to show how entertainment deprives a ‘regular’ form of consumption—analyzing how intersections of entertainment, hate speech, and gambling converge into the roofed cocktail of uniquely damaging content—one which becomes salient in the profit-making cycle of the platformed entertainment in the digital culture and economy.

The research utilizes the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018), which involves documentation of the affordances of the app to investigate forms of habitual consumption and ideal users. The methodology is used to identify *Kick*’s operating model, platform governance, vision, and context that form an understanding of the ideal users and practices of the platform.

I argue that *Kick*’s unique milieu exerts an alienating and addictive effect on its users through the mix of hateful radicalized discourse and hyper-visible hardcore gambling content, constituting a specific form of entertainment. A vicarious and violent form of entertainment—*Addictainment*.

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Part One

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the online livestreaming platform *Kick*. The recent growth of *Kick*, owned by Australia-based crypto-betting company *Stake*, is known as the place streamers/content creators go when their harmful radicalized and phobic discourses become no longer profitable for other streaming sites such as *Twitch* or *YouTube*. A digital space to engage in content creation that breaks the guidelines of other entertainment platforms, a marketed safe haven for the content creators that flock to it and the users that follow. *Kick* is the livestreaming platform, and the infrastructure of their platform allows seamless integration of their betting platform *Stake*. A betting website with a livestreaming function built-in, a convergence of entertainment mediums and media. *Kick* does not solely attract creators who have already been de-platformed from *Twitch* or *YouTube*, but actively offers lucrative contracts worth upwards but not limited to 100 million USD (Browning, 2023). Engaging in a form of proactive poaching, the monetary amounts doled out in contracts allude to future investment returns. All this takes place alongside a contemporary context of the rise of internet gambling. Which is a mode of gambling facilitated by technological advances of mobile devices and internet availability, gambling can now be a private action where the process of betting is rapid in its accessibility and speed (Gainsbury, 2015).

On September 2022, *Twitch* announced that *Stake*, as well as other gambling sites, would be banned as streamable content on their platform (Twitch, 2022), citing concerns of several *Twitch* streamers whose gambling addictions were not just spiraling out of control, but spiraling into the habits of their massive underage audiences (Parrish, 2023). *Kick* thrives as one of the largest spaces in digital popular culture that serves an addictive entertainment *need* while also creating the *want* by making self-destructive gambling behavior visible. Gambling content serves as the context and backdrop of the platform and is further filled by phobic discourses and controversial personalities that feed a toxic far-right culture littered with the usual casts of Nazis and Romanian-sex-trafficking-convicts (Klee, 2023). It is this specific milieu of digital culture at the consumable intersection of gambling, entertainment, hate speech,

radicalization, addiction, and discrimination that this study analyses. Hegemonic discourse seeps down from the stakeholders of the platform into the addicted creators and users below, fostering radicalized hedonism that is manufactured and sought for profit.

By adopting the methodological lens of the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018) and critical discourse analysis, this paper will examine the political-economic relations in the consumption, production, and circulation of ideologies within the platform. Taking a critical gaze to the live-streamed content, live chat comments, and platform infrastructure and advertising. Drawing these out then into an analysis of *Kick*'s unique platform governance, operating model, and creation of ideal users. Aiming to investigate how hate speech and hegemonic ideologies get constructed and circulated in an online live-streaming platform by creators and users through the medium of entertainment, and the blanket of commodification that is fed by continued radicalized hate speech and hedonistic consumption. The subjects of analysis here are defined as the content of the live stream, the content of the creators' commentary and visual organization, the content of comment sections, and the ideology embedded in the infrastructure of the platform. Furthermore, a theoretical understanding of the corrosive role of entertainment and cultural production in media and popular culture is applied to understand the role of the production of discourse on *Kick*—the extent to which cultural production plays in the maintenance of ideology on the platform.

The paper explores how *Kick*'s digital platform of entertainment deprives avid audiences of a life outside of the ideology this platform buys into—it deprives frequent consumers of any way back as it is the *end of the line* in digital media consumption in regards to what is socially, culturally, and economically *acceptable* in mainstream culture. Investigating the extent to which no other entertainment media platform has shaped content to be so irresponsibly-harmfully-entertaining as much as *Kick* has. Their mediatized entertainment is a roofied cocktail of radicalized ideological fervor and addiction packed into consumable content. Livestreams daily showcase the losses (and wins) in the range of millions. Financial ruin or glory is numbed and shown constantly.

The literature review looks at the political-economic models of digital entertainment platforms and the historical development of how they got there; the production, consumption, and circulation on these digital platforms—user and creator

practices; and the problematization of hate speech online, historical treatments and attempts at its moderation by creators and platforms.

The following three research questions serve as the guiding lenses of critical analysis this study takes to the case of *Kick*:

1) Platform

How do *Stake* and *Kick* coexist and negotiate in their convergence of a gambling livestreaming platform? What differentiates *Kick* as a unique digital milieu of ideological fervor in the pursuit of profit in the historical development of digital entertainment platforms? How is this embedded into the platform through advertising/platform design?

2) Creators / Live Streamers

To what extent and how do content creators on *Kick* negotiate their own content and profit pursuit with the embedded influences of the gambling infrastructure on the platform? What is their role as producers of content on *Kick*? Are they closer to producers, or just the most hypervisible consumers? To what extent are they instrumentalized by the platform?

3) Audiences / Users

What role do users/audiences play in the circuit of production, consumption, and circulation? To what extent is the consumption of a vicarious or hateful nature? What are the shared communal practices that distinguish *Kick*'s audiences?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Political Economy of Digital Entertainment Platforms

An understanding of the political economy of media and its historical development requires an understanding of the placement of power and its role in the media-making process. *‘In countries where the levers of power are in the hands of a state bureaucracy, the monopolistic control over the media, often supplemented by official censorship, makes it clear that the media serve the ends of a dominant elite.’* (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p.110). Dominant discourses work as a reflection of elite interests and a vessel to produce an intended effect on the public (van Dijk, 1995), especially in a neoliberal society where corporate and elite concentration of power has a controlling force in the media (Harvey, 2007). A Marxist political-economic approach is an investigation into the circuits of production, consumption, and distribution at a systemic level, and how control/power plays a part in this ever-present circuit (Mosco, 2009, p.24). Understanding how the media has served as a vessel—a reflection of elite or state interests—is the historical (and still very present) media backdrop that has a continued effect today. Media systems and capitalism are mutually constitutive through the processes of commodification, ideological persuasion, and monopolization. It is how these powerful practices and political-economic relations become disrupted by the rise of the internet that reflects relevancy in this study. This helps us understand the historical context and political-economic conditions of *Kick* as it arrives following platforms such as *YouTube* and *Twitch*.

These political-economic conditions are reflected in the financing of media companies, whose capability to engage with audiences reaches new capabilities as technological advancements progress. However, it has always been a process of mediatizing investment. The ‘Publishing-broadcasting approach’ is the model Hess (2014) describes as the traditional media companies’ process of production and circulation before the rise of online media’s availability (p.4). In this approach, media companies since the emergence of broadcasting have maintained the same idea: the costs of the production process are covered by broadcasters/advertisers for the media

companies to generate content. Advertisers have also always understood media (even more so electronic media) as this process of buying and selling audiences (Smythe, 1981). This is then composed into a program geared towards a target group (specialized or general public) to be made available to consumers via a mass medium (p.4).

Consumers are arguably more passive in this context in regards to their ability to participate in consumption, not akin to creators of content as we see on *YouTube*, or the ability to produce discourse in comment sections. The rise and availability of online media now resulted in three takeaways that Hess (2014) lays out, its characteristics of bidirectionality, multimedia-based, and low barriers (financial/licensing) for entry in the production of content (Hess, 2014). Since their conception, digital platforms have dealt with the new potential of the consumer, the audience as a creator. A livestreaming platform like *Kick*, is a live *omnidirectional* multimedia-based platform. *Kick* an example of how online media has progressed past this bidirectional distinction, instead reflecting the mannerisms and production/consumption/reproduction behaviors in its own environment—operating as its own self-organization system (Fuchs, 2011). It also bears relevance to the idea of the *protean* nature of consumption by consumers argued by theorists such as Michel de Certeau (1984). Although they are influenced and can contain the various messages of television, newspapers, media, and more — the trajectories of their future consumption are not decided in a deterministic way, their interests and desires are not fully determined by the systems in which advertising is developed (p.xvii). This also echoes Mosco's (1998) political-economic perspective: *'This is not to suggest that all uses of technology are a function of power; rather, power sets the pattern for the principal direction of production, distribution, and use.* (p.3).

It is this very notion of audience/community participation in contributing to the production of content that existing scholarship has noted as a unique characteristic of online entertainment media (Wellman & Gulia, 1999; Hess, 2014; Reagle, 2016), especially later in regards to livestreaming (Hamilton et al., 2014; Woodcock & Johnson, 2019; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019). A digital media company is then understood as having a more active and *omnidirectional* relationship with its audiences. But what Hess (2014) describes as lower barriers of entry in the production of content (p.4), new forms of advertising and profit strategies through data and audience manipulation create even more lucrative opportunities for media companies on top of the barrier of entry.

'Dot-com' became a money-making buzzword, manifesting around 1999 as the highly profitable moniker 'New Economy' became synonymous with rising shares and valuations. It was understanding the internet as a money-making machine, a bubble that was not sustainable (Schröter, 2016). It is a reason why in our contemporary era we see a dominance of profit models focused on data harvesting and selling. Out of the top 100 list of most used websites in the world, only Wikipedia and BBC Online are operated in a non-profit model (Jin, 2013, p.157). The rise of online media companies has allowed further forms of investigation into an understanding of their audience, a quantification of advertising, and of consumers.

Data has always existed as an extractable resource to gain insight into consumer preferences. However, given the integral advantages of recording and utilizing data under the competitive pressures of capitalism, this new raw material represents a vast new resource to be harvested (Srnicsek, 2020, p.29). Of relevance here is that media companies' regulation (in the case of the U.S.) is dictated by the disproportionate influence over the media and government the upper classes have, persuading individuals and society at large that lack of regulation should be the only regulation, that they are better off under a neoliberal regime of freedoms (Harvey, 2005, p.38). Neoliberalism relies on individuals feeling empowered/free in their consumption, leaving audiences then even more ripe to be harvested by the instrumentalized media as a tool for profit. To an individual under neoliberalism, individuality is the way life should be led. Nevertheless, to media companies under the same ideology, there is no need to market on an individual basis—the individual is not truly unique. Instead, they are slotted into audience demographics, where individuals are packed like sardines, quantified and organized according to their neoliberal instinct of consumption.

The progression from a pre-internet media company to livestreaming is most influentially built from *YouTube*. *YouTube* was created and acts as the video-sharing platform for the everyday user, creating the potential for anything from education to entertainment (Snelson, 2011). While *YouTube* rapidly became the dominant distribution platform for online video since its public availability in 2005 (Paolillo et al., 2019, p.2632), live video streaming sites such as *Twitch* (which is looked at as the pioneering livestreaming platform) were still at the fringes of online media. Only slowly growing from 2009 to breakthrough popularity in 2013 (Hamilton et al., 2014).

Recently, in 2021, *Twitch.tv* was ranked 37th globally for overall internet engagement, and in the same year, raked in an income of 231.8 million in annual advertising revenue—a juxtaposition of the 102.5 million they received from ads in 2017 (Dean, 2023). These figures demonstrate not only the ascension of livestreaming platforms into popular global culture, but also the rise of investment by corporations in this lucrative advertising market. The relationship between livestreaming platforms such as *Twitch* or *Kick* and traditional video-based platforms such as *YouTube* are both segregated and understood as not as much different *platforms*, but as different *mediums*. The platform and its medium are synonymous to an extent, a *YouTube Video*, and a *Twitch Livestream*. However, a hard distinction is still no way to describe the way creators and audiences use the platforms, as *YouTube* has its own livestreaming capabilities and has even engaged (way before *Kick* engaged in similar behavior) in signing live streamers and content creators previously on *Twitch* to instead stream on *YouTube* for million-dollar contracts with exclusivity clauses (Grayson, 2022).

The digital entertainment media economy here has evolved from a digital playground for growing content creators to now one of record labels and sports teams, signing creators to contracts scaled to the profits possible to earn. Incredibly similar via practices of poaching unhappy players from the competing platform. The digital entertainment world is in constant competition for more audiences to generate profit, competing with each other in a digital system that ebbs and flows. A quantified and commodified popular culture, a digital commercialized rendition of Hall's (1981) definition of popular culture as a constant ebb and flow for visibility, situated in an ever-changing arena of consent and resistance (p.239). Here, platforms fight for visibility on the internet, a place in popular culture where accessibility is frictionless for audiences to choose their platform as their dish of consumption. Increasing their degrees of visibility aims to add enough influences in an almost war-of-attrition manner, staking a claim for users' protean consumption habits to turn their eyes their way. Popular creators are instrumentalized as tools for increasing popularity and visibility. The digital media market is an ever-changing arena where corporations can act as agents of contestation in the fight for visibility.

Kick, nominatively-deterministically, is one of the newest contenders seeking to disrupt this arena, collaborating with pop culture figures like Drake (a long-time *Stake*

community (Stake, 2023) and signing existing *Twitch* and *YouTube* streamers. *Kick* is not necessarily engaging in new habits in the creator economy, but through the backing of online gambling company *Stake*, owned out of sunny Curaçao, is through the supply of (internal) capital able to compete to gather audiences and creators to stabilize a place in this digital environment along with the established platforms.

2.2 Production, Consumption, and Circulation on Digital Entertainment Platforms

Previously building on the political economy of these platforms, this section of the literature review focuses more specifically on the practices and relationships of production, consumption, and circulation within these digital entertainment platforms, more specifically, livestreaming and *Kick*. The elements of the multimodal medium of livestreaming, audiences, sociality and community, live-chat, and creator practices are discussed.

A core understanding is that the draw of consuming live-streamed content is the primary activity of ‘sociability’. The majority of streams are considered ‘participatory communities’, with the sociability of interacting and being a member of a community being the very appeal (Hamilton et al., 2014). Anderson (2017) notes how it is difficult to find live streams on *Twitch* without a chat box that is constantly updated with viewers’ eager messages. This sociability is understood by its relationship alongside *play*—A dual emphasis on consuming the streamed content with an accessible chat alongside, resulting in a medium mixing high-fidelity video broadcasting with a low-fidelity chat (Hamilton et al., 2014). The medium of livestreaming incorporates the visual spectacle with a consumable society audience. An evolution in the way audiences consume mediums and their content, driven further by advances in personal devices (mobile and not) and their ability to play and capture high-fidelity video/audio with ease (Zhang & Liu, 2015). Livestreaming is a medium where audience production is an object of consumption. Circulation here is not just understood as the political-economic

system-wide circulation of content, but also as the microcirculation/convergence of production and consumption within a singular live stream by audiences and creators.

Then there is the dichotomy between sociality online versus ‘real life,’ getting more into what online consumption can entail and how it influences the discourse users produce in their chat communities.

Virtual environments that support high social interaction capabilities are what social livestreaming provides through their synchronous mixed-media content (Bründl & Hess, 2016). Reagle (2016) describes online behavior by, ‘*Online, people exhibit greater status equalization and disinhibition. We miss the social cues, context, and information that are normally relied on to regulate interpersonal challenges.*’ (p.95). While we may miss the social cues, it still accomplishes and is a social act. Still *talk* performing as *function*, discourse in the form of conversation/dialogue embedded with various social and cultural contexts (van Dijk, 1997). The equalization of status is also understood as anonymity, a moniker always linked with user production, but one of ‘lurking.’ ‘Lurking’ is a descriptor for users who consume content (video and chat) without contributing to the production of further content of these resources of entertainment (Lampe et al., 2010). The difference in communication was written about long before livestreaming had developed in 1993 by Elizabeth Reid’s ‘*Social Issues on Internet Relay Chat*’. Users create virtual replacements for social cues (non-verbal, body language) that are not communicable online. Cultural indicators (age, appearance, authority, social position) are weak in this medium of communication, possible perhaps to infer, but never clearly evident (p.69). Online milieus allow the lack of participation in the *sociability* of online spaces to remain free of ostracization, especially a direct criticism of the individual. The anonymity of the spectator finds a prevalence in online consumption, as there is no expectation of production. Production and engagement with a live stream community through the live chat are up to the agency and desire of the user, and distinctions are made by the audience in their choice to produce or remain in silent spectatorship.

A user’s motivation to get information and be entertained at the same time (Hamilton et al., 2014) does not denote a willingness to produce. Lampe et al.’s (2010) study investigates users’ motivations to participate in online communities. In regards to what is a predictor of contribution among users, found no association between how easy

the site and chat are to use and users producing more interactions—instead deducing that social and cognitive factors of the user themselves individually are the more possible influences (p.1935). Decisions to engage in comment production could also be influenced by genres of content, as creators and either the games/type of content they produce lead to audience interactions varying across the platform (Wang & Li, 2020) and reiterating again that the production of chats and community by users is not wholly deterministic from the affordances of the platform.

Reid (1993) goes on to say that it is the very act of creating virtual replacements for physical communications that cannot be communicated through Internet relay chats (IRC) that brings a community together. *‘[...] users share a common language, a shared web of verbal and textual significances that are substitutes for, and yet distinct from, the shared networks of meaning of the wider community.’*(p.70). A community has a self-regulating system of hierarchy and power in managing said community, culminating in their own ‘unique symbolic strategies and collective beliefs’ (Meyer & Thomas 1990, as cited in Reid, 1993, p.70). Attachment to an online community can be understood as the individual feeling wholly part of a community that is unique in their symbolic and collective beliefs, that they could feel they had a part in shaping.

Now, content creators and the way they perceive themselves and understand their success/work ethic relate to a neoliberal understanding of meritocracy. Johnson & Woodcock (2017) noted a clear neoliberal subjectivity presented in n = 39 interviews with streamers with ‘partner’ designations. Creators who are popular enough to profit shares of ad revenue on their content and further abilities for profit accumulation. ‘Partners’ also can offer ‘subscriptions’ to their viewers, consisting of a monthly fee where one half goes to the streamer and the other to Twitch. Subscribers get incentives such as being able to bypass ads, as well as stream-specific community perks such as various emotes or icons. (Hamilton et al., 2014). An emphasis on work ethic leading to automatic reward is argued for without nuance outside of their personal myopic experience, the subjectification and individualization of people to see themselves as ‘companies of one’ (p.345). The individualism embodied by creators should be connected to the individual nature of companies that seek to have their platforms dominate digital spaces. The vicious pursuit of profit still exists, and its purpose of survival as well, just at differing stakes and with differing consequences. It also casts a

relatability for audiences, as the myth of neoliberal meritocracy is ripe for obfuscation of inequalities and limiting social mobility (Littler, 2018, p.50). When the atmosphere of a stream is developed and reflects a streamer's personality, attitude, and values (Hamilton et al., 2014), ideological influencing is bound to happen for audiences, especially those of ages where being impressionable is a natural consequence of time spent in the exposure.

A central part of the relationship on livestreaming platforms like *Twitch* between streamers, audiences, and the platform revolves around the ability to continuously be presentable, entertaining, comedic, and *in-character* (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019). A constant performance (to varying degrees) contingent on being socially active and emotionally responsive to their audiences. A striking amount of affective labor goes into maintaining a presence of entertainment and personality that is unique, to an extent, to them (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019).

The way live streamers moderate their chat, or the way it reflects their attitudes/values, has a relational effect on the community that can be grown. We see this in how Jones et al. (2004) found that: 1) users were more likely to respond to simpler messages during periods where the chat would be overloaded with comments and information; 2) users were more likely to seek to end their active participation as information overload increases; 3) users were more likely also to simplify their own participation as mass information interaction increases. (p.206). Streamers who moderate their chat, managing the influx of information and comments left by users, have an active role in shaping the type of discourse and community that spawns from their content. It just depends on what the live streamer values in their 'community'.

This is also seen in how live streamers involve audience participation in even more ways than just being limited to a chat box, such as giving audiences a chance to be participants in games where the streamer plays with viewers (Hamilton et al., 2014). This can be seen as a meritocratic chance for further experience in the community. Communal experiences can lead to a further bond with a streamer (albeit one-sided to a significant extent). Jackson (2020) looks to 'Channel Points' as a point of contestation between streamers and platforms, as well as between audiences and streamers. 'Channel Points' is a feature that is opt-outable that rewards users for time spent in a live stream. Points are accruable by watching streams, active watching (engaging in buttons that

appear intermittently to test engagement), and building streaks by watching consecutive streams. Viewing time is then tied to capital in a reward system based on consumption by users, as these points can be cashed for stream-specific visual emotes or community items (which have no monetary value). Jackson (2020) notes that this feature is contested by some streamers who criticize it as taking away profit from subscriptions, as users who consume enough get the chance to gain some community items without cost, but others praise and utilize it to build a more collective community, a reward for dedicated audiences who do not pay monetarily (p.8-9).

This establishes the agency that creators (to an extent) have in how they wish to monetize, and their agency to paywall content instead of a collective approach that rewards consumption and ‘dedication’. It could also be looked at as short-term or long-term planning by creators regarding their careers on the platform. While paywalling and putting profit over community can lead to short-term financial success—building deeper social and communal engagement is not just associated with a greater time spent by users, but also a way to receive more significant financial contributions to streamers, especially in the case of small less popular streamers (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018).

When looking at more possible streams of revenue for creators, Johnson & Woodcock (2019) note that livestreaming platforms are relatively devoid of explicit rules or regulations that prevent specific streamer behaviors—casting a wide variety of possible monetization methods (note as well that it was only in September 2022 that *Twitch* banned sponsors and content from *Stake/Kick* on their platform). As mentioned previously, in the case of the most popular livestreaming platform *Twitch* (Similar programs exist on *YouTube* as well), there is a distinction between ‘partnered’ and non-partnered creators. This can be understood as official streams of revenue (mandated and facilitated by the platform), and unofficial streams of revenue. Official streams of revenue entail monthly subscriptions (50/50 revenue split between creator and platform), and donations (entailing a TTS [text to speech] donation where the creator can acknowledge and thank the donated amount). Unofficial routes include running adverts for corporate products on one’s individual channel, whether it is in an ad read, or embedded similar to a running banner that plays intermittently or consistently throughout the live stream. These adverts are usually dependent on the

content creators' choice to accept or not, either being sought out or seeking out themselves to engage with these revenue streams (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019). The form of monetary pursuit that is most relevant to the unique case of *Kick* however is the utilization of unpredictable rewards, '*drawing on the psychology of gambling and games of unpredictability to keep people donating in the hope of recognition.*' (Bowman et al., 2020, p.5).

2.3 Hate Speech and Radicalization

'Hate speech is intended to injure, dehumanize, harass, debase, degrade, and/or victimize the targeted groups, to foment insensitivity and brutality towards them. A hate site is then defined as a site that carries any form of hate: textual, visual, or audio-based rhetoric.' (Cohen-Almagor, 2014, p.431). On livestreaming platforms, where their content consists of mixed multimedia forms blending text/video/audio into one consumable experience, there is a growing understanding of the live chat as an emerging space of political and ideological formation (Ruiz-Bravo et al., 2022). Looking at the gaming community and understanding it to have potential political power in how rapidly user groups would emerge and form and develop political consensus and/or radicalization (p.3176). Livestreaming as a multi-mixed media medium has a political dimension in the way public discourse by communities is produced, as the visibility of the chatbox is an inherent part of the audience consumption process (also affecting the streamer). This paper focuses on online forms of hate speech and radicalization, whether it is discourses that are text-based in the chatboxes or those encoded in visual messages/digital media that creators produce.

But what is the difference between online hate speech as opposed to regular hate speech? Brown (2018) writes that anonymity, invisibility in consequence, and the ability to congregate as a community are also affected by the instantaneous ability to message and read information. When chatboxes can be overloaded with information, leading to more spectatorship rather than consumption (Jones et al., 2004), domination can occur of ideology among harmful actors who seek to engage in producing hate speech with

mass visibility. Of course, this effect is prevalent among the common discriminatory targets, disproportionately targeted at women in platforms that are hegemonically dominated by male creators and consumers (Döring & Mohseni, 2018; Döring & Mohseni, 2020; Wotanis & McMillan, 2014)—leading to disadvantaged groups becoming marginalized in online spaces and less likely to comment and engage with the platform (Molyneaux et al., 2008).

This marginalization, concluded by Döring & Mohseni (2020) in their content analyses of gendered hate speech on *YouTube* and *YouNow* (a smaller livestreaming platform), added on to previous studies by showing that female video creators do not necessarily receive more of every *type* of hate comment than their male counterparts, but that they receive more sexist and sexually charged aggressive ones. Female creators also received more positive comments regarding their physical appearances, which Döring & Mohseni understand as an exhibition of ‘*benevolent sexism*’ (p.80) — while also leading female video creators to see ‘*beauty as currency*,’ fostering the gender stereotype that females have to appear attractive enough to imply sexual objectification (p.81). It is an issue with subjecting yourself to the discriminatory and objectifying practices/male-dominated spaces online, the process of being shaped and molded by the influences that creators subject themselves to succeed. Minority groups face a higher risk of victimization through online hatespeech compared to their counterparts; youth of these groups (whether they are creators or simply consumers in the audience) receive hate speech at a scale much higher due to their identity, resulting in severe mental health consequences. It is worth noting as well that regardless of sexual orientation, the experience of being cyberbullied as a youth results in severe mental health consequences, but LGBT youth have a much higher risk for targeting (Wiederhold, 2014).

Schmid et al.’s (2022) study shows that some forms of hate speech go unrecognized by most users—especially as hate speech in user comments are very often rarely read. The chance of seeing it to a strong extent is dependent on whether the users are targeted by the contents of the hate comments (p.13). It also showed that—at least on social media—images and humor were the ideal means of spreading hate speech (p.15). Entertainment becomes the vessel through which hate speech gets disseminated, an object of consumption for users who find humor in it. Schmid et al.’s point on hate

speech being very often rarely read might go in line with what Bilewicz & Soral (2020) highlight about the desensitization people feel after being frequently exposed to hate speech online. Perhaps they are very often not read, but still inherently present and visible. The mere frequency of hate speech in people's digital environment can produce a normativity of hatred and its form of communication (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020, p.9).

Participation (even if it is more passive and solely consumption) in online groups that have radical and ideologically homogeneous practices will result in increased opinion extremism amongst those in said environment. *'Although such online communities will not turn most internet users into radical ideologues, nevertheless, moving some users toward yet more extreme positions may have consequences that reach beyond cyberspace.'* (Wojcieszak, 2010, p.178). Moreover, when a streams community continues to develop over time, and is a reflection and reproduction to an extent of a streamer or content creator's personality, attitude, and values (Hamilton et al., 2014), the process of an online community developing a hate speech saturated community is something that has to be actively avoided and moderated, not passively treated. Of course, moderating only to the extent of what the creator finds to be acceptable. An individualized perspective to understanding complex social/racial dynamics/effects that they are put into the position of responsibility to either negate, foster, or garner.

Perceptions of hate speech online also have to remain above the traditional hate/no-hate dichotomy if there is to be a greater takeaway other than *Hate speech is bad*. Understandings of the production of hate speech online needs an understanding above just sorting comments into these binary categories (Paasch-Colberg et al., 2021, p.177). A characteristic they note as a common approach to studies on hate speech that ends up limiting understandings—needing a more differentiated approach, a qualitative one to complement and command the quantitative, a multi-dimensional/mixed methods approach (p.173).

The larger problematization is the role the medium of the Internet plays, as hate speech is not a micro problem only seen on *Kick*. Internet users are able to upload and disseminate information at such a frictionless rate without many (if not any) editorial/critical filters, saturating content with discourse that traditional broadcast media would not dare resemble due to blowback. Taking action against hate speech

online requires vast societal efforts that involve changes by stakeholders of communication technologies, as well as changes in the education system and workplace (Cohen-Almagor, 2014). And yet, it remains an open question regarding how to deal with hate comments online, as automatic deletion and report systems lead to lowered engagement and—in a way—reduces feedback to a creator’s content no matter how hateful it could be (Döring & Mohseni, 2018). Creators’ decisions in moderation have to deal with the influence of the economic considerations at play.

Hate speech is a product of a systemic issue; individual solutions by creators are only successful in the neoliberal understanding of it, not understanding how the issue requires comprehensive systemic societal change. The problem at stake here is looking at *Kick* as a case, but understanding and looking at where it goes from here and what platform will follow or come after *Kick*. Even if what is seen here is plenty causal for critique.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on the works and influences of a few fields of scholarship to build a theoretical framework that is suited to analyzing the case of *Kick*. Through a political-economic approach in communication, a framework suited for systemic analysis of circuits of production, distribution, and consumption (Mosco, 2009), this paper critiques the ideological role entertainment plays as a corrosive worldview, the role of alienation in entertainment consumption, and the way discourse and culture are produced in the platforms digital circuit at the levels of users/audience, content creators, and platform.

This paper understands the concept of entertainment as an ideological one, it is a worldview through which content is shaped. Adding palatability to the content it is incorporated into. Entertainment always occupies an ideological place within media structures (Frith, 1999, p.160). The employed critique towards the ideology of entertainment is directed to its dominatory nature of all it comes across. With an underpinned political-economic foundation focused on class, exploitation, media, and the consumption, production, and circulation of resources/ideologies. I see entertainment as its own *dispositif*; its own apparatus that manifests in forms discursal, institutional, and cultural without the need for a coherent strategy with identifiable actors (Foucault, 1980, p.203). I don't aim to project a monolithic blanket of lacking audience agency, but contemporary society is characterized as an ever-increasing consumer culture where consumption is increasingly central (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010); the extent of agency/choice should be understood as being dominated via the influences of negotiations between *gratification* and *repression* in said consumer society (Baudrillard, 2020, p.191); at the hands of economic-cultural elites who maintain monopolistic control over the media which serves the very dominant elite in privatized neoliberal society (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Harvey, 2007). Entertainment has the potentialities to promote then a passive engagement—in inactivity and mental subordination to the spectacle (Debord, 1970). Alienation through consuming entertainment as self-medication; viewing mass rising entertainment

consumption as the consequence of the individual self-masochistic-exploitation of a capitalist *Burnout Society* (Han, 2015).

The role of entertainment is investigated to show how entertainment deprives a 'regular' form of consumption—all consumption and experience of life takes the form of entertainment (Postman, 1986). As well as its infinite capacity for incorporation (Han, 2019), and indoctrainment (Sun, 2002). Understanding entertainment in the case of *Kick* to be the content it produces, ranging from the specific game or gambling content being played, the content creator's characteristics, the audience's role, and the appealing distractions/amusements of the platform's affordances. '*The sphere of entertainment, which has long been integrated into production, amounts to the domination of this element of art over all the rest of its phenomena.*' (Adorno 1997, p.253). It is the role of entertainment as a dominant force and worldview that is analyzed. How does it palletize gambling content, advertising, hate speech, radicalization, and other discourses? What is integral is entertainment's ability to be incorporated: Han (2019) describes this as an ever-protean format, resulting in terms like *Infotainment* and *Edutainment* (p.78). Entertainment should be understood as an additive substance intended for user/audience consumption, something to satiate humanity's '*infinite appetite for distractions*' (Postman 1986, p.xx).

What I also want to add to entertainment's possible forms of incorporation is Sun's (2002) conceptualization of *Indoctrainment*. Indoctrainment is understood as a phenomenon, the capacity of the Chinese state's (in the case of the 2008 Olympic games) ability to deliver an embedded intention while simultaneously giving people what they want (p.126). This paper aims to recontextualize Sun's concept into the case of *Kick* by understanding indoctrainment as the medium through which the livestreaming platform can deliver advertising to accumulate users to use their gambling platform, while simultaneously giving people what they want (whether its hopeful pursuits of meritocratic dreams of gambling success, or purely just *entertaining* content). It is a process of using entertainment for the ideological purpose of enacting a message for the viewer to embody through their consumption. Entertainment is the compensation for the 'price' of being ideologically encoded by corporations, governments, and institutions that have the power to do so—for profit, cultural hegemony, and more—utilizing the lens of indoctrainment links a path between the

ideology of entertainment and political-economic analysis as it allows the tracing of power and weaponized intention in the circuit of capital. How indoctrainment is a wielded process, and how it is benefitted and utilized for profit.

What this paper also intends to interrogate is the link between alienation and entertainment: Alienation can be a tool of analysis on this platform as this is an isolated space that deprives consumers/content creators of outside worldviews and critiques that are not hyper-capitalist bigoted role models and content. Alienation refers to how workers are deprived of their ability to think of themselves as active directors of their own lives and futures. It is '*The individual potential to achieve self-perfection (in social relations, in the relation to nature and in the experience of the labour process) is denied.*' (Harvey, 2018, p.426). The process of alienation is an everpresent process under capitalism, existing in the workplace, dominating much of politics and daily life, and most relevantly, its presence at home in consumption (Lefebvre, 1981, as cited in Harvey, 2018). This project investigates how the digital platform of entertainment deprives consumers of a life outside of the ideology this platform buys into. It deprives them of any way back as it is the *end of the line* in livestreaming consumption in regards to what is *acceptable* in mainstream culture. It is indoctrainment via entertainment to create alienation in regards to the agency of consumption, breeding a consistent and addicted userbase to *Kick's* unique milieu of digital entertainment.

Entertainment attaches itself to every social and media system, modifying them to engender their own forms of entertainment (Han, 2019, p.81). The theoretical framework's understanding of entertainment applies and analyzes the characteristics of *Kick's* engenderment of their own entertainment. Contextualizing *Kick* to understand its unique intersections of discourse and political economy in relation to the historical development of digital entertainment platforms. The research questions will be complemented by analyzing the role of entertainment at this intersection of ideology on *Kick* and how the political economy of this circulation impacts and produces *Kick's* particular worldview. Does entertainment displace the hierarchy to make itself the main consumable object? Is hate speech simply secondary to amusement?

'*Cultural production is an integrated component of the capitalist economy as a whole.*' (Adorno, 1991). Cultural institutions are sites of societal domination through the influence capitalists deploy through their accumulated capital on the production process

(Marx, 1867). This paper's theoretical understanding of culture comes with an understanding of the way it produces the mediatized-entertainment objects that can be utilized as a tool for domination, whether for profit or ideology. The methodological approach also analyzes the discourse produced by comments, as their participation through the production of comments is a crucial facet of live stream and platform studies. In *Kick's* case, comments also help showcase the way users interact and engage with the platform, their intentions, or interactions with entertainment. It is also worth understanding the way Hall's (1981) definition of popular culture can be applied theoretically to understandings of cultural production in this paper's research. '*Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance.*' (p.239). *Kick* as a platform is a setting for cultural struggle, where visibility and presence within this space seek dominance in the arena of consent and resistance. Investigating the ways creators and users undergo negotiation and resistance against the platform will highlight the way cultural production is constructed on *Kick*. The research's methodological approach allows us to interrogate how dominant and hegemonic discourses are constructed, reproduced, circulated, and reinforced in *Kick's* digital platform. The walkthrough method and CDA will help establish the key players, key forms of content, and critical characteristics that are linked with dominance over this space at the level of the political-economic circuit between creators, audiences, and the arena itself (the platform). These theoretical understandings of cultural production and the relations between production and capital serve as lenses of analysis to help interpret the unique case of *Kick*.

4. Methodology

As this paper is a study focused on a specific app/platform, the main methodological approach employed is the walkthrough method of Light, Burgess, and Duguay (2018), an approach which combines complementary concepts from cultural studies and STS that understands the dual consideration of technology and culture as mutually shaping powers (p.889). *‘The walkthrough method is a way of engaging directly with an app’s interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experience.’* (p.883) Involving documentation of the affordances of the app (Screens, features, flows of activity, comments, ads, etc...)—with the goal to slow down the hyperactive nature of digital apps to salient and digestible analyses of the mundane actions and interactions that can form habitual consumption (p.883). It is the digital ethnographic researcher adopting the atemporality of computing technology for research, with the aim to slow down and study through embodiment what the experiences and practices of the digital flânerie seem to be. The method here is used to answer the research questions developed through its ability to examine and put forward an app's disseminated vision, operating model, and (platform) governance (p.889-891). To methodologically recognize and draw out the embedded cultural values of *Kick*.

The methodological approach of this paper engages then with three different tiered levels of analysis. The first is the platform itself—the walkthrough method applied to home pages, registration, user experience, advertising, and other visual aspects consumers experience. The second is the specific creator practices seen on the platform and the way users/audiences engage in their unique practices as well. The three-tiered approach of platform, creator, and audience has this through-interrogative-line directed to the presence of gambling on the platform. As *Kick* and *Stake* function hand-in-hand, the methodology looks to the pervasive hypervisibility of gambling within the three tiers of interest.

To pull out the narratives at play in the three lines of platform, creator, and audiences—critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993) is utilized to analyze the discourse generated in live chat comments, as well as the textual and oratory nature of

cultural production seen in content on the platform (whether it is by creators or the platform). CDA supplements the walkthrough method by analyzing the text and narratives at play and their role within the circuit of political economic production. But this, of course, will also simultaneously adopt an STS approach of systematically tracing key influencers/actors at play; purchase buttons/icons, registration processes, feature access, and functionalities—while maintaining and producing a collection of data with the generated field notes and recordings (Light et al., 2016, p.891). Screenshots, video, and audio recordings of the app itself, as well as the researcher's interactions with it, are also included. This then involves drawing on cultural skills of semiotic and textual analysis to recognize embedded discourses and how the app constructs its vision and concepts of class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, gender, and more (p.891).

Live streams are emblematic of the way online gig work operates, where workers/creators find themselves working at inconsistent schedules for varying lengths of time not consistent in a routine manner (Graham et al., 2017), leading to the length of live streams being extremely variable-affected even in the case of the most popular and consistent streamers. The temporal range of data collection over a month is chosen to compensate for the varied nature of the length of content on livestreaming platforms. In the case of extreme situations where the content of the most popular live stream is under a length of 60 minutes, the range will be extended to accommodate the case study's possible constraints. *Kick* as a platform also allows live streams uploaded within the last 30 days by creators to be visible and downloadable within those 30 days, allowing me to store and record exact figures.

With *Kick*, the case study necessitates a detailed description of the setting and actors, followed by further analysis of themes and problematizations (Creswell, 2017, p.312). A 'case' is also understood as potentially being an event, entity, small groups, community, organizations/institutions (Yin, 2018, p.31); illustrating the relevancy of this approach in looking at the digital media organization and varying communities within the platform of *Kick*. The walkthrough method develops the key findings and qualitative themes that will come out of the case study, along with the research questions and theoretical perspective.

During the walkthrough, I made sure to engage with a multitude of live streams throughout February 2024 to March 2024. Instead of sitting down to watch streams

from start to completion, I traveled through *Kick* like a digital flâneur aided by the *analytical eye* (p.891). Allowing the app to naturally draw me via their flows of activity, assuming the user position. Furthermore, what is available to users, in many cases, is the previously-recently broadcasted live streams that are still available to be viewed. This allowed me to engage and relive ‘Recent Broadcasts’, which are not fully dependent on the live nature of the name of the medium connotes. The atemporal aspect of available content is apt for the application of the walkthrough method. It is necessary/relevant to state that I have not engaged in any habitual or even recreational use of *Kick*, or other livestreaming platforms like *Twitch*. However, I have still engaged and seen (especially *Twitch*’s) their platforms in the past, knowing the general process of traversing livestream media platforms like these.

I collected data by taking screenshots of *Kick*’s web pages, stream content, chat messages/user comments, and relevant mediator characteristics that arose. This was done to draw out a qualitative takeaway through a qualitative approach. No users were disturbed, as the walkthrough ‘avoids interactions with users’ (p.895). I did not write comments or engage in any behavior or data capture that would have denied a user’s informed consent. The walkthrough method was engaged on a computer through the *Kick* web browser. I first engage with the process of the *technical walkthrough*, the central data collecting procedure (p.891). This consists of an analysis of the process of registration, the introductory experience of a new user engaging with the platform. Followed by looking at what the platform affords and allows in everyday habitual use, analyzing the habitual modes of interaction and consumption on the platform, and looking at how processes become familiar. The technical walkthrough is then concluded by looking at *Kick*’s processes of suspension and account deletion.

This is then followed by extrapolating the technical walkthrough to an understanding of *Kick*’s *expected use*. Consisting of establishing *Kick*’s vision dissemination process, how it gets encoded and expressed through the UI/UX, its purpose and intended scenarios of use, its operating model and revenue generation, and the underlying political and economic interests (p.890). Then, *Kick*’s governance process: Terms of Service, rules and guidelines, and patterns of enforcement. The analysis consists of three sections: 1. Platform Governance; 2. Profit Operating Model; 3. Ideal Users.

Part Two

5. Analysis

5.1 Platform Governance

‘Kick is a rapidly growing live-streaming platform that encourages Creators to express themselves freely and produce outstanding content suitable for a thoughtful and mature audience.

At Kick, we value the importance of constructive dialogue over knee-jerk reactions often associated with ‘cancel culture’. Still, we also firmly recognize that free speech should not be a shield for hate speech.’

(Kick Community Guidelines, 2024)

Kick’s (2024) 13 Community Guidelines:

No Pornography; No Violence and Hate-speech; No False Sensationalism; No Doxxing; No Botting; No Fraud and Deception; Keep Channels Clean and Compliant through proper category labelling; No Self-Destructive Behavior; No Terrorism; Protection of Minors; No Gambling with other users’ tender; No Solicitation; No Game Hacking.

Platform governance is *‘How the app provider seeks to manage and regulate user activity to sustain their operating model and fulfill their vision.’* (Light et al., 2018, p.980). On *Kick*, governance is dictated by a lack of enforced governance; governance is achieved through inaction by the platform. Which, in consequence, hands off the responsibility to individual creators—each to manage their community to the extent they wish. The hands-off approach by *Kick* is a symptom of neoliberal sentiments of unregulated markets and spaces, where responsibility is left up to the individual. We’ll go first through establishing *Kick*’s community guidelines to evaluate the juxtaposition between the discourse of their legal statements and the results of the walkthrough method. Their critique of ‘cancel culture’ while playing to notions of free speech and constructive dialogue instead of *knee-jerk reactions* highlights the creators and users they intend to attract—those of an online-hatred-fueled-right-wing conservative ilk.

Who are not necessarily *primarily* political in their content or aim to have a political effect as part of their job. The hatespeech they produce, along with their communities, is simply the *style* of their specific entertainment—whether it is gaming, gambling, or ASMR. This does not negate the harm of the consequences of a platform giving them a place to garner audiences and allow their harmful discourse to be hypervisible. But it does highlight the way *Kick*'s platform governance attracts creators and audiences on a more personal level; it is both playing to a conservative and neoliberal sentiment while touching on the personal beliefs of creators even if their 'job' is just to play digital blackjack 10 hours a day.

How We Enforce Our Policies

At Kick, our enforcement actions may vary depending on the severity and frequency of the actions. Our primary goal is to work collaboratively with our creators to address and correct improper behaviors. We believe in reformative efforts whenever possible to foster a respectful and inclusive community. However, we have a zero-tolerance policy for some behaviors and will not collaborate to find a resolution in certain severe circumstances.

Our enforcement actions may involve, but are not limited to:

- Polite Warnings in Chat: We will kindly ask you via chat to make corrections to your content or behavior when necessary.
- Risk of Termination Warning: We will inform you that your stream is at risk of termination if course correction does not occur, especially for more severe violations.
- Content Label Update to 18+: In cases where content requires an 18+ label, we may update it accordingly.
- Alterations to Category, Title, Username, or Profile: We reserve the right to change your category, title, username, or profile as part of enforcement actions.
- Muting Accounts: We may mute accounts in Kick chats, forums, or Discord to address inappropriate behavior.
- Revoking Moderator or Other Privileges: Accounts with moderator or other privileges may have those features or benefits removed.
- Adding Restrictions: Depending on the situation, we may add account restrictions to ensure compliance with our guidelines.
- Content Removal: Inappropriate or rule-violating content may be removed or hidden.
- Account Ban: We may ban individuals and accounts for more severe violations to maintain a safe and respectful environment.
- Account Termination: We may terminate accounts in cases of repeated violations or evasion of previous restrictions or bans.

We strongly believe in fostering a community where creators and users can grow and learn together. Our enforcement approach aims at striking a balance between reformative efforts and maintaining a zero-tolerance stance when necessary to ensure inclusivity and the wellbeing of our community.

Figure 1. 'How We Enforce Our Policies'

Kick portrays their process of policy enforcement in *Fig 1*, which is tough to fully gauge through the walkthrough method in terms of how governance is enacted on audiences and user participants. *Kick*'s concluding line in *Fig 1* summarises their aim to

project an ability to enforce a tight-gloved process. But by combining that sentiment with the selling point of the platform, that of free speech and lack of regulation—the tug of war of action and inaction simply creates a stalemate of stasis: ‘*We strongly believe in fostering a community where creators and users can grow and learn together. Our enforcement approach aims at striking a balance between reformative efforts and maintaining a zero-tolerance stance when necessary to ensure inclusivity and the wellbeing of our community.*’(Kick Community Guidelines, 2024). Kick then offloads responsibility to individual creators. Only in the most extreme cases, such as when the creator is under fire for illegal/criminal acts, will *Kick* step in. It is in these higher-stakes situations when *Kick* pays the most attention when there is detrimental financial and, at worst, legal blowback that could be directed at *Kick*.

Experiences of the chat varied a lot, but what was consistent was that every streamer had their own rendition of this, their own moderation standards. Some were laxer, some were stricter. As a user, you come away with an almost liminal understanding of how policies are enforced, as it becomes clear that they are enforced differently across every streaming community. An example of the way individual creators manage and set up their stream through moderation can be seen below from kick.com/classybeef. Who is self-described in their bio as ‘*Welcome to ClassyBeef, the most uplifting casino and slots streaming channel on Kick, where positivity thrives!*’. The ‘CHAT RULES’ below are from their channel:

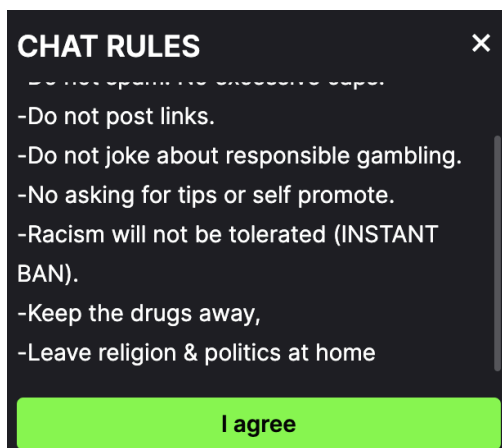


Fig 2. Chat Rules kick.com/classybeef

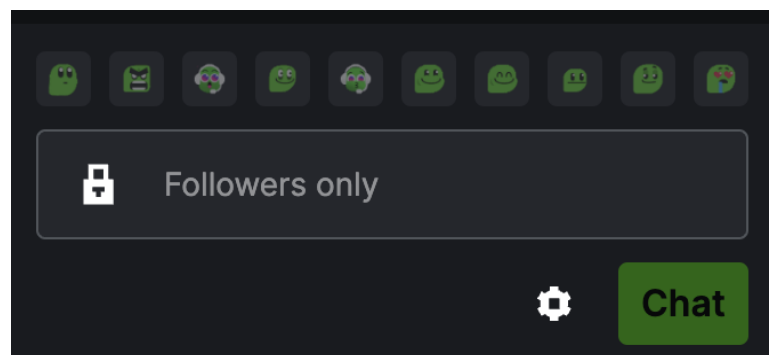


Fig 3. Followers-only chat kick.com/classybeef

The live chat function is restricted to only be usable by followers of their livestream. It is a process that just takes one ‘following’ click to do, making the process of discourse creation—whether it is for the intent of hate speech or positive community participation—only possible if you provide a quantitative benefit to the live streamer at hand. You give them a follower, playing your part to increase their popularity and income streams. A model of self-governance in *Kick*’s platform governance allows little banal actions to become transactional, leaving the choice to creators on whether or not to undergo these processes. We see in the ‘CHAT RULES’ as well how creators make their own laws reflecting their own morals. ‘*Do not joke about responsible gambling*’ is tough to decipher due to the many possible reasons to infer for why it is a rule, perhaps because there is no such thing as responsible gambling, especially not on *Kick*.

It goes without saying that during the walkthrough method, I saw more than a few of these community guidelines being broken in real-time. And to a very real extent, based on discourse generated in the chats and the projected characters of the content creators at play, the breaking of those community guidelines is almost the appeal of the platform—the lack of enforcement if they were to happen.

‘No Self-Destructive Behavior’ seems antithetical to the persistent and encouraged behaviors of this livestreaming platform owned by a crypto-casino. The unsaid selling point of *Kick* is that users can see self-destructive behavior at a financial scale never really seen in everyday life. In a medium through which they can react and interact with the person experiencing it. Even a huge win would be destructive in a way that allows users to see it, as it gives a sort of hope and awe at the spectacle that functions almost akin to the myth of meritocracy in financial success. Luck, of course, has a playing role. But seeing someone hit a stroke of luck in real/recorded time is different from a written account or a fictional story. Every game category (in this case, *Slots and Casino*) has two columns from which to choose a view: ‘Live Channels’ or ‘Clips’. Clicking ‘Clips’ will result in the page seen below, which is already automatically sorted by most viewed of all time (see *Fig 4*). They are presenting a sort of algorithmically organized hall-of-fame ready to be viewed by users ready to be (unconsciously or consciously) persuaded.

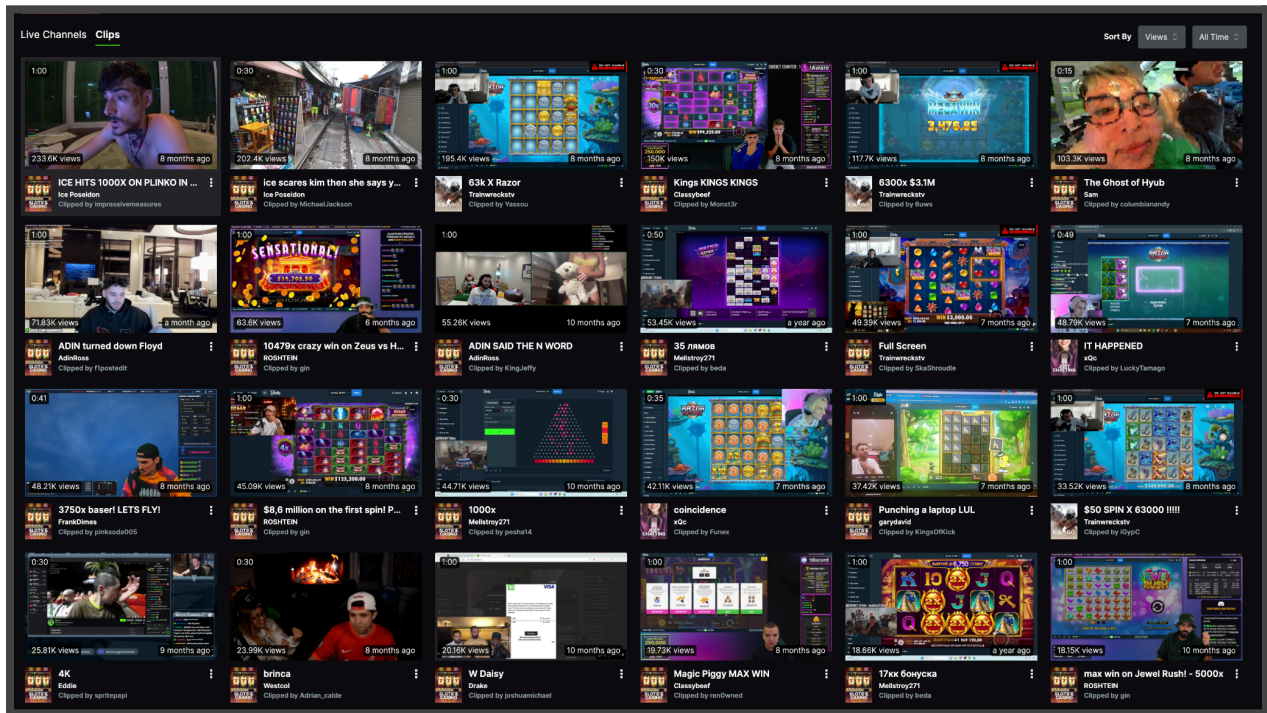


Fig 5. Category 'Slots and Casino' 'Clips' Column - most viewed all time -

'No Gambling with other users' tender' is also frequently broken. Many streamers heap their live chat with automated messages, sending constant external links to *Discord* servers and personal websites where prizes, side bets, and complex parlays can be bet on the success of the streamers' own gambling. Members of the audience compete against each other while all being tied to the central gambler—the live streamer. It is a meta-multimodal gambling process where you can bet on the wins and losses of the entertainer on your screen. *Kick* doesn't take active action against the ways creators work around and bypass their platform governance as long as these exploitative acts are conducted outside of their platform. And by not even taking action against creators who are still engaging in this process, their leniency is their form of governance. This means that 'No gambling with other users' tender' is not enforced at all.

'No Violence and Hate-speech' and 'Protection of Minors' are also not enforced in a hypervisible sense. The extent is dependent on the identity of the creator and the curated community of the creator. Matching Wang & Li's (2020) point that the decisions to engage in discourse production by users are influenced by genres of content and the type of creators and games, each unique context influencing the way users choose to

interact. There is a plethora of hate speech and incitement of violence (whether it is financial, racial, and more). As said before, the punishment for users who engage in this is up to the way individual creators manage their community. When content creators perceive their context and success majorly through a neoliberal understanding of meritocracy (Johnson & Woodcock, 2017), they gladly forsake moderation of their chat because it does not lead to a financial incentive. It becomes too much work for no immediate or long-term economic reward, as the platform does not punish creators for the lack of control over the attitudes and hate speech produced by their community.

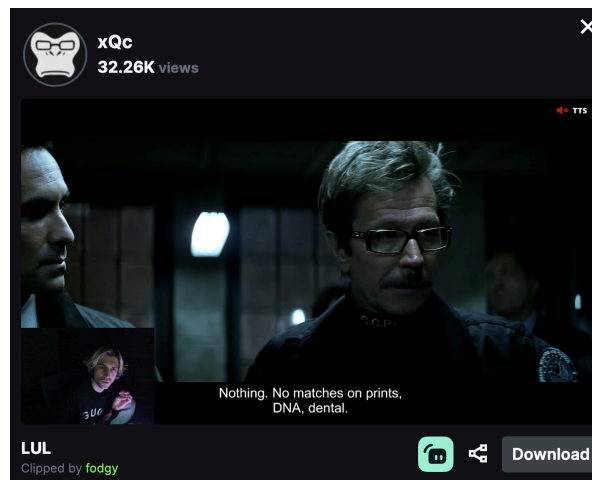


Fig. 6. Kick Streamer xQc watching 'The Dark Knight'

It also really differentiates itself in the platform's enforcement of copyright. Especially as the rigorous enforcement of copyright is due to the majority of online media consumption on entertainment platforms being free for users. Advertisers fund the money to pay creators and for the platform to continue operating. Fig 6 highlights an egregious case. But it marks again the platform's process of self-governance; there is a lawlessness to the practices of the platform and its creators that is tough to prescribe fully as intentional, with it very likely instead being negligence. Turning a blind eye due to the very poor running of a media platform which in Dec 2023 had 21 million accounts (Browning, 2023). As policy enforcement towards cases where copyrighted content is being live-streamed is a reactive process, the fact that these live streams continue to exist over time shows that their policy enforcement process is, in the best case, incredibly slow, and worst case, virtually non-existent. Kick spins their poor

management and operation of their media platform into a selling point. By not engaging in any policy enforcement, they get to reduce their own labor in running the platform, while twisting it to be a flag in the sand against ‘cancel culture.’

The public pretense here presented by *Kick* — which really is integral to the shared sentiments of the site—is to play to the conservative dog whistle of cancel culture while valuing the importance of the deeply neoliberal sentiment of free speech. It also aims to attract those content creators whose phobic discourses had gotten them de-platformed off of other traditional media platforms. While also attracting the ever-lurking misogynistic, racist, phobic content creators that proliferate below the lines of popularity on other platforms. The quotes from *Kick* are simultaneously a community guideline and a selling point to those who feel their hate speech (among others) has left them feeling *hard done by* other media platforms like *YouTube* and *Twitch*.

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Fig 7. ‘Contact our Support Team’

General Support	support@kick.com
Technical Support	techsupport@kick.com
Subscription Enquiries	subscriptions@kick.com
Partnership Enquiries	partners@kick.com
Ban Appeals	appeals@kick.com
Business Enquiries	business@kick.com
Career Opportunities	careers@kick.com
Verified Streamer Application	verify@kick.com
Youth Protection Officer	youthprotectionofficer@kick.com

Fig 8. ‘Contact our Support Team’

We see this similarity again in their methods of platform governance when looking at the process of account creation and deletion. *‘The process of account suspension, closure or leaving may not always represent a total break of the*

relationship between user and app' (Light et al., p.894). The walkthrough method has highlighted the fact that it is incredibly easy to register a new account previously in the section on registration and entry, showing that there is no confirmation email sent to new account registrations. Just input new information—which need not be verified—and you are ready to engage in the participatory process yet again. On the opposite end, a user is not able to delete or deactivate their *Kick* account in as easy of a process. There is no button in 'Settings' or 'Security', and a perusal of *Reddit*, *Quora*, and *YouTube* shows that an account can only be deleted in two ways: Contacting support, or downloading and logging into the mobile app. Contacting support means sending an email of a specific inquiry to a specific receiver. And in the age of digital platforms either having a live chat support system or the decision to run a contact system via email, implies a purposeful slowing down of the app closure process. This highlights a shifting of the scales in the contestation between users who may find difficulty in navigating the platforms' user interface to find non-intuitively findable deletion options, and then the platform itself, which aims to prevent users from accidentally/too-easily deleting their accounts by adding friction to the process (Schaffner et al., 2022).

Kick here utilizes a *Restrictive* type of 'Dark Pattern': '*Restrictive dark patterns reduce or eliminate the choices presented to users.*' (Mathur et al., 2021). It reduces and eliminates choices of instant agency in account deletion by not having an instant delete option, and uses the medium of email as an aim to restrict the process of account deletion. Along with forcing the instalment of their platform on users' mobile devices. Now, the process of deletion only becomes possible through more involvement with the app. Letting it wrap its tendrils around your devices even tighter, and only then can you leave. Banking on the hope that the process becomes too painful, and a change of mind might occur for the user in this process. It is, after all, seemingly easier just never to log in again than it is to delete your account. Allowing *Kick* to also pad their user numbers as they continue their disruptive goal of making a space and name for themselves in competition with the established digital media companies.

Kick is the case of a platform that does not even aim to put up a veneer on the way their platform runs. Hate speech by users does not matter because the goal is to get them addicted to their gambling platform. But more simply, it exists just to attract

new/outside users to become users of their platform—Occam’s razoresque. The political-economic understanding of the role of hate speech and radicalization on *Kick* is understanding that it is simply a practice that has been allowed due to the financial tradeoff. The pursuit of capital’s predatory practices online incentivizes the negation of action against hate speech if the goal is user retention. They are metrics that measure engagement. Their process of platform governance also represents the way the notion of neoliberal anti-regulation is both an economic and ideological point. It has an economic benefit for creators, and it attracts creators who share that ideological sentiment of radicalized modern conservative free-speech-for-hate-speech.

5.2 Profit Operating Model & The User and Creator Acquisition Pipeline

'An app's operating model involves its business strategy and revenue sources, which indicate underlying political and economic interests.' (Light et al., p.890).

Kick and *Stake* are uniquely differentiated from the historical lineage of digital entertainment platforms and their profit models. The Smythe audience-commodity model does not necessarily apply to the case of *Kick*. *Kick* is not beholden to advertisers, as its financier is a casino. And they are the consumable commodity through which an advertiser would want an audience to purchase. It is not so much indebted to *Stake* as it is a tool for *Stake*, functioning like a persuasion machine to entice an entrance into the RGB-lit casino. The audience is an even more heightened commodity, an investment much more frictionless in cost and access. It is an audience-addictainment model—requiring a psychological/social/mental persuasion. Persuasion not primarily for the act of consumption, but for the overarching convincing of an audience, a user, to partake in a new elicited entertainment. One that, if you strike big, could truly—even if it is just through a neoliberal consumerist understanding of obtaining the objects of desire—make you happy. This persuasion feeds on the conclusions from Gainsbury et al. (2014) that internet gamblers whose habits have developed into a problem were more likely to be young, less educated, and having greater debts compared to nonproblem internet gamblers. The audience-addictainment model preys on a lack of education and the naivety of youth, but most persuasively it preys on debt, on the economic status of users. The hypervisibility of gambling content on the platform, and the role creators play in this process is to hammer home the *hope* that could come with possibly getting out of your debt—an escape from a dire economic situation through gambling, through *play*.

For users who are persuaded into this mentality, it is a more entertaining form of the stock market, where even a self-awareness (which is very present from creators and audiences) of luck and chance don't serve as strong detractors to further problematic gambling behavior because the hole has already been dug. It is the entertaining form of the falsely meritocratic American Dream.

And while *Stake* naturally uses *Kick* as an advertising outlet, it is the way they are even more radically intertwined, functioning organically in their governance and financial model, that should elicit a fear-tinged interest. A more radicalized and intrinsic symbiosis of the financier and financier. Unique too, as it leads them to govern in their desired projected unregulated and free-speech type format. Their control over the financing and expression of their organization results in the ability to self-regulate in the contexts of production and consumption to an extent never seen at this monetary and technological level for a media company. It is a lucratively sustainable model that even if *Kick* were to implode, traditional media companies would take note of the freedom *Kick* has in not being tied to advertisers to sustain their functioning and growth. But it is their wholly unique context through which this is made possible. But the *Kick* model of a digital platform not needing to rely on advertisers on a platform-wide scale is extremely fascinating in contrast not just to the historical development of digital media companies, but media companies as a whole.

Their elicit profit operating model exists by taking advantage of legal loopholes and the digital nature of the internet and making use of the ways that there is not necessarily a firewall/jurisdiction online similar to the physical. Which already can be exploited and circumvented via capital and power. But *Stake* preys and operates in that unregulated digital system of an already poorly regulated (in regards to a class-based critique on transnational money storage and taxation evasion) system. *Kick* operates with the traditional players of Western media in the same digital setting, where media companies were traditionally also derived. But now dominates the space while legally operating in Curacao. It is a process of exploitation, which is an *unfair* advantage—not abiding by the same legal binds that hold digital media companies that physically are located in countries with anti-gambling/exploitative laws (not that these companies were fully abiding by these laws anyway, but the extent to which they are held liable is striking in comparison to *Kick*).

Their geographical location is also why it is almost impossible to decipher the platform's finances. It is a black box of financial obfuscation. Curacao's notorious laissez-faire allowance of online gambling companies also aids in these companies want to remain private. This gives *Kick* a level of autonomy and freedom that would be unattainable in the more heavily regulated states where traditional media companies

tend to operate. Determining whether or not the platform operates at a loss is not possible through the chosen methodology as it is not public information. Even journalists and governments are restricted from a deep dive into their financial practices; they have no jurisdiction. But if it is operating at a loss, it is nowhere near a loss significant enough to eventually shut down the platform, as new users continue to sign up as *Kick* continues to seek to be a disruptive platform in the livestreaming space. However, I find it to be more relevant to look at their user acquisition pipeline, which turns users into gamblers and determines the success of *Kick*'s profit operating model. Whether or not the platform is a loss leader, it is the harm of its operating model that is of focus.

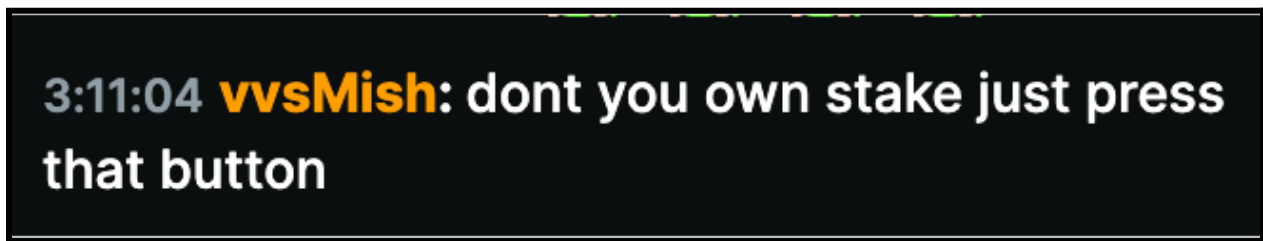


Fig 9. Livechat from chatter vvsMish

The unexpected practices (p.895) of the role of streamers in the operating model were the growing concerns and allegations raised about the legitimacy of the egregious amounts of money being gambled with on *Stake* through *Kick*. These allegations are even seen in the discourse users produce in the live chats of popular *Kick-affiliated* streamers, although usually with a tone of jest. Comments such as the one in *Fig 9* make a semi-frequent appearance in live chats, and if the streamer does read it out loud—catching the comment in the rapidly-paced, evermoving chat—it is met with an outburst of criticism from themselves articulating that that is ‘not how it works’.

There is a very high chance that it is not even an honest display of degenerate gambling, at least in the high-stakes bets made by popular streamers. However, quick perusals of streamers with small view counts in the 0-50 viewer range show that there are no dummy accounts for the less fortunate. Even if describing them as less fortunate is only in relation to the false simulacra that gambling is manufactured as. Highs and lows have a much more exaggerated effect and become more frequent and visible. This

relationship between *Stake* and *Kick* allows money to carry its affective weight while being utilized in a more flexible and manufactured manner, especially as the money that is being gambled with is converted from cryptocurrency.

The profit model is that for large popular streamers, especially those who were poached and moved from traditional media platforms to stream on *Kick*, the goal is not to bankrupt them. But to have them bring huge amounts of traffic/revenue onto their site. And even if a streamer like *Trainwreckstv* (<https://kick.com/trainwreckstv>), who actively advertises the amount of their losses, the actual amount must be many multiple times lower than what is claimed, as the lack of playing with real money, and possible kickbacks on losses obfuscate even the lows of gambling. What is real? And to users, to an extent, it does not seem to detract from the spectacle of what they are seeing. World Wrestling Entertainment is manufactured, and their dramatized scripts don't detract from the users who consume it. Entertainment transcends notions of what is real or manufactured; if *Kick* is secretly pulling the strings and funding these mountainous amounts to creators, it doesn't have a detriment to the entertainment consumption process by users because the spectacle (whether manufactured or not) is still a spectacle—the process of manipulation functions to create the addictainment.

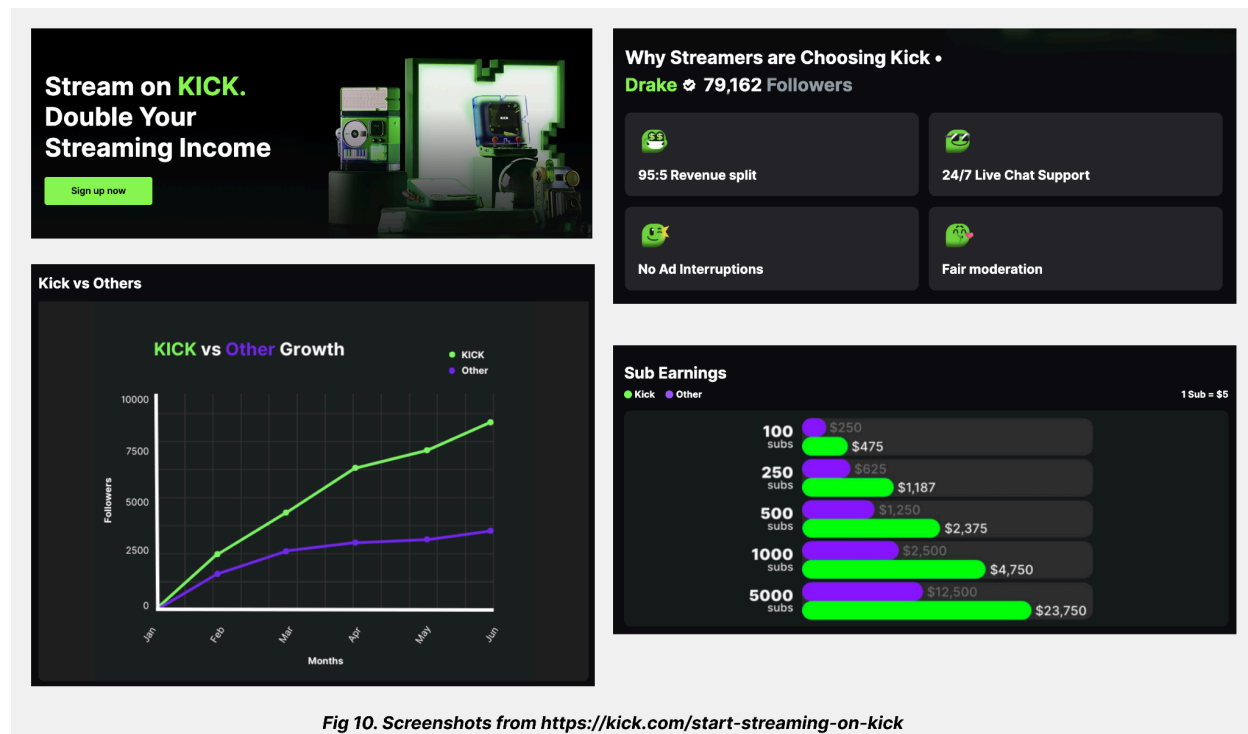


Fig 10. Screenshots from <https://kick.com/start-streaming-on-kick>

Kick is also a fantastic profit service for creators compared to other platforms, even if they are also instrumentalized unknowingly as profit tools by the platform. *Kick* offers a 95% creator and 5% platform split for streaming income, one that is lucratively high in comparison to other platforms like *Twitch* or *YouTube*. *Fig 8* highlights the ways *Kick* advertises the potential financial implications if streamers choose to stream on *Kick*. The purple ‘Other’ in their figures is *Twitch*, they avoid using the competing platforms’ name, but clearly signal through representing ‘Other’ in purple (which is *Twitch*’s identifiable color aesthetic) how financially *Kick* is the better option. Creators are the platform’s desired acquisition, creators unlock the key to acquiring these new users/followers who are the target of a developing gambling addiction. *Kick*’s operating model is the acquisition of content creators to poach away from *Twitch* and others by appealing to creators’ economic considerations.

Furthermore, the intent to persuade and move users from *Twitch* to *Kick* is seen in how *Kick* aims to use the same visual conventions of everyday use of their competing platform, making it an easy transition for users to navigate. Everyday use is the part of the walkthrough method that looks at the specific options, functionalities, and affordances provided to users by the platform/app (Light et al., 2018). The platform makes sure that everyday use is extraordinarily similar to *Twitch*. The navigation structure of *Kick*’s user interface is incredibly intuitive and easy to use. During the walkthrough, *Kick* feels very similar to what *Twitch* looks and is designed like. *Figs 11 & 12* highlight this shared convention quite strikingly. An aesthetic difference in its use of color is the main separator. Its symbolic representation associates the experience of using *Kick* as similar to *Twitch* through its shared conventions, establishing an association through its similar user interface. The ideal scenarios of use then were understood to be at the consumption level, the same as *Twitch*, the act of being a user navigating the platform was to be no different. This leads to a drawing out that the imagined user is one from *Twitch*, a user who would be persuaded to migrate by making *Kick* familiar to use. If anything, a more neon-darklit tone with more visible *adult* content: *Fig 4* shows ‘Slots & Casino’ and ‘Pools Hot Tubs & Bikinis’, while *Twitch*’s white slabs of content feel blander in comparison.

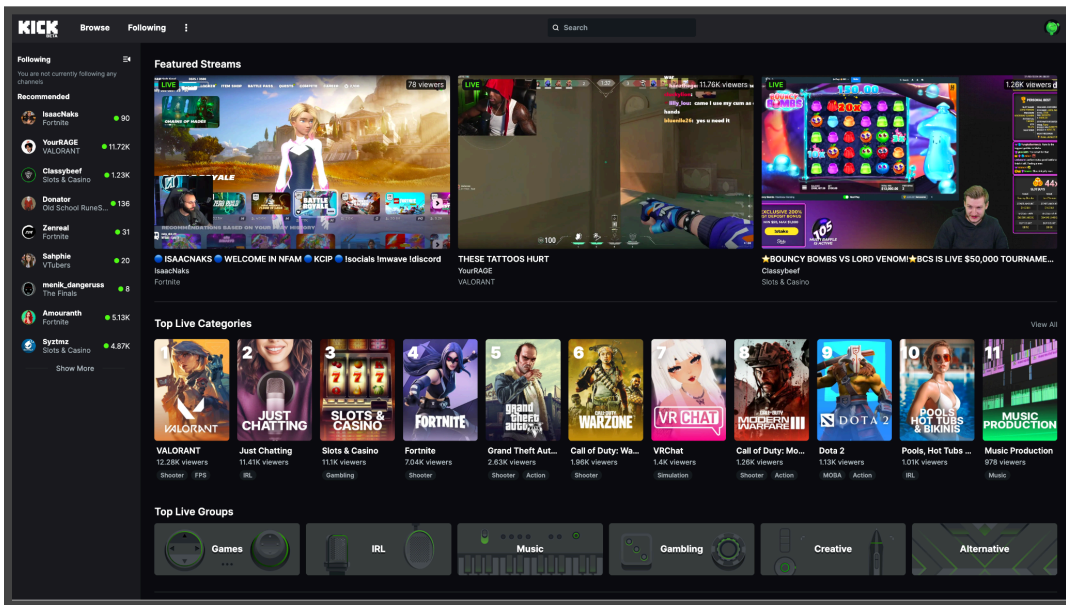


Fig 11. 'Kick' home page

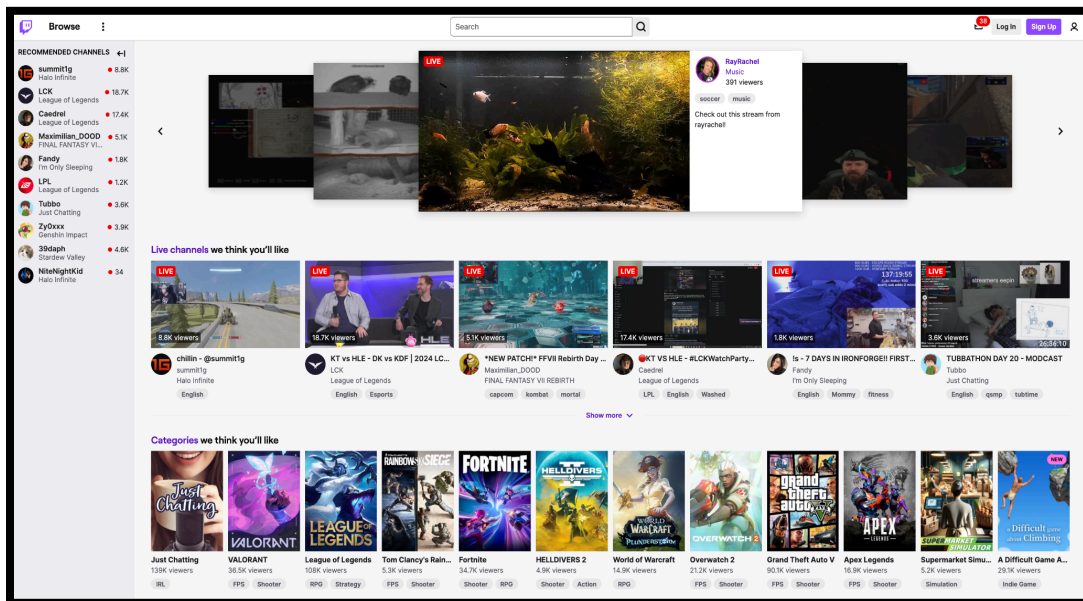


Fig 12. 'Twitch' home page

The stages of *Kick's* acquisition pipeline as part of the operating model start with the acquisition of creators with sizable followings, poaching and attracting them away from competing platforms. Then, it is about making new users feel comfortable and able to operate their platform with the shared conventions users already understand from their everyday use of these other competing platforms. The next stage is how *Kick* profits by aiming to turn non-gambling users into frequent users primarily. Then, once

high frequency of everyday use has been established, the pipeline aims to turn them into gambling users, culminating in them being dedicated problem gamblers. There is a stasis in the current way disclosure of the harms of gambling is treated and mediated on the platform. ‘Gamble Responsibly’ is always visible somewhere on the platform, and creators make their own descriptions highlighting the dangers of a gambling addiction. But there is a felt shamefulness in how transparent it is, with nothing being done about it—disclaimers do not necessarily stop self-destructive behavior. Many examples during the walkthrough showed someone blowing obscene amounts of wealth while constantly disclosing the profit model behind it. Disclosure does not negate or change the behavior of the platform and its creators and users for the better. The dedicated radicalized gambler is the ideal user, and the ways the platform aims to produce the creation of these ideal users are seen on the ‘Settings’ page.

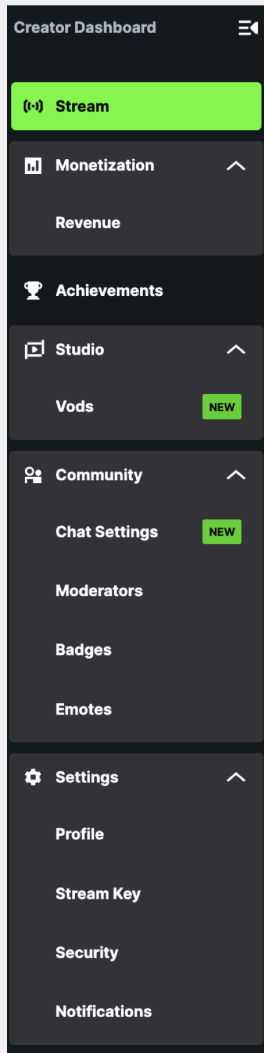


Figure 15. Creator Dashboard

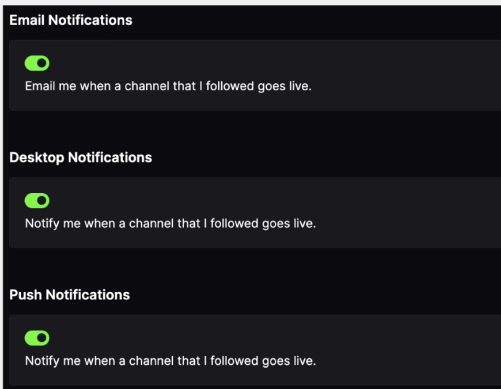


Figure 13. Email Notifications

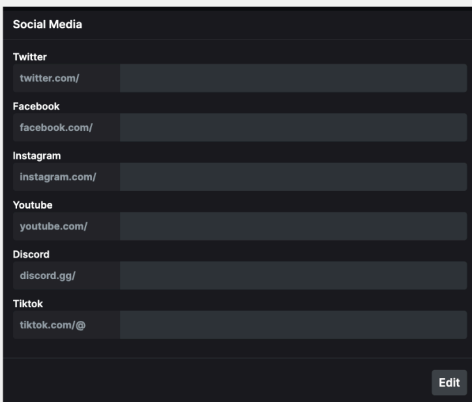


Figure 14. Social Media

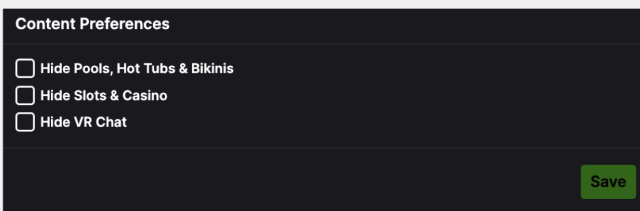


Figure 16. Content Preferences

The selection of the ‘Profile’ button opens up a page called ‘Creator Dashboard’, where ‘Profile’ is just one selection underneath the ‘Settings’ tab. At this point, there is no information needed after the registration and entry that needs to be input to use the platform; all the information here is additive and not demanded. Customizations such as editing your ‘Avatar’ (profile photo), ‘Banner Image’ changes, changing usernames (60-day wait period between changing names), adding a personal bio, adding social media links, and your personal ‘Content Preferences’ (what content do you want to *hide* from your view).

The ‘Social Media’ (*Fig 14.*) links, notably, show that streaming competitor *Twitch* is omitted. The shared links don’t go towards any other platform that would be of a similar medium of livestreaming (even if *YouTube* does have a livestreaming feature). This feature is more popularly used by creators rather than users as noted during the walkthrough by looking at its lack of utilization on user profiles compared to creators. Creators use it to advertise their accounts on other platforms, part of their identity as not just a *Kick* streamer, but as an online content creator. *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, *Discord*, and *TikTok* are listed. These platforms are—in a way—complementary. Helping provide creators with their own growth outside—but most importantly—in this beneficial online relationship on *Kick*.

‘Content Preferences’ (*Fig 16.*) gives users the choice of visible consumable content. The automatic setup is that none of the three options are selected, these being 1) *Hide Pools, hot Tubs & Bikinis* 2) *Hide Slots & Casino* 3) *Hide VR Chat*. While *Kick* does give the option to restrict, it is worth noting that the selection process for determining what content one would like to view is hidden in ‘Settings’ and not an initial part of the registration and entry process. Which when going back, never had any kind of certified age regulation/verification—and never actively asked the registree at the beginning.

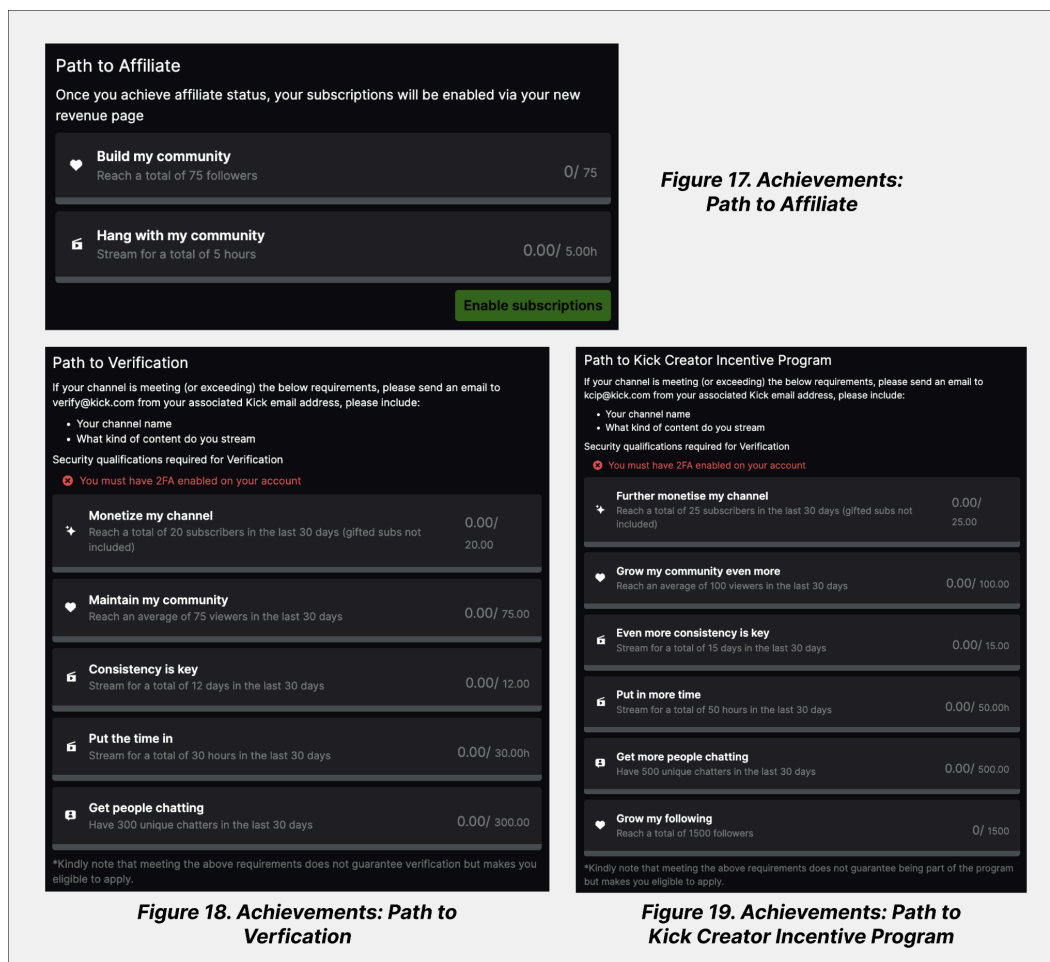
Along this customizable stream is the dropdown tab ‘Notifications’ (*Fig 13.*), where the three types of notifications users can receive (email, desktop, and push notifications) are already automatically enabled. Users can, of course, turn the button off, but its automatic enablement directs users to be aware of the content of *Kick* outside of being on the platform itself. Now *Kick* gains visibility and seeks to dominate a user's decision-making process on use in their emails, computer, phone, and other possible

tunnel entrances that lead to using their app. It is the process of pre-establishing the hypervisibility of their platform to promote frequent use. Notifications could also be looked at as a benefit the platform gives to its creators. As long as a user follows a channel, *Kick* has the automatic support system to make sure that when creators go live, they reach their audience through a myriad of ways to make them aware of the happening stream.

Under ‘Security,’ the 2 Factor Authentication is also not enabled automatically. Multifactor authentication (MFA) is utilized in our current digital contemporary context, which considers that passwords alone are no longer safe, they’re the current big implementation for security (Henricks & Kettani, 2019). During the walkthrough, setting up the two-factor authentication would have been a hindrance to logging into accounts in comparison to the traditional (yet unsafe) speed of logging in without an MFA. Ease of use outweighs the very abstract and obfuscated role data security plays in the minds of users. It just isn’t worth it—unless you have taken the steps to add payment details related to spending or monetization. The decision to leave two-factor authentication as a choice for the user is one that still abides by laws on safety and security of user data by giving it an option, but by leaving it optional, it almost absolves itself of risk with data security issues. This is an example of forsaking the onus of protection onto the user, who makes a negotiation between laziness and security—*On or Off*.

A dominating majority of the account settings are geared towards options that creators would utilize. It demonstrates to users who aren’t creators the pathway to *becoming* a creator. Showing to users that the steps to being a creator are all easily accessible on the same dashboard they modify their settings in. An everyday use of the platform seeks to push that fact in, the jump from viewer to streamer is possible just through the setup of a few key bits, which can be done in your profile. The tabs ‘Stream,’ ‘Monetization,’ and its dropdown tabs ‘Revenue,’ ‘Studio,’ and ‘Community’ all signify the different creator controls that anonymous-passive consumers have no need for. All the different forms of moderation and revenue information are relevant for creators. Putting a certain *fear of missing out* into the mentalities of users who open their settings. Making these settings visible to users and not just creators is integral to the

functioning of their operating model, and the acquisition pipeline. *Kick* teases a life not lived.



The most interesting one from the ‘Creator Dashboard’ is ‘Achievements’ (Figs 17, 18, & 19.). It shows a very gamified form of progression towards gaining monetary consumption for their streaming play/work. It almost works as a self-reflective sheet for streamers, as they can map their progress in understanding the *success* of their work. The achievements move upwards in scale from *Path to Affiliate*, *Path to Verification*, to *Path to Kick Creator Incentive Program*. Each reward and completion of one of these paths is the reward for achieving the status of those named paths. The achieved status leads to greater increased monetary benefit. But more significantly, *promising* it via expressing a visualized career progression through quantitative means.

‘Monetization’ (*Fig 15.*) has a drop-down menu with only one bar: ‘Revenue’. Here, a gatekeeping lock is planted for a nonstreaming user. A need for a *Stripe Connect* account. And the moment users/audiences link their personal credit card into the settings of the platform, or any sort of payment account—even if it is due to a user being under the guise that they are setting it up to *receive* money, with no intention of depositing—that is one step closer down the pipeline of their profit model of turning viewers into dedicated problem gamblers.

Kick is situated in a context where it is very uniquely not beholden to the same power relations towards the golden-gloved advertisers that traditional media companies were. What/who are they beholden to? The churning profit of their casino, but also towards the continued success and growth of their mediatized entertainment. The ability for the unique addictainment to continue a process of subordination of audiences. And indoctrainment of turning non-gamblers into gamblers. Done through an ecological-technological massaging via the social influences of the platform (creators/livestreamers) and its technological influences (platform affordances, UI/UX, accessibility, and hypervisibility of gambling).

5.3 Ideal Users & Ideal Creators | Unique Practices

I'd like to first return to the distinction between commercial mass media audiences and those of the live or motion picture. Smythe (1981) '*Audiences for the commercial mass media are a strange type of institution. They are more a statistical abstraction than are, for example, the audience of the live or motion picture theater because they have no possibility of simultaneously and totally interacting internally to create an audience mood or affect. Yet we know that they are far from merely being statistical abstractions.*' (p.251). The medium of livestreaming is a commercial mass media that also allows the simultaneous creation of a mood or effect from audiences in the live chat. Having an embedded social perspective, the live chat feature allows viewers to build a sense of community through sharing opinions and connections (Kohls et al., 2023)—a mood and affect that is created through textual means, and iconography/emojis. The multimodal medium of livestreaming itself leads to user practices being more active, and more discourse-creating options are available to them. Linking to Fuchs's (2012) point on the internet being different from television with the distinction that users on the internet are not passive watchers, but, to an extent, are active creators of content. We see this exemplified by the affordances of the medium of livestreaming. *Kick's* users are situated in this digital context where live chats and communities play an active and influential role in creating the mood and affect of the consumable content. Later in this section, and in 6. *Addictainment*, I'll argue that what is unique to the practices of users/audiences on *Kick* is their role in fostering a vicarious form of hateful communal consumption. What is intrinsic to *Kick* is that misery loves company, users' digital practices are much informed by the mental effects and woes of their shared communal interest in gambling.

Then there is Smythe's point on commercial mass media audiences being more of a statistical abstraction compared to live participators. The ideal user of *Kick* is a statistical abstraction, but one of an economic investment. As we've established previously, *Kick's* profit operating model relies on a pipeline of new user acquisitions to—over time—sublimate into dedicated gamblers. I use sublimate to imply that the

transition from non-gamblers to gamblers is one in which its completion feels like an achievement of what is culturally accepted on the platform, by creators and audiences alike. While a user's motivation to get information and be entertained at the same time (Hamilton et al., 2014) does not result in a willingness to produce/participate in comments/content of a stream, the degree of a user's willingness to engage is influenced by the spectacle of the content, of *Kick's* unique form of entertainment—the mediatized cocktail of gambling, hate speech, radicalization, and digital entertainment.

Users then negotiate and resist against being involved in the communal act of reaffirming/communicating the strength of the ideological *addictainment*. Whether or not they fully radicalize into gamblers, *if* they undergo a sublimation and develop gambling habits on *Stake*, it is due to a failure to continue their mental processes of negotiation and resistance against the platform that aims to shape them into ideal users. '*Intense gambling involvement has been verified as a predictor of gambling problems for online and offline gamblers*' (Gainsbury, 2015). Frequency of use is the verified marker for their degree of gambling radicalization.

Kick fully commits to the utilization of unpredictable awards through its context as a heavily pro-gambling platform. The conventional communal practices reflect this, which are influenced by creators, users, and platform alike. Not only utilizing non-gambling unpredictable reward mechanics in chat-based interactions between creator and users, which psychologically aims to manipulate users to donate in the hope of reward (Bowman et al., 2020), but the ideologies of risk, unpredictability, and gambling, all coalesce into a unique type of communal moment. A type that only *Kick's* unique milieu is capable of facilitating. What Reagle (2016) has described about user communication online, where communication consists of the missing social cues, context, and information that would regularly be available if the act of sociality had been in person, is reflected in users' commenting on *Kick*. However, there is a sensible greater disinhibition at play depending on the context of the stream/community present. A quantitative approach measuring differences textually of the length and medium of discourse between *Kick* and *Twitch* users could be ripe for cross-analysis in future studies (Or one between *Gambling* chatters and *Non-gambling* chatters could possibly yield more pryable results). But the ethnographic takeaway of the walkthrough method showed the haze of the mood created by live chat users in tandem with the livestreamer.

A certain desperation for new escalated stimuli to happen on the part of the gambling of livestreamers is hyper-present. A lot of users and audiences are living vicariously through the wins, but simultaneously, the losses carry a vicarious allure as well. Both are entertaining, and contain experiences foreign to audiences on such a raw affective and financial level. Great highs and crushing lows.

The communal activity here is unpredictable in its outcome, where even failing or 'losing' money is, in itself, a communal activity—alleviating the woes that may have come with gambling in isolation into a failed group activity, where support and possible further motivation are there to continue the experience. The live chat is an extension of the streamer, of themselves to the extent of their moderation (Hamilton et al., 2014). And the attitudes and behaviors, their attitude towards play—gambling—can allow the chat to give an antagonistic, and almost scary spiraling effect to project onto the streamer. The level of participation, the very experience of community, is then radicalized for future commodification in the case of gambling on *Kick*. When gambling is the communal bond, the theme and participatory event that draws communities together, it then reflects Mosco's (1998) *Pay-per Society* applied to digital livestreamed entertainment. To truly experience *Kick* at its full potential as a mixed multimedia-gambling platform, is to participate in one of the most harmful *pay-per* examples out there, as the *pay-per* experience here is one towards an experience diagnosed as addiction. Mosco (2008) writes on how the same technologies that extend the *pay-per* society into the home are used extensively and similarly to create a *pay-per* environment in the workplace (p.7). We see its effect on users' entertainment habits at home—while also understanding that technology has evolved to be much more mobile in its ability to have entertainment be consumed by people (Zhang & Liu, 2015). To participate truly in a live chat, or the community in a live streamer's content is to be a member of the hedonistic impulses of gambling on *Kick*. Levels of community participation are equivalent to your willingness to *pay-per* experience. The ideal user afforded and directed by the flows of activity on the platform is a user who is engaged financially, involved in the paying communal activities. Misery loves company.

What is entrenched in almost every experienced gambling spectacle communicated by creators and users was a shockingly clear self-awareness of the hopelessness and detriments of gambling. There is a popular mimetic saying that was

reproduced in the live chats often in different forms, but always saying the same thing—with irony entrenched into the phrase—‘99% of gamblers quit before they hit big’. But scores of audiences saying it with irony does not matter or negate it, as it is still treated and reproduced with the naive behavior in mind. This, I want to expand on by saying that it became clear through the walkthrough method that there is a really striking self-awareness of the harmful nature of gambling by the creators, and also by the users on the platform.

Nothing hammers home the self-awareness of the creators of the platform quite like the two following transcriptions of what was said on a *Kick* stream from one of the largest livestreamers on the site, *Trainwreckstv* (<https://kick.com/trainwreckstv>).

*“It is not a way to get rich quick, it is not a way to get yourself out of any f*cking low parts of your life. It will put you in a lower part of life. The ones that are lucky lose their first time playing, the ones that are the unluckiest win. You understand. Because then you get sucked in you’re f*cking done. Do not gamble. Do not even try. Gambling is literally for the f*cking rich to get a high. That is it.*

*Whatever you think, whatever you convince yourself that your life, you know, is in a sh*tty place. I promise you - you gamble, you will find yourself in an even sh*ttier place that you didn’t think existed or you could fathom. And you’ll wish every second that you can just go back to your sh*tty life that you thought was the worse and really wasn’t.”* (YouTube, 2022b)

*“Do not get it twisted. Do not gamble. Do not start gambling. Gambling is entertainment it is entertainment only. You won’t break even you won’t win. You won’t do any of that. You understand? You will only go into debt and ruin your f*cking life. I do this because I f*cking love it I do it all the time. It is entertainment for people who can afford it. And that’s it. You will lose. I’m losing you understand, I am down millions.”* (YouTube, 2022a)

While directed towards his viewers, he is almost martyring himself in his monologue when examining his own situation; it can be applicable to the outlook of almost every level involved, apart from the platform itself which aims to profit off of

their now ideal users and creators. You can swap out the word gambling for entertainment very fluidly. And when we build upon that, when gambling and entertainment fuse together to entwine and mediatize, it gives that addicting effect, that pursuit of a *high*. When we understand drugs and their addictions as a public health issue, this project functions in part to argue that we understand the production and consumption of *Kick's* unique conceptualization of entertainment as a public health issue as well. The case of *Kick* is a hotbed of ailments screaming for regulation.

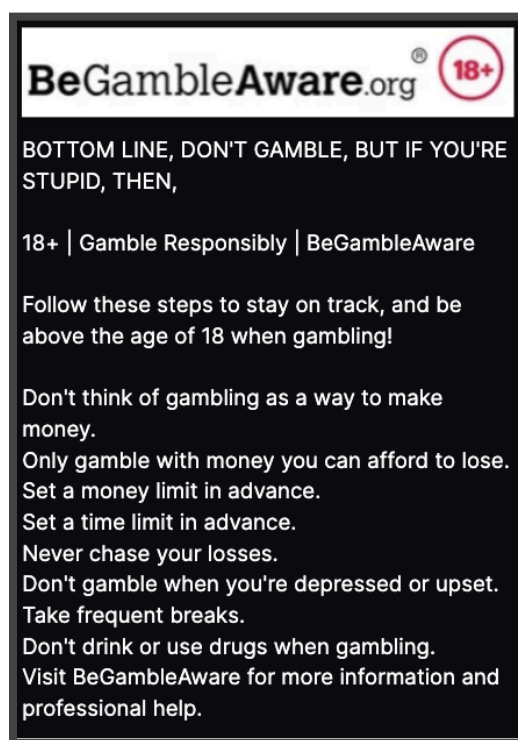


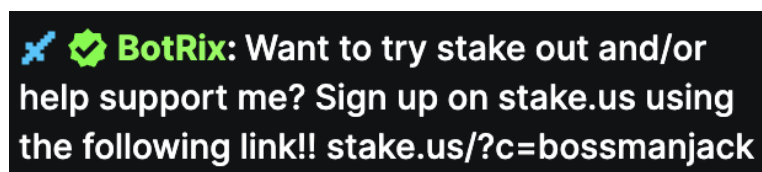
Fig 20. *Kick* streamer *Trainwreckstv's* personal *Gamble Responsibly* banner

The unique relationship creators have of the self-awareness of their degenerative job is interesting to think of in regards to the historical practice of patronage. It is a way of understanding how patronage can lead to exploitation from the patron towards the artists they house and fund. Power is situated with the platform, and enacted onto creators. *The patron and the artist, the platform and the creator*. This metaphor works in regards to the financial backing of performing and creating gambling content of which is expected by the creator. While for the creator, it is at its financial core, a *job*. This *job* which is understood as having this addictive gambling element, the drive to

work now becomes synonymous with *play*. The dyad of *work-play* so domineering and invasive over their lives, accessible anytime due to working from home or anywhere, just needing a computer or phone. *Kick*, the patron, provides both the financial backing, and the drug of addiction/entertainment for creators.

The once dyad now triad of *work-play-home* has an influence why creators on *Kick* naturally get addicted to streaming gambling content, some streamers admit they gamble offline as well. They participate and aim to win back these losses without the public aspect that defines their job. Its both working from home, and shooting up from home. *Kick* has a dominating penetrative effect into the homes and practices of those creators, an effect on their lives outside of a clock-outable shift. Woodcock & Johnson (2019) describe that the work of live streaming is much more intense, mentally and emotionally demanding, and performatively draining than one would expect. Combined with long hours of work (even if work is *play*), the role of the live streamer—dependent on their contexts of popularity/addiction/wealth—is just as much of a user—if not more so—than those audiences who watch through their screens. The controlling *Kick* casts a shadow of unfulfillment and pointlessness onto what is—as it seems on the surface level—a lavish and hedonic life.

No matter the livestreaming platform of choice, the livestreamer still has vast amounts of control over the way they moderate their chat. Their moderation of their community is an extension of their attitudes/values, having a relational effect on their audience (Jones et al., 2004; Hamilton et al., 2014). The walkthrough brought to light the way creators' specific moderation seeks to squeeze that mode of profit out of their audience.

A screenshot of a chat message on a dark background. The message is from a user named 'BotRix' with a green checkmark icon. The text reads: 'Want to try stake out and/or help support me? Sign up on stake.us using the following link!! stake.us/?c=bossmanjack'.


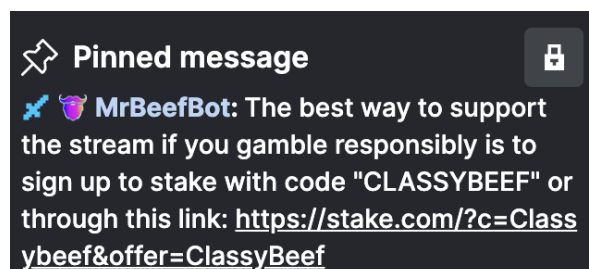


 **BotRix:** Want to try stake out and/or help support me? Sign up on stake.us using the following link!! stake.us/?c=bossmanjack

Fig 21 & 22. Automated chat examples of affiliate codes and ways to support.

A screenshot of a pinned chat message on a dark background. The message is from a user named 'MrBeefBot' with a purple and blue icon. The text reads: 'The best way to support the stream if you gamble responsibly is to sign up to stake with code "CLASSYBEEF" or through this link: https://stake.com/?c=Classybeef&offer=ClassyBeef'.

 **Pinned message**

 **MrBeefBot:** The best way to support the stream if you gamble responsibly is to sign up to stake with code "CLASSYBEEF" or through this link: <https://stake.com/?c=Classybeef&offer=ClassyBeef>

There is such an embedded sense of shame and hopelessness felt on the platform. Streams reek of desperation and exploitation, utilizing parasocial relationships for their own dopamine and economic goals. The profit model for platform and creators are so shockingly visible, in comparison to its more obfuscated nature on traditional media platforms. Creators manipulate their fans in this process as well. Worst cases are seen in the example of *Bossmanjack* (kick.com/bossmanjack), who even links his *PayPal* email in the bio of his account, the affordances of the platform allows the unique practice of *professionally begging* audiences to fund creators gambling habits. Popular streamers are allowed by *Kick* to have their own affiliate codes, giving them a cut of the invested income that their audiences who use said affiliate code put into betting platform *Stake*.

The addictainment is most infiltrative on creators in situations where their livestreaming job is all they have. Those who have reached the financial goals to allow them to feel content at the end of their own career pipeline. Having achieved a pretty staggering amount of financial success, while also being relatively isolated and stuck very much on *Kick* as their platform of choice. Their days are marked only by the sensation of gambling, which is, thanks to *Kick*—a job. The most insidious work-from-home job in the sense of the process of degenerate devolvement. It is essential to recognize that a lot of *Kick* creators—especially those who transferred from *Twitch* to *Kick*—were already engaging in creating gambling content before *Twitch* banned creators who gambled on *Stake* and other companies in 2022. When gambling is also so ingrained in online gaming cultural practices (Sanders & Williams, 2018), then the experience is felt by both creators and users. It is a natural part of the digital entertainment landscape. Whether it is paying for keys to unlock mystery cases, or Gacha-based loot box mechanics, the role gambling and computerized chance play in the digital entertainment sphere has always been more ingrained and familiar than it is alien.

Another factor that impacts creator practices—especially the popular ones who were poached from competition platforms by *Kick*—is that they receive a monthly/yearly contractual amount (we can understand this almost as a gamblers stipend, a *license to bet*). This is probably why we see such unsustainable gambling practices for such a consistent—and frankly *sustainable*—amount of time. Addictainment follows the narrative of a gambler forever—they still feel the embedded

shame and degeneracy that a gambler would. But never put into a financial situation where the story ends. Which, at its worst, ends with financial ruin, and/or the loss of one's own life. The ideal creator on *Kick* is one who has a profit and monetization model, making money for themselves and for *Kick* at a 95/5 split. The ideal user streams a majority of the time of the time, the triad of work-home-play is a unique practice to creators on the platform in the sense of the addiction that stems from frequent gambling habits. In this toxic addiction-feeding milieu, it is no surprise that many of the most visible streamers also frequently gamble offline. They play and aim to win back these losses without the public aspect that defines their job. It's both working from home and shooting up from home—*watch me gamble, so you don't gamble yourself*—but it doesn't make it less alluring to audiences when the wins are so appealing.



Fig 23. Tweet from Trainwreckstv 2021

6. Addictainment

Kick's unique ideological milieu addicts users to only be able to consume and reproduce hate speech if there are slot machines and poker tables in the background. Entertainment is a flavor enhancer, which without its addition, a return to normal consumption takes on an ascetic tone. However, we need to understand technology as something that does not deterministically shape social relations and social institutions, we need to understand the way technology is utilized by those with power who instrumentalize them as a function of power (Mosco, 1998) Closer to a more mutually shaped relationship between technology and society (Quan-Haase, 2013, p.55). It is how the power relations between stakeholders, the platform, creators and audiences and how technology, entertainment, and content are instrumentalized for profit that is at stake here. Multiple forms of entertaining and amusing stimulants (auditory and visual) confluence together into the object of consumption. All consumption of the platforms circulated hegemonic ideologies necessitates a side of entertainment for palatability. *Kick's* contribution to the historical development of entertainment platforms and their content is their amalgamation of ideology is its formation into Addictainment in a system of production, consumption, and circulation. Profit is accumulated by acquiring more audiences through the acquisition and radicalization of content creators, who reproduce the radicalization process onto their audience. Addictainment breeds profit as *Kick* curates a truly unique ideological product of content only they can offer in the mainstream entertainment media market.

I develop *Addictainment* to denote the addictive stimulations at play (gambling, drug use, online sociality) and how it is incorporated with *entertainment* as an inseparable component. Addictainment is the mediatization of gambling content into a palatable, overstimulating, and consumable form in the multi-modal medium of livestreaming. The ideal user is the transition of the regular entertainment consumer into the addictainment consumer. That is the road all flows of activity aim to lead its users astray into. *Kick's* disseminated vision of gambling. The hypervisible and obviously intentional systemic influence of gambling. Gainsbury (2015) notes that

existing studies fail to differentiate specific personal/behavioral risk factors between digital and non-digital problem gamblers. What is explicated is that *Kick* has a unique differentiation against digital *and* non-digital problem gamblers because of this idea of *Addictainment*. It is gambling combined into a mediatized consumable entertainment, in a medium that has a social and communal aspect.

Addictainment differentiates from an understanding of the addiction of gambling due to its contexts of production and contexts of consumption, both of which are linked to their role in creating a consumable mediatized object. The context of production is the way the entertainment is felt by the creator/livestreamer, the dominating power of gambling becoming a job, of shame becoming a job. The context of consumption is that of the viewer, who engages in a vicarious parasocial relationship, the emotional highs and lows of which make even regular parasocial relationships seem healthy in comparison to the heart rate and emotional stimulation audiences subject themselves *willingly* to. But after a certain threshold, ‘willingly’ goes out of the window. At a certain point of stimulation, the user builds a tolerance, and consuming the same level of addictainment doesn’t give a high as much as it puts you into a stasis—you’re in a consumptive trance wanting more. During the walkthrough, there was a feeling of boredom, entwined still with desperation for more stimulation, the chat and streamer both building a mood of waiting for *something* to happen. The rapid communication in the live chat felt slightly different from *Twitch* in that sense. In such a minuscule abstruse way that it is tough to even draw an articulated conclusion out of it. Even shorter, more instinctive, more desperate, there is a certain mental haze that all communication in the live chat seems to be filtered through—as everyone seems to be operating on a different level of invested effort and purpose in their communication.

Addictainment is similar to arrested development in the sense that it maintains its largest users and creators at a certain level of growth, of mental agency and forte. But combined with gambling, it devolves into a stimulus junkie, where one undergoes a process of arrested decay. Addictainment is this process of arrested decay one undergoes under the thumb of entertainment. The environment of this arrested decay is fostered and facilitated by *Stake* through *Kick*. The ceiling of growth is degenerative and financial, determined by the extent to which ideal users travel through the pipeline of non-gamblers to gamblers locks them into a growing process of regression. The

regressive act itself is the process of growth. Negotiations of resistance against this growth find themselves fading, as higher frequencies of use and gambling are degenerative in mental agency and forte as it is the process of spiralling into addiction. Which just creates more content and more work on behalf of the creator for their patron *Kick*. The hardest workers are the most addicted as they hedonistically and harmful continue to stream.

What is important and deeply sad is the sense of sympathy and pity one feels throughout the walkthrough method. No one is doing great, to say the least. What is tragic is that the most depressing form of entertainment is still entertaining. Being entertained connotes less of a good or bad, less about what form the content takes, but the act of being enraptured and stimulated by the spectacle at hand. And a *tragic* spectacle, carries a range of emotions so diverse, simultaneously high and low in mood, such an ambiguous and muddled mess of emotions, creates such an immersive takeaway. A car crash one can't turn their eyes away from. And it's multimodal, the ultimate stimulation. Assisted by a throbbing, constantly updated live chat with messages constantly pinging mimetic reactions, aided by auditory stimulation. Sustained by the multidimensional visual element of seeing a video camera of the creator, the content being discussed, as well as any other visual element a creator would like to include.

Addictainment has three core parts that lend to its dominating protean nature: Its political economic understanding as a powerful instrumentalized tool for profit and exploitation in the circuit of production, consumption, and circulation; its ability to proliferate and exploit communities and digital social acts of communication, fostering and feeding on hedonism and shameful consumption; its alienating and radicalizing effect on those who consume and produce it, the alienating neoliberal and phobic pipeline those involved in the contexts of production and consumption shape and are shaped by. The roofied cocktail of gambling entertainment, hate speech, and radicalization intertwined into consumable addictainment. The contractual triad of work-home-play feeds this process as well. And it results in the consumptive experience of *Kick* as a societal outlet for a violent form of entertainment.

A Societal Outlet for a Violent Entertainment

We see the ways that the consumptive experience users have on *Kick* mark the platform as a societal outlet for a violent form of entertainment. Company loves misery in the live chats on *Kick*. Watching someone bet hands/spins upwards of millions is a level of voyeurism so distinctly technologically recent. And when it all crumbles, it is akin to watching a lifelike voodoo doll get stabbed by pins and needles. There is an element of a subconscious feeling that this is someone who deserves punishment. A content creator who, when viewed from a class lens, is exploiting their own audience for their own profit—turning followers into heavy gamblers just like themselves. These creators are also funded via a form of patronage by the platform to continue gambling, to continue to be visible and entertaining in their work. The consumptive experience when the stream begins to turn tragic is the ponderment of ‘*will this be the fulfillment of fate,*’ tinging the tone and mood with a fatal determinist taste. I draw this from the walkthrough experience of seeing live chat reactions over the course of hours as streamers lose a couple million on *Stake*; and the back-and-forth dialogue that happens between content creator and the formless live chat. Needing a certain abstraction, addictainment functions as a societal outlet for a *violent* entertainment. The violence of which is deeply real for the creator gambling on stream—and in a self-harming vicarious way for the audience.

The greatest predictive potential of emotional attachments to media consumption patterns is not just feelings of love, beauty, enjoyment, but also hate (Gilbert, 2020). *Kick* is ripe for hate watching: consuming media of/about content and creators for whom the consumer maintains a harsh dislike. Whether it is for their phobic discourses or simply out of an economic jealousy that they get to live a hedonistic life of mountainous amounts of degenerate gambling. This enacted violence functions as a form of self-harm as well, as the live chat buzzes with ‘*that was my weeks/months/years salary*’ ‘*would have blown my brains out after that degen gamble.*’ Each message like that is a user edging an emotional process of self-shame, testing the untenable waters to imagine how it would make them feel. Making yourself feel the guilt of how that first loss—which felt inconsequential and entertaining at the time—has now led you astray into a dark wood, vicariously yet shamefully watching live

streamers who are in much deeper holes than you, their nails digging even deeper. It is harmful in a much more loathing internalized way when we think of vicarious consumption in regard to parasocial relationships. When it is addictainment, the live chatter sees themselves to an extent in the content creator gambling their earnings away. Hate watching is prescribed to the creator, but when they vicariously embody the creator in their consumption, that hate lights up the self as well—viewing the actions of the live streamer as their possible actions if the users' degeneracy continues. But seeing them get away with it, as viewers with incomes nowhere near the livestreamer, live with the negative economic and mental effects of their hobby at a degree more relevant to them.

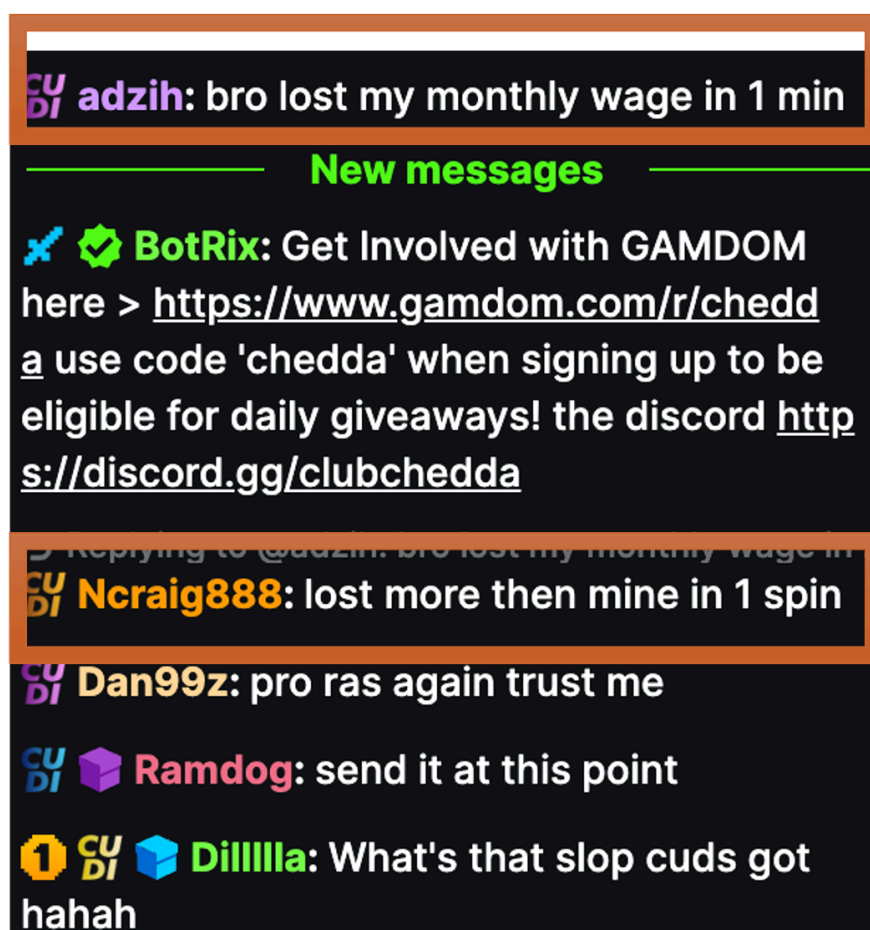


Fig 24. Examples of vicarious self-harm from the live chat

The *Kick* Streamer epitomizes a modern mediatized version of Foucault's use of the Chain Gang and prisoners in public works. The group of prisoners who are paraded around society as a public spectacle, performing servitude work while simultaneously performing their identity of criminality to the public. The metal links the gambling addiction, the heavy ball the patron *Kick*. *'These convicts, distinguished by their 'infamous dress' and shaven heads, 'were brought before the public. The sport of the idle and the vicious, they often become incensed, and naturally took violent revenge upon the aggressors. To prevent them from returning injuries which might be inflicted on them, shells were attached, to be dragged along while they performed their degrading service, under the eyes of keepers armed with swords, blunderbusses and other weapons of destruction.'* (Foucault, 1997, p.7). 'Injuries,' 'attached shells,' and 'swords and blunderbusses' take on a financial tone. Injuries as debt, shells as long contractual obligations to live in the triad of work-home-play, swords and blunderbusses as de-platforming, strikes, hate raids, and contract terminations. The incensed spectacle society resembling the anger and vitriol of a live chat gone antagonistic. At its most harmful degree, the job of being a dedicated problem gambler on *Kick* is a *degrading service*. Both to faults of their own in devolving into a situation where that is what their life resembles, but also to the platform for allowing and actively fostering a place for it to be possible. Possible, and extremely public.

Kick Streamers represent a societal outlet for the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) traces the disappearance of public torture:

'Punishment had gradually ceased to be a spectacle. And whatever theatrical elements it still retained were now downgraded, as if the functions of this penal ceremony were gradually ceasing to be understood, as if this rite that 'concluded the crime' was suspected of being in some way undesirable to it. It was as if the punishment was thought to equal, if not to exceed, in savagery the crime itself, to accustom the spectators to a ferocity from which one wished to divert them, to show them the frequency of crime, to make the executioner resemble a criminal, judges murders, to reverse roles at the last moment, to make the tortured criminal and object of pity or admiration.' (p.9)

Punishment here is in the eye of the consuming beholder. And the multimodal medium of livestreaming is theatrical in its mediatization. In the absence of a societal outlet for a violent entertainment, the savagery of the crimes and the feral audience turns to crimes of a financial nature. Which has the potentials to be fuelled by class resentment, and the overall pervasive influence capital has on lives globally. The livestreamer is both executioner and criminal in a process of both financial and mental murder and suicide. The platform that facilitates this is the public square through which audiences congregate. The social aspect of this is a self-judgment placed in contestation with a judgment of the criminal other. Your perceived superiority or inferiority with/against the social community at play. We want the criminal to know their criminality. Users almost want the gambler to lose—if they're among the popular—they're almost the only ones who can. The craving for the spectacle. Of both ravenous joy and subordinated punishment.

7. Conclusion

Kick is a digital city of hedonistic entertainment consumption and production. The most radicalized visible case of unregulated digital entertainment. Entertainment to spit vitriol and spin slots simultaneously via the frictionless possibilities of digital technology. There's a link between the rise of *Kick* and the idea of *iGaming*. *iGaming* is the intent to have gambling be mass-adopted by all digital users. Intending everyone to have frictionless access to apps, phones, and platforms with access to online casinos, online sports betting, live dealing, and all forms of online gambling experiences (Servers.com, 2023). To put a casino into the hands of everyone with a phone makes the ability to gamble almost synonymous with using technology. *Kick* engages with this process by intruding on users' processes of consuming digital content.

At this stage, it would be a fair assessment to say that *Kick* is not truly a competitor for the traditional chokehold in the medium of livestreaming against *Twitch*. It is, however, an ideological competitor, satisfying a different type of entertainment need for a different type of person. This specific type of entertainment need is of the phobic-hate speech-hedonistic gambling type. It is, most likely, a larger competitor for other gambling companies than it is in the traditional media model. The perceived success of the platform's profit models transcends a comparison to other digital media platforms due to *Kick's* unique operating model. By understanding it under the theoretical entertainment model I've presented, we understand that the way it is consumed and used should have our understanding of *Kick* shifted away from looking at it as a media company. To truly enact a solution to the case of *Kick*, to regulate it, requires a shifting of its understanding to one of a mendacious gambling addictainment machine. It fundamentally changes users who enter into it and travel along the pipeline of new user, frequent user, new gambler, culminating in their (regressive) evolution into a dedicated problem gambler—leaving them decrepitly poorer, with a hate-filled heart numbed by the multi-modal entertainment, along with hate-filled producing spewing phobic discourses at a speed only possible in the medium of live chat.

Kisk is a competitor and a disruptor in a much more macro sense. Their symbiotic relationship between financier and financier, which is concealed in a black

box not available for the public's eyes to peer, represents a possible new growing threat in regards to the weaponization of entertainment. *Stake* is the real house, while *Kick* is the shield aiming to represent itself as the main. The house always wins. While also highlighting the possible further frequency that we will be seeing more companies that are self-sufficient in their operating models utilize an addictive element for profit. It is the combination of a weaponized consumable (mediatized) form of entertainment, in combination with an addictive experience. The widespread belief in the importance of free speech and deregulation, as well as the neoliberal sentiments embedded within a capitalist society, will not result in any restrictions towards its current format. The governing model is one of negligible unenforced operation. Willing inaction is still a governing model of behavior. It cries out for regulation. *Kick* is cloud infrastructure at its worst, and a platform/agent who embodies the criminal characteristics of the cloud is not easy to catch. Only getting the individual rain droplets that come out of it, but never the cloud itself. As gambling content, hate speech, and right-wing content continue to proliferate. Exacerbated and made palatable through the medium of multi-modal entertainment, the problematization at hand will only continue to rise. No actual regulatory change enacted against *Kick* will stick or dissuade future instances unless there undergoes a systemic economic and—more importantly—cultural change. *Kick's* profit model is also too cautious to be caught out, safely reliant on a long precedent of shady casino practices utilizing international law to circumvent national rules.

As gambling continues to proliferate and rise, especially into a culture where mass entertainment consumption becomes so prevalent, *Kick*, I feel, should be looked at as one of the inciting examples of a shift towards a more visible degenerate platform, where the veneer of what traditional media companies offer is not obfuscated. Allowing the entertainment to wrap its tendrils around everyone in its orbit. It is paramount that we see that media and entertainment can harm more than just a propagandizing effect. *Undergoing* acts under the guise of transparency and disclosure does not solve the heating of heroin spoons. *Kick* and *Stake* are exactly what a neoliberal entertainment-saturated society desires: a symptom, not a cause. It is its blatancy that is unprecedented, its hypervisible degeneracy. And it is the way the multimodal medium of livestreaming has allowed mediatized objects of entertainment to carry a more intense form of persuasion, and perhaps a deterministic effect once users/audiences agencies

have been inhibited by the addictive element that comes with a high radicalized frequency of gambling use. *Kick's* roofied mediatized cocktail of entertainment, hate speech, and radicalization demonstrates the path unregulated entertainment has ahead as technologies continue to get more accessible and entertainment becomes even more entrenched into every sphere of life. The harmful spectacle that is more alluring, more enticing to consume. Only once sipped does one find out that it is the end of the line, swallowing the alienating and radicalizing habits that the platform, creators, and audiences negotiate and influence each other into performing. This is the process of Addictainment, the societal outlet for a violent entertainment.

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