

# Feminine Identity Under The Digital Gaze: Surveillance, Commodified Resistance And The Social Cyborg On Instagram

Author

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the relationship between Instagram and women's identity construction and deconstruction, arguing that the platform does not merely reflect pre-existing feminine identities but actively participates in their production, regulation, and destabilisation. Drawing on three foundational theoretical frameworks — Foucault's (1977) theory of panoptic surveillance, Mulvey's (1975) concept of the male gaze, and Haraway's (1985) figure of the cyborg — the study interrogates the mechanisms through which Instagram disciplines women's self-presentation, reproduces gendered structures of spectatorship, and generates hybrid, technologically mediated identities whose authenticity is rendered permanently unstable.*

*The research synthesises empirical scholarship on self-objectification, body dissatisfaction, selfie culture, filter aesthetics, and feminist counter-practices on the platform. The analysis demonstrates that Instagram functions simultaneously as a digital panopticon that incites chronic self-surveillance, as a visual economy that quantifies and rewards conformity to the male gaze, and as a cyborg space in which the boundary between the biological body and its digital representation is irreversibly blurred.*

*Rather than positioning women as either passive victims of these disciplinary logics or straightforwardly resistant agents, the paper argues that identity formation on Instagram is an ongoing and dynamic process continuously constructed, evaluated, and revised in response to platform feedback (Cohen et al., 2019; Tigemann & Slater, 2013). This tension between subjection and agency, between normalisation and transgression, constitutes the defining condition of feminine identity in contemporary digital visual culture.*

**Keywords:** *Instagram, identity construction, panopticon, male gaze, cyborgfeminism, self-objectification, digital femininity, Critical Discourse Analysis, surveillance, self-presentation*

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## I. Introduction

Instagram has emerged as a powerful platform that features an endless stream of curated photographs and videos, transforming it into a digital stage where an individual's body and identity are always on show, subject to constant evaluation through identity formation and continuous performance. Unlike older forms of media, this platform enables users not only to consume content but also offers a stage to actively participate and produce their own images, driven by rapid engagement signals — likes, comments and shares — that make visibility a measure of value. However, this process is not completely voluntary or free. For women, this visibility is deeply tied to body image, appearance and social validation. Women act as both stars and audience, crafting their looks to match viral trends powered by smart algorithms favouring smooth and clear skin, fit bodies, and dreamy lives. Practices such as curated posts, heavily edited images, and participation in popular trends like “Get Ready With Me” videos, glow-up reels, and aesthetic routines reflect how self-presentation becomes structured and repetitive, functioning less as genuine self-expression and more as a disciplined performance oriented toward audience expectations and platform norms.

This culture of idealised beauty provokes chronic social comparisons, transforming Instagram into what might be described as a mirror maze that continuously destabilises women's sense of self. As users encounter influencers performing aspirational femininity, they are confronted with normative standards for appearance, behaviour, and lifestyle that reshape their own self-perceptions. Algorithmic architecture intensifies this process by privileging content conforming to these standards, creating feedback loops in which body dissatisfaction is not only produced but monetised. This dynamic corresponds to Foucault's (1977) account of panoptic surveillance: knowing they are subject to an omnipresent, anonymous gaze, women monitor their own self-presentations, concealing perceived flaws and curating sanitised versions of their lives in order to manage the evaluative scrutiny of an always-potential observer.

The emphasis on visual appearances also reflects what Laura Mulvey conceptualises as the gaze, where identity becomes a hybrid construct shaped by human action, technological systems and social interaction, aligning with Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg selves, where real skin blends with filters and tech, tearing down “true” identity while building new power through viral makeovers. Hidden algorithms control this blend,

pushing slim-curved looks or fresh-faced routines, sidelining other body types and narrowing what's "beautiful."

This paper analyses Instagram as a site of social surveillance, examining how viral trends, visual conventions, and algorithmic governance construct and destabilise women's identities. Through sustained engagement with viral content practices, the study traces their implications for body image and self-perception, understood as products of visibility, repetition, and digital interaction, and argues that these processes give rise to what may be understood as the social cyborg: a mode of femininity constitutively entangled with technological mediation.

### **Research Objectives**

This paper aims to locate these foundational theories in the ongoing digital scenario, fulfilling the following objectives:

- To examine Instagram as a space of social surveillance influencing women's self-presentation and identity.
- To analyse how viral trends (such as GRWM, glow-up reels, and aesthetic routines) shape body image and behavioural patterns among women.
- To examine the role of algorithmic systems in reinforcing and normalising specific beauty standards for women.
- To theorise the emergence of "social cyborg" identities produced through the interaction of human agency, technology, and audience feedback.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **The Digital Panopticon: Surveillance, Self-Regulation, and Disciplinary Power**

Foucault's (1977) panopticon describes a mode of power in which the mere possibility of being observed compels subjects to self-regulate. Instagram, with its architecture of followers, hashtags, likes, and algorithmic amplification, functions as a paradigmatic digital panopticon. The platform's hashtag system constitutes a mechanism for cataloguing and monitoring women's bodies and identities, rendering users permanently findable and perpetually visible to an anonymous audience, replicating the asymmetry of Foucault's panoptic tower. Empirical research reinforces this: women who use Instagram more frequently report higher levels of appearance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating, mediated by increased self-objectification and body surveillance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). In Foucauldian terms, the platform produces docile bodies — women who internalise the evaluative gaze of the institution and deploy it against themselves.

Further research demonstrates that women navigate Instagram through a form of dual consciousness, simultaneously pursuing self-actualisation while policing their presentations for fear of public embarrassment (Kaur et al., 2023). This anticipated negative judgment operates as a regulatory mechanism without requiring external authority; discipline is proactive and self-imposed. Instagram collapses the distinction between public and private self-presentation, extending evaluative visibility across all domains of life and creating a condition of total visibility in which the panopticon has no exterior. Related research frames the platform as a 'virtual mirror' that continuously confronts women with idealised body norms, generating a feedback loop of self-comparison and self-correction (Kyriakides et al., 2024).

### **The Male Gaze and Its Discontents: Spectatorship, Selfies, and Self-Objectification**

Mulvey's (1975) analysis of the male gaze identified a structure of gendered looking in which women are constituted as spectacle for a presumed male spectator. The transition from cinema screen to Instagram feed does not merely replicate this logic — it intensifies and personalises it, demanding that women become active producers of their own spectacle. Mulvey's concept of to-be-looked-at-ness finds its most literal digital expression in the selfie: composing, editing, and posting a selfie is not an innocent act of self-documentation but a rehearsal of the male gaze turned inward (McLean et al., 2018). A woman who frames and filters a selfie simultaneously occupies the position of cinematographer and erotic object. Selfie-posting behaviours are associated with elevated self-objectification and reduced self-esteem, creating a feedback loop in which the male gaze is actively rehearsed and intensified through the woman's own agency.

Instagram further quantifies the gaze: the 'like' translates diffuse social evaluation into a metric that can be accumulated and optimised. The need for popularity mediates the relationship between selfie-posting and body dissatisfaction (Cohen et al., 2019), transforming the male gaze from an ambient cultural structure into an active, responsive reward system. Research on female self-sexualisation demonstrates that prolonged platform exposure leads women to internalise appearance norms and reproduce them voluntarily (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2015). Yet research examining the female gaze on social media identifies an emergent counter-hegemonic practice in which feminist creators redirect the gaze, centring female desire, subjectivity, and ways of seeing (Pham, 2023).

### **The Cyborg Woman: Digital Technology, Hybrid Identity, and the Deconstructed Self**

Haraway's (1985) cyborg — a hybrid of organism and machine — proposes a figure that exceeds the dualisms structuring Western thought: nature/culture, human/machine, self/other. Instagram, which routinely mediates and transforms women's self-presentations through filters and editing tools, creates precisely these conditions: a space where the natural body and its digital representation merge into a hybrid entity that is neither simply authentic nor simply artificial. Instagram filters represent a form of soft cyborgification, a technology of self-modification that blurs the boundary between the biological body and its digital image. Media commentary on filters oscillates between empowerment and deception (Chou & Ferrara, 2022), but both frames miss the more fundamental transformation: the filter does not distort a pre-existing natural self but participates in the construction of a cyborg self that has no unmediated original.

Research on the cyborg woman reveals a central paradox: digital technologies enable identities that transgress biological constraints, yet these cyborg identities are themselves subject to new normalisations enforced by platform algorithms (Athanasίου & Tsoukala, 2024). The algorithm withholds amplification from transgressive self-presentations, disciplining without coercing. Critically, the cyborg ideal encoded in filter algorithms is not neutral — it typically privileges Eurocentric, thin, symmetrical aesthetics, reasserting the very dualisms Haraway's cyborg was meant to dissolve.

### **III. Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology centred on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a theoretical and methodological framework that examines how visual images, captions, and other semiotic resources both reflect and reproduce social relations of power. Drawing on the tradition established by Fairclough (1992), van Dijk (2001), and Wodak (2001), CDA treats discourses not as transparent representations of reality but as actively constitutive practices: discourses produce subjects, normalise power relations, and circulate ideologies. Applied to Instagram, CDA enables a systematic interrogation of how the platform's visual and textual outputs construct, discipline, and at times destabilise feminine identity. This methodology is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, grounded in the understanding that meaning is socially produced and that knowledge of gender and digital culture is always partial, positioned, and historically contingent.

#### **Data Sources**

The study synthesises three categories of source material:

- **Foundational scholarly texts:** The theoretical framework is anchored in Foucault (1977), Mulvey (1975), and Haraway (1985), supplemented by a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature on digital femininity, self-objectification, surveillance studies, platform culture, and feminist media studies published between 1975 and 2024. Empirical studies on Instagram's psychological and social effects on women provide the evidential base against which theoretical claims are tested.
- **Digital platform discourse:** A qualitative analysis of the broader discourse patterns, aesthetic conventions, and self-presentation norms circulating on Instagram, with attention to content categories including selfie culture, beauty and fitness content, body-positive communities, filter aesthetics, and feminist counter-content.
- **Critical and cultural commentary:** Analyses of Instagram culture, filter technology, and digital femininity drawn from academic cultural criticism, reputable journalism, and platform studies, including scholarship on the manosphere's intersection with mainstream aesthetic norms, the cultural politics of the Instagram algorithm, and the racialised dimensions of platform beauty standards.

#### **Analytical Framework**

Analysis proceeds at three levels, following Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model. At the textual level, the study examines the specific visual, linguistic, and rhetorical features of Instagram's self-presentation discourse: the formal conventions of the selfie, the semiotics of filtering and digital augmentation, caption and hashtag practices, and the aesthetic codes through which femininity is constructed and evaluated. At the discursive practice level, analysis addresses how these texts are produced and consumed within Instagram's platform ecology — how algorithmic amplification, the like economy, and community norms shape what kinds of self-presentations are possible, legible, and rewarded. At the social practice level, the study situates these discursive findings within the broader theoretical frameworks of panoptic surveillance (Foucault, 1977), the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), and cyborg identity (Haraway, 1985).

The three theoretical frameworks function as complementary analytical lenses rather than competing explanations. Foucault's panopticon illuminates the surveillance and self-regulatory dimensions of platform participation; Mulvey's gaze theory addresses the structure of gendered spectatorship reproduced in visual self-presentation; and Haraway's cyborg provides the conceptual vocabulary for theorising the hybrid, technologically mediated identities that Instagram enables and constrains.

### **Limitations**

As a theoretical and discourse-analytical study, this research does not include primary empirical data collection such as interviews, surveys, or the systematic coding of specific posts or accounts, and therefore cannot make claims about the direct lived experiences of individual women or specific user communities. The findings are analytical and interpretive rather than representative. The rapidly evolving nature of Instagram — its features, algorithmic logic, and user cultures — means that specific discursive trends identified in the literature may have shifted between the period of analysis and publication. Finally, while the study attends to the racialised and classed dimensions of platform beauty norms, the scope of the analysis does not permit comprehensive coverage of the diversity of feminine experiences across all cultural and geographic contexts.

## **IV. Discussion And Analysis**

### **Algorithmic Governance: The Invisible Control Tower of Identity Formation**

Instagram's algorithm does not just announce itself — it operates beneath the verge of user awareness, structuring the visual environment in which identity is formed without ever forcing its influence. This invisibility is not incidental but integral to how the algorithm exerts its power. This section examines three interlocking mechanisms through which algorithmic governance produces and regulates feminine identity: the illusion of personal choice, engagement as a control mechanism, and the internalisation of surveillance as self-regulation.

#### ***The Illusion of Choice***

One of the most ideologically consequential features of Instagram's algorithmic architecture is its capacity to produce the experience of free choice while systematically constraining the range of options available. The platform presents users with a personalised feed that appears to reflect their individual tastes and identity commitments. In reality, this feed is shaped by a recommendation system that amplifies content most likely to generate engagement, and in the domain of feminine self-presentation, converges consistently on a narrow set of normalised beauty standards.

The “that girl” aesthetic illustrates this precisely. Creators built highly engaged audiences through content featuring early morning routines, green juices, and curated self-improvement rituals. What appeared to be a spontaneous cultural movement was actually an output of the algorithm, which through continuous engagement feedback identified that this style was most effective at sustaining attention. As this content achieved high engagement, it was further amplified; as it was amplified, it was imitated; and progressively, it narrowed what “aspirational feminine selfhood” looked like across the platform.

Foucault (1977) argues that normalisation does not prohibit alternative identities but portrays them as invisible, removing them from the field of what feels possible or desirable. This is precisely how Instagram's algorithm operates: it does not censor other femininities, it simply hides their visibility until they cease to feel like real options. Kaur et al. (2023) describe women's social media self-representation as simultaneously an act of self-actualisation and social embarrassment, capturing the coercive dimensions of what presents itself as individual expression.

#### ***Engagement as a Mechanism of Control***

Instagram's algorithm distributes visibility on the basis of engagement — likes, saves, shares, comments, and watch-time — creating a system of rewards and penalties that functions as behavioural conditioning. Creators who conform to the platform's normative aesthetic standards are rewarded with reach; those who deviate are penalised with invisibility.

The GRWM format demonstrates this mechanism in action. GRWM content consistently attracted millions of views by structuring content around the transformation narrative — the before-and-after arc of getting ready — which is architecturally designed to maximise watch-time. The algorithm registers this sustained attention as high-quality engagement and amplifies the content further. This means the algorithm rewards the transformation narrative specifically, not because transformation is inherently meaningful, but because it is algorithmically profitable.

Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2015) propose a three-step self-objectification process — body surveillance, body shame, and self-objectification — through which media exposure conditions women to internalise an external evaluative perspective on their own appearance. This maps directly onto the engagement conditioning dynamic: the creator who monitors her metrics, adjusts her content accordingly, and internalises the algorithm's preferences as her own is enacting precisely this progression. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) define self-objectification as the internalisation of the observer's perspective, such that women begin to monitor and evaluate themselves as objects rather than subjects.

### ***Internalised Surveillance and Self-Regulation***

The cumulative effect of the mechanisms above is the production of a mode of self-governance that Foucault (1977) would recognise as the characteristic achievement of disciplinary power: the internalisation of surveillance as self-regulation. The Instagram user who has learned, through engagement feedback, which modes of self-presentation are algorithmically rewarded does not need the platform to instruct her — she has already adopted its evaluative logic into her own self-understanding.

This is most visible in the openly strategic self-regulation practised by lifestyle influencers who have publicly discussed their deliberate adjustment of posting times, caption length, hashtag strategy, and visual consistency to algorithmic preference. What is significant is not simply that these creators are strategically aware of the algorithm, but that this strategic awareness has become constitutive of their self-presentation: they do not first decide who they are and then figure out how to present it, but work backwards from algorithmic preference to construct a self that the platform will reward. The panopticon has been miniaturised and installed in the user's own self-perception.

Foucault (1977) argues that the most effective form of disciplinary power is one in which the subject internalises the gaze of authority to such a degree that authority's actual presence becomes unnecessary: "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself" (p. 202). Tiggemann and Slater (2013) found significant associations between social media use and body image concern among adolescent girls. In the more sophisticated algorithmic environment of contemporary Instagram, these dynamics are substantially amplified.

### **Algorithmic Homogenisation: The Erosion of Individual Identity**

Where algorithmic governance operates at the level of individual identity formation, this section turns to its collective consequences: the systematic homogenisation of feminine identity across the platform. The algorithm's tendency to reward aesthetic conformity and penalise deviation does not merely shape individual self-presentation — it produces a broader cultural convergence in which the diversity of feminine selfhood is progressively eroded across three interconnected phenomena: trend culture and replication, the standardisation of aesthetics, and the emergence of performative identity driven by the fear of invisibility.

### ***Trend Culture, Replication, and Aesthetic Standardisation***

Instagram's algorithm actively generates trend culture, where certain styles quickly appear, spread widely, and then become outdated, shaping how femininity is visually defined at any given time. When content performs well the algorithm amplifies it further, creating a positive feedback loop in which high-performing content inspires imitation, and imitation reinforces the template's status as the normative standard.

The progression of the "clean girl" aesthetic illustrates this precisely — slicked-back buns, gold hoops, glazed skin, and effortless simplicity — which became one of the platform's most replicated beauty moments. Within weeks, the aesthetic had been reproduced by thousands of creators across different skin tones, budgets, and geographies, each repetition reinforcing the template as the baseline of "natural" beauty. Critically, luminous, dewy skin had been celebrated in Black and Latina beauty communities for years before achieving algorithmic amplification, a racial asymmetry the algorithm produced without acknowledging.

Berger (1972) argues that the ways of seeing introduced by Western visual culture condition women to experience themselves primarily as spectacles, objects constituted by and for an external gaze. Instagram's algorithmic trend culture updates this account: it is no longer simply that women are taught to see themselves as objects of the gaze, but that the range of gazes available is itself algorithmically constrained and periodically renewed as trends appear and fade. Kyriakides et al. (2024) found significant associations between social media use, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating behaviours, with the mechanism of influence operating through repeated exposure to idealised images.

### ***Performative Identity and the Commodified Self***

A further consequence of algorithmic homogenisation is the emergence of performative identity — a mode of selfhood in which self-presentation is oriented less toward expressing an inner self and more toward managing an outward image shaped by algorithmic reward. On Instagram, identity is not simply performed in the Butlerian sense of being constituted through repeated acts within normative frameworks (Butler, 1990) but is performed for a quantifiable audience, where engagement metrics actively shape and refine subsequent performances.

The career arc of highly visible lifestyle influencers offers a longitudinal illustration. Early Instagram content of an informal, diary-like quality — candid photographs, personal moments, and genuine glimpses of life — progressively transformed into a highly polished performance of aspirational femininity, structured around brand partnerships, curated travel, and a visual pattern bearing little resemblance to early posts. The self presented is not a stable interior identity being expressed through Instagram; it is an identity being continuously reconstructed in response to the algorithmic and commercial feedback that shaped what audiences rewarded.

### ***Fear of Invisibility and Enforced Conformity***

The homogenising pressures documented above are reinforced by the fear of algorithmic invisibility — the anxiety, experienced by creators and ordinary users alike, that departure from normative aesthetic templates will result in reduced reach, lower engagement, and effective marginalisation from the platform's social economy. This fear is not irrational: the algorithmic mechanics described above mean that aesthetic non-conformity is genuinely penalised with reduced visibility.

The experience of plus-size creators is instructive. Those who build initial audiences through comedic, self-aware content that is explicitly non-normative — documenting the failure of straight-size fashion to accommodate their bodies with honesty — attract large and loyal followings precisely because they depart from aspirational content. As their platform grows, however, commercial and algorithmic pressures toward conformity gradually shape their content toward a more typical style that the platform favours. The fear of invisibility functions as a structural force toward homogenisation even on creators most explicitly committed to resisting normative standards.

Cohen et al. (2019) found that while exposure to body-positive content produced short-term improvements in mood and body satisfaction, these effects were modest and contextually contingent, suggesting that the emotional reassurance of body positivity content does not translate into durable attitudinal change. Social comparison processes and internalisation of the thin ideal remain operative even in the context of ostensibly positive media content — a finding that captures precisely the paradox of a platform that delivers empowerment content through the same algorithmic channels that generate the insecurities that empowerment content claims to address.

### **Commodified Resistance: When Rebellion Becomes Another Form of Control**

The preceding sections have established how Instagram's algorithm governs and homogenises feminine identity through reward conditioning, normalisation, datafication, and the fear of invisibility. This section addresses the question of resistance — whether users can mobilise the platform's affordances to challenge these mechanisms. The analysis argues that the forms of resistance most visible on Instagram are systematically subject to algorithmic neutralisation that renders them compatible with the platform's commercial and governance imperatives. Resistance on Instagram does not escape the system. It feeds it.

### ***Aestheticisation of Authenticity and the Body Positivity Paradox***

One of the most prominent forms of supposed resistance on Instagram is the performance of authenticity — content that presents itself as raw, unfiltered, and real in deliberate contrast to the polished aesthetic of normative self-presentation. Posts documenting lupus, mental health struggles, and body changes, including widely discussed posts addressing weight gain, were received as acts of radical transparency and attracted enormous engagement. Therein lies the structural paradox: the authenticity that appeared to resist the platform's normative logic was simultaneously the content that performed best within it. The aestheticisation of authenticity is not a failure of individual intent but a structural consequence of algorithmic conditions — authenticity, once it generates engagement, becomes a template, and the template becomes a trend.

The body positivity movement embodies this paradox at a collective scale. The movement originated as a radical political challenge rooted in fat activism and anti-racist politics. Its migration onto Instagram subjected it to the same algorithmic dynamics: the algorithm amplifies body positivity content not because it endorses its politics, but because content featuring visible, vulnerable bodies and emotionally resonant narratives performs well on engagement metrics. Cohen et al. (2019) found that while exposure to body positive content produced short-term improvements in mood and body satisfaction, these effects were modest and contextually contingent. McLean et al. (2018) found that users required explicit social media literacy training to develop critical resistance to Instagram's body image environment that body positivity content alone failed to produce.

Foucault (1977) argues that the most effective form of disciplinary power is not repression but incorporation. Instagram's amplification of body positivity content is the precise mechanism through which incorporation operates: the movement is not silenced but monetised, and in monetisation progressively emptied of the critical content that gave it political force.

### ***Commercialisation of Empowerment***

A further dimension of resistance's recuperation is the systematic commercialisation of empowerment discourse — the process by which feminist messaging is incorporated into the platform's commercial infrastructure, generating revenue while progressively evacuating political content. Creators who successfully perform empowerment are rewarded with brand partnerships and amplification, creating financial incentives for content that is compatible with commercial partners.

Mulvey (1975) analyses the structural relationship between visual pleasure and commercial cinema, arguing that Hollywood produced a visual pleasure structured around the male gaze because that pleasure was

commercially profitable. Instagram's algorithm produces an analogous dynamic in the domain of empowerment: it amplifies empowerment discourse structured around its monetisation logic because that discourse is commercially profitable. Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2015) demonstrate that mass media exposure conditions the self-objectification process through repeated normalised encounters with idealised feminine images, and the commercialisation of empowerment extends this conditioning by ensuring that the products used to achieve the idealised image are integrated into the very content that claims to challenge it.

### ***The Trap of Performed Uniqueness***

The final mechanism through which resistance is weakened on Instagram is the trap of performed uniqueness — the dynamic through which the performance of non-conformity becomes itself a normative aesthetic category subject to algorithmic amplification and repeated replication. Niche aesthetics such as cottagecore, dark academia, and indie sleaze each present themselves as alternatives to mainstream normative femininity while operating within the same algorithmic logic of systematisation and engagement-driven amplification.

The dark academia aesthetic, positioned explicitly against the clean, bright visual discourse of mainstream Instagram femininity, attracted devoted followers who experienced mainstream aesthetics as alienating. Within eighteen months, however, dark academia had generated its own normative conventions — specific clothing items, colour palettes, caption styles — reproduced with the same iterative logic as any mainstream trend. What had presented itself as a rejection of aesthetic conformity had become a new form of it, complete with its own algorithmic amplification cycle and commercial infrastructure.

Haraway (1985) theorises the cyborg as a figure of boundary transgression that resists the stabilising categories of identity politics. Instagram's niche aesthetic cultures superficially resemble this model, assembled from diverse cultural fragments and claiming a politics of difference. But the cyborg Haraway imagines is constituted in resistance to the informatics of domination; the niche aesthetic Instagram user is constituted within it, assembling a “unique” identity from a menu of algorithmically pre-approved options. Foucault (1977) argues that resistance does not operate from outside power but from within it — and on Instagram, the most visible forms of resistance are precisely those most thoroughly integrated into the platform's operational logic.

## **V. Conclusion**

This paper has argued that Instagram does not merely host feminine identities but actively produces, regulates, and destabilises them. Through the interlocking lenses of Foucault's (1977) panopticon, Mulvey's (1975) male gaze, and Haraway's (1985) cyborg, the analysis has demonstrated that the platform operates simultaneously as a site of disciplinary self-surveillance, gendered spectatorship, and technological hybridisation. Algorithmically governed visibility conditions women to internalise normative aesthetics, reproduce them voluntarily, and experience this reproduction as personal expression rather than structural compliance.

Crucially, the analysis of commodified resistance established that resistance does not escape this system — it feeds it. Body positivity, performed authenticity, and niche identity are each recuperated through the same engagement logic that amplifies conformity, confirming Foucault's (1977) insight that resistance operates from within power rather than outside it. The social cyborg that emerges from these conditions is neither victim nor free agent but a hybrid subjectivity constituted at the intersection of human intention, algorithmic governance, and commercial imperative.

These findings carry implications for platform regulation, feminist pedagogy, and future research. Effective intervention requires not only counter-content but structural reform of the recommendation architectures that systematically suppress non-normative self-presentations. Understanding Instagram as a constitutive infrastructure of feminine identity — rather than a neutral stage for its expression — is the analytical prerequisite for contesting the disciplinary conditions it continues to produce.

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