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"Anyone Who's Watching Can See That You're Watching, Too": A Case Study of Prosumption and Visibility Labours on Instagram Live

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Résumé de l'article

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Article

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Abstract

Online audiences have become increasingly visible to each other. Recent work in *Surveillance & Society* has suggested that visible viewership in gaming constitutes "visibility labour" (Abidin 2016). Yet, little work has sketched the relationship between visible consumption, visibility labours, and social media's surveillance economy. This article fills that gap by offering a preliminary structural outline of how visible consumers play a role in digital surveillance economies. I ask: What role does visible consumption play in digital surveillance economies on Instagram Live? What kinds of visibility labour are demanded of visible consumers, and with what effects? First, top-down surveillance of user interactions turns involuntarily visible consumers into social producers through metrified viewership and personal profiles. Second, lateral surveillance, such as moderator features and reporting tools, also turns voluntarily visible consumers into social producers by reproducing Instagram's brand and deflecting from government oversight. In the context of Instagram Live, making users' consumption habits socially public extends surveillance culture and neoliberal trends on social media, whereby market forces are extended into further reaches of social life.

Introduction

"Anyone who's watching can see that you're watching, too."
- Notification to viewers as they enter an Instagram Live broadcast (Meta n.d.d)

Historically, people have consumed content on social media platforms by scrolling through feeds and profiles. While these relationships exceed quantification, from a top-down political economic perspective, these interactions have always been surveilled and commodified for social media companies as free labour (Fuchs 2011). Yet, they were relatively *socially* private.

However, many platforms have developed structural affordances that involuntarily compel those previously private acts of consumption into socially public acts. For example, SnapChat alerts people when others view their messages. This increasingly visible viewership reflects "surveillance culture," wherein watching and being watched is a pervasive part of everyday life (Lyon 2018).

Yet, little work has explored the implications of involuntary or voluntary visible consumption for surveillance. One exception is Partin (2019: 156), who suggested visible viewership in livestreamed gaming constitutes visibility labour, as proposed by Abidin (2016). I pick up Partin's (2019) understanding of visible viewers as performing visibility labour and sketch a preliminary understanding of the intersections between visible consumption, visibility labours, and the digital surveillance economy of social media, rather than

gaming. Social media is distinct because visible consumption is often involuntary. Specifically, this article expands scholarship about visible viewership by examining a non-gaming platform: Instagram Live.

I ask: What role does visible consumption play in digital surveillance economies on Instagram Live? What kinds of visibility labour are demanded of visible consumers, and with what effects?

First, visible consumers perform visibility labour that produces value for Instagram through top-down surveillance of user interactions. Given little choice, visible viewers become producers of social and economic value as (1) quantified metrics and (2) individual profiles. Second, visible viewers become responsible for self-governance *and* Instagram's brand-image using *lateral* surveillance tools, including (1) moderation features and (2) reporting systems. Although self-governance and branding do not directly solicit user engagement to surveille for profit, these visibility labours still benefit Instagram by reproducing social and economic relations favourable for Meta's profit-motives. Thus, making users' consumption habits socially visible extends surveillance culture and neoliberal trends on social media, whereby market forces are extended into further reaches of social life.

Literature Review

Surveillance and the Digital Economy

Surveillance is "the focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction" (Lyon 2007:14). Traditional panoptic "top-down" approaches to surveillance emphasize structural forces and the surveyor's power (Lyon 2007). "Post-panoptic" approaches to surveillance recognize power "flows" and acknowledge the importance of social relationships and contexts (Lyon 2006; Marwick 2012). These models are not necessarily opposed but are fundamentally intertwined.

Scholars focused on "top-down" surveillance often examine the digital political economy. They understand surveillance as reinforcing neoliberal social and economic structures. Neoliberalism has many definitions (Byrne 2017), but I use a cultural studies framework. Rather than classical liberalism, which relies on laissez-faire economic policies, neoliberalism stresses state interventions to stimulate competition for market growth. It emphasizes "flexible accumulation" strategies, which expand market ideologies into social life. Neoliberalism also insists on the primacy of the "competitive individual," who is responsible for their own development and is expected to take on market risks, despite structural limitations (Hall, Massey, and Rustin 2013; Hearn 2008, 2010).

Terranova (2000) situates internet websites within neoliberal capitalism by proposing that websites rely on "free labour." Expanding this argument, Christian Fuchs (2010, 2011, 2017) argues social media users also perform "free labour" through "prosumption," wherein consumers blur into producers. Briefly, Fuchs (2010, 2011, 2017) extends Smythe's (2012) work. In Smythe's (2012) Marxist framework, "production" includes productive forces, like labour, and raw materials. Importantly, "production" also includes the *reproduction* of labour power and social conditions necessary to sustain capitalism. "Value" is "the 'objectified or materialized' expression of the amount of labour that has gone into its creation" (Marx 1976: 129). Smythe (2012) concludes that media companies *produce* audiences as "audience commodities" to sell to advertisers, and audiences perform "free labour" by watching media, which reproduces their labour power. Fuchs (2010, 2011, 2017) applies Smythe's (2012) theory to social media. Simplistically, social media companies surveille people to collect data about their online consumption and engagements (e.g., clicks, likes, views, etc.) to sell as metrics to advertising companies. Ad companies use those data to target advertising campaigns and try to predict future behaviour (Fuchs 2011, 2017). Additionally, users create the content that solicits surveillance data from others. Therefore, companies profit by selling "audience commodities" *and* by saving on labour costs, as companies do not need to create content. For Fuchs (2010, 2011, 2017), prosumers work by creating informational content and surveillance data. This creates "surplus-value," or

the excess value produced by prosumer labour and appropriated by capitalists. Thus, Fuchs (2010, 2011, 2017) argues prosumers are "exploited," as they are not fairly compensated for their labour, and capitalists benefit by taking unfair advantage of their vulnerabilities. While digital exploitation is not industrial factory work, conceptually invoking exploitation highlights the coercive nature of prosumption. Thus, "digital exploitation" is both the "deprivation of economic resources" *and* the reproduction of "scarcity that compel[s] freely given forms of submission" (Andrejevic 2011: 284). Moreover, prosumers are "alienated" from their labour because they are separated from the value of their products. Thus, "alienation" is not only "surrender[ing]… conscious control over productive activity, but also, consequently in its product" (Andrejevic 2011: 284).

Yet, scholars debate if prosumption is "productive," as its connection to monetary profit is unclear. Scholars also debate what values are transferred. Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012) argue that Fuchs (2010) misapplied Marx's (1976) value theory, since there is no correlation between time and value creation in prosumption. Later scholars disagree that Marx's (1976) value theory is inapplicable (Comor 2014; Rigi and Prey 2015). However, Comor (2014) concurred that Fuchs (2010) misapplied Marx's (1976) value theory by isolating it and collapsing production as a process with the moment of production. Rigi and Prey (2015) argue that prosumption does not adequately account for how, unlike material commodities, information cannot be depleted and has negligible reproduction costs. Thus, the value produced by information is not transferred to the product. Later, Kaplan (2019: 1956) proposes that attention scarcity is the true product of the digital economy.

To theorize production and value-creation, these scholars turn to the neoliberal commodification of intangible things, such as "affects," or nonrepresentational, immeasurable, "moods" or feelings. Still, scholars debate affect's exact role. Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) propose the "Like Economy," which links affective social values to economic values. Despite affect's immeasurability, social buttons, like "like" buttons, flatten affective responses and social activity into commodifiable metrics, thus linking social and economic values. Moreover, these metrics "intensify" engagement. "Intensification" is the capacity for metrified "likes" to produce economic value by encouraging further interactions. Gerlitz and Helmond (2013: 1360) wrote: "Data and numbers have performative and productive capacities…[,] they can generate user affects, enact more activities and thus multiply themselves." Simplistically, "intensification" refers to how the more a piece of content has been "liked," the more value it accrues and the more likely it will accrue even *more* "likes" and generate *more* valuable surveillance data. While Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) focus on interpersonal relationships, Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012: 144) conclude that affective attachment to *companies* produces value. Essentially, social media companies must cultivate affective attachments to their brand's reputation to attract investors. "Brands" are "socially recognized and communicated images attached to a product or a service" (Rigi and Prey 2015: 399). Rigi and Prey (2015) concur that brand-value matters, but they argue that rather than produce new value, affective brand-attachments enable brand-owners to appropriate a greater portion of labourers' surplus-value. This article does not settle these debates. Rather, these scholars highlight how the digital economy produces value.

Still, structural views of the surveillance economy are limited. Scholars have argued that the interpersonal relationships that people form by sharing content exceed capitalist quantification. Framing these relationships as solely exploitative may oversimplify power dynamics as static state-power. Instead, it is context-dependent and power "flows." Thus, surveillance also occurs between individuals in what Marwick (2012) calls "social surveillance," which foregrounds shifting power dynamics, hierarchies, social roles, and reciprocity. Although often binarily opposed, recognizing the value of interpersonal relationships does not mean ignoring critiques of capitalist structures altogether. Enjoyable activities can still generate profit (Kaplan 2019: 1953–1954). Ultimately, top-down surveillance underlies the digital economy, but it cannot be meaningfully separated from its social purposes, sociotechnical assemblages, and the power imbalances that affect how people experience surveillance (Partin 2019; Sebastian 2019).

Instagram, Influencers, and Visibility Labours
As surveillance is both structural and social, I examine the interplay between unquantifiable social dynamics and prosumptive exploitation through "visibility labours" following Partin's (2019: 156) suggestion that the concept can be applied to visible consumption on Twitch. As defined below, visibility labour overlaps with both social surveillance and top-down approaches.

In contrast to Partin (2019), I focus on Instagram, which has distinct socio-technical surveillance structures, economies, and cultural norms. Launched in 2010, Facebook, Inc. purchased Instagram in 2012. Facebook Inc. subsequently became Meta. Instagram relies on a prosumptive economy, but its economy has increasingly incorporated influencers, who also profit from surveillance. Building from Senft's (2008) work, Abidin (2015) defined influencers as "ordinary" people with large online followings. They "engage with their following in digital and physical spaces, and monetise their following by integrating 'advertorials' into their blog or social media posts" (Abidin 2015). Influencers endorse products and services for fees from sponsors. Influencers then drive demand for those products by leveraging their relationships with long-time followers who consume content aspirationally (Hund 2023; Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020: 106).

Influencers become mediators in surveillance economies. They have economic stakes in their relationships with their audiences, as they use audience metrics to demonstrate to potential sponsors that they can engage audiences (Hund 2023). Simultaneously, their social relations with their followers further solicit surveillance data from which companies profit.

Although pundits critique influencers, influencers *do* perform time-consuming labour (Hund 2023). They work to become *visible* to accrue sponsors and followers and to encourage greater consumption of their content, and thus, the production of surveillance data. Abidin (2016: 87) calls this "visibility labour," which describes "the work enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of self-conspicuousness in digital or physical spaces depending on intention or circumstance for favourable ends." As everyday people online are increasingly expected to act as influencers (Hund 2023: 145–146), visibility labour also extends to them.

Visibility labour encompasses forms of labour that are often invisible in patriarchal labour regimes. It includes "self- branding," or the idea that people market themselves as brands for commercial or cultural gain, much like corporations (Khamis, Ang, and Welling 2017; Marwick 2013). Self-branding, an outgrowth of neoliberalism, is "a distinct kind of labor that 'involve[s] outer-directed process of highly stylized self-construction" (Hearn 2008: 201). Echoing Terranova (2000), Hearn (2010: 434–435) argues that self-branding and online reputation management are free immaterial labour. Visibility labour also relies on affective labour (Hardt 1999) and self-care work (Banet-Weiser 2018). Women[1] frequently perform "aesthetic labour" (Elias, Gill, and Scharff 2017) and "aspirational labour," which is "a forward-looking, carefully orchestrated, and entrepreneurial form of creative cultural production" (Duffy 2016: 446).

Visibility labour comes with two tacit neoliberal demands. First, people must be visible in the *right* way by adopting commodifiable self-brands (Abidin 2016). Despite discourses of empowerment, industries provide self-branding templates, which feature narrow ideals of middle-class, white, heteronormative, nondisabled, cis-women (Banet-Weiser 2018; Hearn 2008). Thus, the potential benefits of performing visibility labour are only available to certain people.

Second, visibility demands people accept market risks, which disproportionately affect marginalized groups. Women are pressured to "put themselves out there," despite disproportional risks of online harassment (Banet-Weiser 2018; Duffy and Hund 2019). Ross (2020) demonstrates the dangers of racial hypervisibility in white supremacist structures. Homant and Sender (2019) coin "queer immaterial labour" to acknowledge the immaterial labours performed by queer people of colour, and Zhang (2022) argues that trans creators

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[1]"Women" refers to all femme-identifying people, including trans and cis-women.

labour to navigate "passing." Echoing existing research (Sebastian 2019), surveillance and visibility are not equitable and come with disproportionate risks for some people.

Like prosumption, visibility labour produces value. Self-branding creates surplus-value by producing affect, desire, attention, and image (Hearn 2008: 214). Reputation, part self-branding, is "a new form of currency and… value" (Hearn 2010: 422). Specifically, since production includes reproducing relations, reputation and self-branding are productive as forms of market discipline, which justify market logics that make affective expressions valuable in the first place (Hearn 2010). Indeed, the compulsion to be visible in the "right" way and the disproportionate risks of visibility reinforce existing hierarchical relations necessary for capitalism.

Much scholarship focuses on visibility labour performed by people who *produce* posts. Yet, visible *consumers* also play a role in the digital economy. This distinction matters because while posters may *voluntarily* become visible for potential social and economic capital, consumers may *involuntarily* become visible. They are compelled to become visible in the "right" way, despite disproportionate risks. Thus, although Abidin (2016) defined visibility labour as people intentionally becoming visible, I suggest it may also include the labour that people perform to be visible in the "right" ways and to mitigate risks, regardless of their intention to be visible.

Some game studies scholars have interrogated the role of visible consumers, especially in livestreamed gaming (Chen and Lin 2018; Hilvert-Bruce et al. 2018; Meisner and Ledbetter 2022; Partin 2019; Woodcock and Johnson 2019). However, gaming differs from Instagram. Arguably, Twitch is more of a broadcasting platform, with a clear distinction between streamers and audiences. Streamers may also craft personas distinct from their "offline" personas. Given this dynamic, Twitch commodifies viewers' *voluntary* visibility (Partin 2019). In contrast, Instagram is not framed as a broadcasting platform, allowing for a more porous boundary between creators and consumers, and contributing to the expectation that influencers are "authentic" to their "offline" personas (Hund 2023). With these different dynamics, Instagram users may *want* to remain hidden; visibility may be *involuntary.*

Thus, within the context of Instagram Live, I ask: What role does visible audience consumption play in digital surveillance economies? What kinds of visibility labour are demanded of visible consumers, and with what effects? As I focus on digital economies, my analysis emphasizes Instagram's structure and power. While I recognize social models of surveillance and that people resist surveillance, to theorize how people resist the commodification of compelled visible viewership, researchers need a sketch of the structures that people resist.

Methods

To answer this, I followed the walkthrough method, wherein researchers "engag[e] directly with an app's interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences" (Light, Burgess, and Duguay 2016: 882). Researchers slow down everyday application-use to document "mundane" actions and analyse those actions through science and technology studies and cultural studies frameworks. Researchers contextualize findings within the application's "vision" to determine its purpose, target users, and scenarios of use, which include operating models (e.g., economic structures) and governance (Light, Burgess, and Duguay 2016). The emphasis on economic models and governance allows for structural analysis while also acknowledging people's social experiences.

I augmented the walkthrough method with discursive interface analysis (DIA) (Stanfill 2015). DIA assumes that affordances exercise "productive" power, which refers to how making an action possible exercises

power as much as restricting an action. While people can resist, offering an affordance makes certain actions normative, encouraging users to become particular types of people (Stanfill 2015).

I limited my analysis to Instagram livestreams rather than also analysing Stories, which are clips that disappear after twenty-four hours and that also make audiences' consumption visible, because the contexts are different. From August 2022 to October 2022, I collected sixty-two screenshots of Instagram Live's mobile application as both a producer and a consumer. To examine creators' and consumers' interfaces and determine default settings, I interacted with my personal Instagram account through a second account created for this project. Using the second account to reduce algorithmic bias, I searched for "#IGTV" on Instagram's Explore Page. Instagram has since removed the ability to search for ongoing livestreams. I selected livestreams that demonstrated everyday uses to account for the socio-economic and cultural context of Instagram. Livestreams included videos from newscasters, comedians, makeup tutorials, and Q&As with aspiring influencers.

I triangulated screenshots with Instagram's Blog, Help Center, Community Guidelines, and promotional materials for both personal accounts and Business and Professional accounts. Influencers often use Business and Professional accounts, which display audience metrics. I also collected blogs to understand how people received Instagram Live's features. Although limited, this analysis offers preliminary findings of how visible social viewership operates in surveillance economies on Instagram Live.

Visible Consumers as Social Producers through Direct Surveillance

In this section, I outline how visible consumers perform visibility labours that are commodified by Instagram through top-down surveillance of user interactions. Visible consumption turns consumers into social producers as both quantified metrics and as clickable visible profiles. Although visible metrics and individual profiles demonstrate varying degrees of publicity, making consumers visible may prompt greater social engagement from others. In both cases, consumers perform visibility labours as they become visible producers. Under prosumer capitalism, these social engagements produce more economically valuable surveillance data for Instagram, although this visible consumption is largely involuntary and the risks for this labour are highly stratified.

Quantified Metrics
First, consumers become visible social producers as quantified metrics. As consumers enter livestreams, they add a number to the metric-counter next to the bright-colored "Live" logo at the top of the screen. The metric-counter is visible to other livestream participants, telling viewers how many other people are watching the livestream (Meta n.d.d). Simplistically, in this context, visible consumers produce a number for social metrics. Strictly speaking, by Abidin's (2016) definition, visible consumers' may not be performing visibility labour. Yet, their visibility as metrics does produce value.

Essentially, "views" function like "likes." Specifically, since visible metrics are understood as quantified social influence (Hund 2023) and are "inextricably tied to self-branding" and success (Khamis, Ang, and Welling 2017: 196), making consumers into producers of visible metrics contributes to the social value of livestreamers' self-brands; being seen as an influencer who can engage a large following makes influencers attractive for brand sponsorships. Much like "liking" posts makes consumers social producers, rendering consumers visible turns them into producers of social metrics and value, which benefit creators' self-brands.

Meta also encouraged people to understand visible viewership metrics as a sign of social value. First, as bright elements indicate importance (Stanfill 2015: 1063–1064), the metrics imply that the more people who have viewed a livestream, the more valuable it becomes. As of November 2024, Meta's "Meta for Media" page on Instagram Live further encouraged users to understand viewership metrics as socially valuably by offering livestreamers strategies to preserve these metrics and display them later. Specifically, if creators

post the livestream as a permanent "Reel" to their profile later, the number of visible consumers does not automatically save when a livestream ends. This is likely to enable the Reel to accrue its own value through viewership. Thus, to save the livestream's valuable consumption metrics, the page reads: "Pro tip: Screenshot the end of your Live to save views" (Meta n.d.e). The warrant here is that the number of people who viewed the livestream holds social value for the creator, which they will likely want to preserve and display later, potentially for sponsorships.

Furthermore, as "likes" can "intensify" value and "multiply themselves" (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013: 1360), metrified visible consumption may also intensify data production. First, as intensification is affective, seeing many other people watching a livestream could contribute to feelings of importance or community. Viewers may watch a widely viewed video or creator out of "fear of missing out" or to share a community experience. Indeed, Anderson (1983: 7) argued that imagining communities can allow for the development of feelings of "kinship." With visible metrics, audiences no longer need to imagine communities; they see them, although others' reasons for watching content may vary. Additionally, since creators use these metrics to gain sponsorships, these metrics could encourage creators to continue to produce content. In both cases, visible metrics "intensify" the production of surveillance data.

Ultimately, consumers become social producers as quantified metrics that hold social and economic value for creators and companies, and these view metrics may "intensify" themselves. Although the effects are similar, unlike publicly "liking" content, metrified viewership makes consumers visible *involuntarily*. This involuntariness is where visible consumption differs from social surveillance, which is reciprocal and involves people *wanting* to share (Marwick 2012: 384). Rather, previously private consumption practices become public by default. Echoing neoliberal tenants, visible consumption extends market forces into new areas of social life.

Still, social dynamics matter. As "like" buttons flatten affective and social values, so too are consumption practices flattened. Metrified viewership flattens all social intentions; people watch livestreams out of care, interest, boredom, or because they want to harass a creator. Furthermore, visibly metrified consumers are not all incorporated into profit motives, and creators are not always using followers for metrics and social status. For creators and consumers alike, knowing that a message has spread widely can be powerful. For activists, metrics can also grant livestreamers and their messages legitimacy with news outlets, although *needing* legitimacy from news outlets itself speaks to larger social power dynamics.

Visible Profiles
Metrified visible consumption reflects a relatively private example of visible consumption; people are not personally identifiable. Still, consumers *do* become visible and personally identifiable in three ways.

First, from creators' perspectives, consumers' screennames are publicly displayed along the bottom of the screen as they enter livestreams, regardless of consumers' activity statuses. Like how consumers become social producers by contributing to metrics, here, consumers become social producers as their screennames are displayed as they consume content. Moreover, creators are prompted to click a "wave" button next to consumers' screennames. Since making actions possible is an act of productive power (Stanfill 2015), the "wave" button exercises productive power because it encourages further social interactions between users. This interaction will be commodified for economic profit through top-down surveillance. Importantly, it is only possible for the "wave" to solicit even more commodifiable interactions *because* the consumer has become a visible social producer.

Second, consumers' personal profiles are visible to other consumers. Upon clicking on the host's screenname, a screen reading "Who's watching" appears, displaying a list of profile pictures, handles, and names of other consumers. Beneath "Who's watching," the interface reads "Anyone who's watching can

see that you're watching, too" (Meta n.d.d). Effectively, visible consumers become producers as their profiles become a part of the livestream.

From this screen, consumers can click and view other people's profiles and even mention or message other accounts, depending on the receiving account's settings. Again, if interfaces exercise productive power by making certain actions possible, consumers are encouraged to generate more surveillance data about themselves by interacting with other users' profiles. Much like with the "wave" feature, these social interactions would not be possible without the consumer being a visible social producer. Thus, in both examples, making consumers visible creates more opportunities to produce valuable surveillance data by commodifying social interactions.

Finally, Instagram actively prompts consumers to voluntarily become more visible, and thus more profitable, for creators and Instagram. An "Invite to join" screen appears for the creator, from which they can "send a request" asking consumers to join their livestreams as "guests." Similarly, a screen appears for consumers encouraging them to "send a request to be in [the creator's] live video." If hosts and "guests" accept each other's requests, "guests" appear alongside the creator on screen. Here, consumers become even more visible and active producers.

Inviting guests into a livestream has two effects. First, inviting others to be in an Instagram livestream means that the *"guests'"* followers may also join the livestream. The creator's screen reads, "When someone joins, anyone who can see their live videos can also watch this one" (Meta n.d.d). Thus, when consumers become more visible, so too do creators. With the "guest's" audience as another potential audience, creators can accrue even higher socially and economically valuable consumer metrics. Indeed, in March 2021, when Instagram began allowing creators to livestream with multiple people, Meta explained the feature as a way to broaden audiences. The blog reads: "Going live with multiple guests is a great way to increase your reach, as guests' followers can also be notified" (Meta 2021). Ultimately, the "send a request" feature is meant to increase the creator's visibility and, thus, produce more valuable surveillance data.

Second, the "send a request" feature also disperses creators' labour. Broadly, the "send a request" feature enables what Meisner and Ledbetter (2022: 1187) call "guesting," which "allows a broadcaster to invite a viewer to broadcast alongside the creator during a live stream." While Meisner and Ledbetter's (2022) interviews reveal that gaming consumers felt "empowerment and satisfaction" when "guesting" with high-profile creators, they argue that "guesting" is free relational labour given by consumers, which decentralizes the labour of self-branding. They write, "Guesting represents another way in which personal branding is decentralized. As viewers-turned guest broadcasters *produce* content for broadcasters, they participate in the co-construction of the content creator's brand" (Meisner and Ledbetter 2022: 1187; emphasis added). Likewise, the "send a request" feature makes consumers more visible, demanding visibility labour from the "guest" to produce more brand-value for creators.

These examples are distinct from quantified social metrics, as the degree of publicity is greater. There is a smaller chance of direct harm with metrified viewership. Yet, here, consumers' personally identifiable information becomes visible to a wider audience. This can result in demanding visibility labour and greater *risk* from visible consumers, which, as outlined above, is highly stratified. For instance, displaying someone's profile picture to a wide audience who are encouraged to interact with visible profiles can feel dangerous to people who are already subject to greater rates of harassment online. This is especially salient given Instagram's culture, where people often use images of their bodies rather than gaming avatars. Likewise, the "send a request" feature's visibility can feel riskier for some people. Despite these risks, visibility is *involuntary* in the first two examples, differentiating it from voluntary social surveillance (Marwick 2012).

Ultimately, like with visible metrics, these examples demonstrate the neoliberal expansion of markets into new areas of social life through surveillance of user interactions. In these examples, consumers' visible habits turn them into social producers and subject them to market pressures; each time consumers become visible, the interface prompts others to interact with them, producing more valuable surveillance data for Instagram. Furthermore, as the last example demonstrates, consumers are encouraged to become *more* visible and create *more* value for creators and, ultimately, Instagram. Like neoliberalism demands that individuals assume greater *risks,* making consumers personally visible demands greater visibility labour and risks from them. Still, these risks are disproportionately borne by some groups.

Again, power and social dynamics matter. Being a visible consumer in an Instagram livestream can demonstrate support for creators and enable personal connections. Visible consumption can also give underrepresented creators greater control. For example, Steele (2021: 105–106) demonstrates that Black feminists use ephemeral features like Instagram Stories to capture and control their own narratives. The same could be said of Instagram Live. Moreover, being able to visibly consume content may enable people to defiantly *look back* at creators making harmful content. Specifically, it could facilitate hooks' (1999: 308) "oppositional gaze," wherein Black women "can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also *look back*, and at one another, naming what [Black women] see" (emphasis added). For hooks (1999), gazing back opens the possibility of resistance and agency because it challenges systemic power. Although visibility may be dangerous in some circumstances (e.g., someone phenotypically presenting as a person of color watching a white supremacist livestream), visibly consuming content despite threats can allow those targeted to defiantly say, "I see you, and I will not be intimidated." Even though the onus to change systems should not fall to those most impacted, these small acts of resistance can contribute to systemic challenges. Conversely, being able to see consumers may be a necessary precaution for underrepresented creators until oppressive social systems fundamentally transform.

Still, these examples demonstrate how Instagram livestreams can turn consumers into producers of social and economic value by demanding visibility labour from them, despite the disproportionate risks for some people.

Socially Responsible Consumers and Lateral Surveillance

While the previous examples demonstrate how visible consumers perform largely involuntary visibility labour that produces social and economic value through top-down surveillance of user interactions, visible consumers also protect and maintain the digital economies for which they produce through *lateral surveillance*. Lateral surveillance is more voluntary and refers to "peer-to-peer monitoring," or the "use of surveillance tools by individuals, rather than by agents of institutions public or private, to keep track of one another" (Andrejevic 2002: 488). As my focus is the digital economy, I use "lateral surveillance" rather than Marwick's (2012) "social surveillance," because social surveillance implies uncommodifiable relationships, whereas lateral surveillance demands labour and expands, rather than challenges, structural surveillance. However, I recognize the overlaps.

Although lateral surveillance reporting systems do not necessarily directly facilitate social and economic value production from visible consumers, visible consumption is still tied to economic value. Since production also involves reproducing social relations and justifying market logics (Hearn 2010), Instagram Live's lateral surveillance is productive because it justifies minimal oversight and regulation of livestreams to maintain conditions favourable for Instagram's profit. Again, Instagram's lateral surveillance echoes neoliberalism's overemphasis on individual agency and the demand that people accept risk while maintaining self-governance (Hall, Massey, and Rustin 2013). However, again, the visibility labour associated with reporting is disproportionately distributed.

Moderators

Visible consumers perform visibility labour for lateral surveillance in two ways. First, creators can assign moderators to surveille visible consumers. In March 2022, Instagram enabled creators to assign someone else to moderate their livestreams (Lumb 2022). A screen appears for creators that reads, "Add a moderator from your list of who's watching to help manage comments during this live video" (Meta n.d.d). The screen includes a search bar to search for and select a moderator. Instagram Live's Help Center describes moderators' roles as "manag[ing] [creator's] viewers and comments" (Meta n.d.a). Unlike simple reporting systems, where reporters take little action, moderators intervene directly by removing consumers from livestreams and disabling commenting.

The moderator feature clearly demonstrates lateral surveillance. Lateral surveillance extends neoliberal governmentality into social relations through the "responsibilization" of citizens in a risk society. Essentially, companies offload the labour of governance and market risks onto individuals by deputizing everyday people as law enforcement (Andrejevic 2002). Similarly, Instagram's moderation feature deputizes peers to monitor each other.

Other scholars have already demonstrated how deputizing creators to moderate comments on their content offloads the labour of moderation and market risks *from* platforms *to* creators on Twitch and YouTube (Tarvin and Stanfill 2022; Thach et al. 2022). Likewise, Instagram claims that the moderation feature "gives content creators tools to keep their own spaces safer than before" (Lumb 2022). Here, although framed as a privilege, Instagram clearly offloads the labour of governance and the responsibility to manage risk onto individual creators. However, moderation labour on Twitch and YouTube is distinct; to maintain their markets, creators are responsible for moderating *others'* comments to avoid removal and demonetization. Meta is less clear about Instagram creators' responsibilities for comments, saying little about whether livestreams will be ended for others' comments. Meta simply writes: "Creators who've previously posted something that's been removed for going against our Community Guidelines may not be able to start another live broadcast on Instagram" (Meta n.d.c). Still, creators' responsibility is implicit since the feature is described as "manag[ing] [creator's] viewers and comments" (Meta n.d.a). Creators may also simply care about their audiences. In both cases, moderation labour and market risks are offloaded onto creators.

As neoliberalism decentralizes labour and risk, rather than creators alone being responsible for risks and governance, the moderator feature further offloads the labour of moderation and market risks *from* platforms *to* creators *to* moderators. Importantly, dispersing this labour is only possible *because* consumers are visible to everyone. As noted, all consumers become visible upon entering livestreams, regardless of whether they comment. Indeed, even if consumers do not post comments, moderators may remove certain consumers based on previous social interactions. When moderators can see consumers as screennames, consumers become something to be "managed" (Meta n.d.a). In further offloading labour and risk onto moderators, the moderator feature incorporates two new relationships into the digital economy: the relationships between (1) moderators and their audience peers and (2) moderators and creators. Subsuming these new relationships into the economy incorporates the labour that moderators perform to manage these relationships, and it demands that moderators take on social risks.

Specifically, moderators arguably perform a kind of *voluntary* visibility labour as they manage their relationships with these two groups. Other scholars have outlined moderators' labour in managing their visibility for audience peers. Cai, Wohn, and Almoqbel (2021) detail how moderators declare their presence and explain their reasoning in livestreams and in private arguments. These strategies require the kinds of immaterial labour associated with visibility labour. Importantly, this visibility labour is *not* because moderators visibly perform labour. Rather, they perform visibility labour *because* they become more visible to digital consumers, who may question and harass them.

While the social dynamics of managing relationships with peer audiences may be taxing, moderators may also receive social *benefits* from their work. Herein, the moderators' relationship with the creator becomes salient. Specifically, if visibility is understood as something through which creators gain social status, becoming more visible as a moderator often means that moderators may be perceived as someone who is closer to the creator. In other words, volunteering to moderate allows them to become visible in the "right" ways and gain reputation.

Although the moderation feature itself does not necessarily produce saleable surveillance data, moderation features are still productive. Lateral surveillance is productive because it recreates capitalist relations by "redoubl[ing]" top-down surveillance, which produces docile bodies *and* "maximizes bodies" to make them more "useful" for capitalism (Andrejevic 2002: 485). Likewise, moderation features create the conditions for everyday people to perform platforms' essential moderation duties. This supports Meta's monetary goals because when everyday volunteers become responsible for moderation, Meta can divert fewer resources to content moderation. The above examples "maximize" moderators' bodies *alongside* creators. Furthermore, if reputation is productive because it reproduces social relations (Hearn 2010), these moderation features may also leverage moderators' social motivations and potential reputational gain to recreate the social relations necessary for platforms to offload moderation labour. The promise of visibility and the social benefits that may come with it create the conditions that would entice moderators to perform Instagram's moderation for them.

Again, these relationships may exceed capitalism; Twitch moderators often volunteer because they value their communities (Thach et al. 2022: 4038), and Instagram moderators also likely care about the community and the creator. Still, moderation features demand visibility labour from moderators and support Instagram's profit-motives.

Reporting Tools

Instagram Live further disperses moderation responsibilities *from* platforms *to* visible consumers through reporting tools, which make viewers socially responsible for reporting what others produce. Again, expanding moderation to viewers incorporates their social relationships into the digital economy, although these flagging systems flatten social dynamics (Crawford and Gillespie 2016).

As with moderation features, incorporating these peer-to-peer relationships into the economy alters the nature of the relationships, and it takes social labour from visible consumers. As an example of changing social dynamics, if consumers report a creator's livestream, they follow a process that is nearly identical to reporting posts. However, Instagram frames reporting on posts and livestreams differently.

For reporting profiles and posts, the "How Do I Report a Post or Profile on Instagram?" page reads: "If you have an Instagram account, you *can* report a profile or content on Instagram that doesn't follow our Community Guidelines" (Meta n.d.b; emphasis added). The "How to Report Things" page uses similar language for reporting things like ephemeral Instagram Stories (Meta n.d.c). However, under the "Report a live broadcast on Instagram" tab, Meta adds, "What kinds of live broadcasts can I report on Instagram? We *recommend* reporting any live broadcast you think goes against our Community Guidelines" (Meta n.d.c; emphasis added).

The page continues:

> What if I'm not sure about reporting a live broadcast on Instagram? We recommend submitting a report if you think a live broadcast goes against our Community Guidelines, but aren't sure if it's being shared to speak out against something or educate others. If you aren't sure a live broadcast is fake or meant to be a joke, we also recommend submitting a report if you think it goes against our Community Guidelines. The safety

of our viewers and creators is our highest priority and your account won't be affected if
you submit a report. (Meta n.d.c)

These quotes offer two key points. First, contrary to reporting directions for posts, profiles, and Stories, where people "can" report content, the Instagram Live Reporting section "recommends" consumers report livestreams. "Recommending" that consumers report content effectively *increases* social responsibility.

This increased social responsibility may also increase visibility labour. Although reporting tools appear across most social media platforms, when consumers are visible to each other, social dynamics come into play. For instance, when scrolling through an Instagram feed, people may not report something because they can plausibly deny having seen it. However, since surveillance is multidirectional, when all parties are mutually visible, people may feel compelled to report because they do not want to be *seen* as failing to live up to their social responsibility. In effect, reporting becomes a part of visibility labour, as it can be necessary to maintain a social image and not appear negligent. By the same token, seeing others may discourage reporting. Metrified visible consumption may facilitate a bystander effect. People may choose not to report content because they see that others are not objecting to it. Additionally, although reports are allegedly anonymous, when all consumers are visible to each other, there are a limited number of people who the creator might suspect in small livestreams. Since power dynamics play an important role in surveillance, with fewer potential suspects, people at risk of harassment may hesitate to report. Ultimately, as neoliberalism outsources risk to individuals, here visible consumers assume the social risk of reporting.

Here, rather than the extension of market forces into consumption habits demanding greater interaction from users, as with metrified consumption and visible profiles, the reporting system demands lateral surveillance to maintain a positive social image or self-brand; in other words, visible consumers perform visibility labour. Regardless of whether consumers report, making consumers into visible social producers in the context of reporting tools demands greater visibility labour from consumers, and it increases the social responsibility and risk associated with lateral surveillance. Again, this visibility is largely involuntary, and the visibility labours and risk associated with lateral surveillance are highly stratified. When people who occupy underrepresented positions report, the threat of retaliation may be greater (see, for example, Ross 2020). For clarity, this does not mean that consumers' self-brands *should* be prioritized over reporting heinous content. Rather, that can be the effect of the visible consumption.

The second important point from the quotes above is that Instagram argues that this increased social responsibility is "recommended" because "the safety of [Instagram's] viewers and creators is [Instagram's] highest priority" (Meta n.d.c). This framing not only increases responsibility and risk for consumers but also positions them as responsible for *Instagram's* "highest priority."

Instagram's expressed concerns about "safety" are not disconnected from economic concerns because "safety" directly relates to Instagram's branding. Instagram's branding matters for the digital economy since companies must attract investors (Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012; Rigi and Prey 2015). In addition to attracting investors, social media companies must *also* brand themselves for increasingly sceptical government audiences to maintain their business models. Specifically, they must rationalize their features as "safe and inclusive" to avoid government intervention and oversight that might harm profits (Gillespie 2018).

Expressed "safety" concerns do not mean that social media companies must actually be safe; they must *appear* safe. Ahmed (2012) argues that organisations often invest in *appearing* safe and inclusive rather than altering practices and structures. *Saying* that an organisation is safe can simply be a strategy to manage brand-image and invest in organisational value (Ahmed 2012: 51–52). Rather than safety and inclusion, the *appearance* of safety and inclusion itself has value.

Likewise, Instagram's emphasis on "safety" may have contributed to Instagram's brand-value by making it *appear* safe for investors and governments. Specifically, the focus on safety likely reflects Meta's reaction to increasing public scrutiny of livestreaming features. Following several instances of livestreamed violence on Facebook, including the anti-Muslim Christchurch, New Zealand, mass murder in 2019, Meta's CEO Mark Zuckerberg was criticized for refusing to limit livestreaming (Taylor 2019). Meta's brand-image, and thus, potential profits, were threatened, as it was seen as unsafe. The reluctance to implement stricter limitations, despite reputational damage, may reflect the fact that Instagram Live is a profitable feature. By 2018, it was one of several features that were at the "forefront" of Instagram's engagement strategies (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020: 46). In essence, Instagram needed to weigh the costs of reputational damage and *appearing* unsafe with the valuable surveillance and engagement reports for investors generated by Instagram Live, regardless of safety.

Eventually, Meta implemented rules banning repeat offenders (Vinocur 2019). Similar rules banning repeat offenders appeared on Instagram (Meta n.d.c). Although these rules may protect some users in the short-term, they do little to proactively prevent livestreamed violence. Indeed, violent crimes continue to be livestreamed on Instagram. Thus, Instagram Live still has minimal oversight, and it still generates significant revenue for Instagram, as Instagram Live use grew significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Leskin 2020). In addition to maintaining the conditions for a largely unregulated surveillance economy, these rules and reporting features are also productive because they maintain Instagram's valuable brand-image and make it *appear* safe.

Ultimately, despite minimal changes, the reporting tools allow Meta to maintain its marketable brand-value by arguing that the company is taking action and cares about "safety," while visible consumers are made responsible and assume risk. This critique of reporting systems is not new; however, what is new is that visible consumers perform both surveillance labour *and* visibility labour for *Instagram's* brand-image. Rather than creating social and economic value through direct surveillance of their interactions and the commodification of their own self-brands, visible consumers perform visibility labour to maintain *Instagram's* brand-reputation and economic profits through lateral surveillance. Therefore, although moderation and reporting interactions do not produce valuable surveillance data as metrified viewership and visible profiles, compelling consumers to take on visibility labour in the context of moderating and reporting is still recuperated into Meta's profit-motives through brand-image. In effect, visible consumption deflects critiques, justifies minimal oversight, and legitimizes the means for generating that profit in the first place. Thus, the reporting system and, arguably, the moderator feature position consumers to perform visibility labour to maintain Instagram's "highest priority"/profit-motives.

Like with the moderation system, these reporting tools are productive not because they produce more surveillance data, but because they reproduce the social conditions necessary to sustain markets and capitalist relations. First, the demand for visible viewers to consider self-branding when deciding if to report content reproduces the hierarchical social conditions necessary for capitalism. Second, *saying* that Instagram's highest priority is the safety of their viewers while simultaneously outsourcing that lateral surveillance labour back onto consumers can function to manage Instagram's brand-image, which invests in organisational value.

In the current system, moderation features and reporting systems may be necessary. Without reporting tools, creators and consumers would have little recourse unless Instagram fundamentally alters its content moderation strategies. Being able to moderate consumers may be a necessary safety precaution for underrepresented creators in livestreams. Still, these examples demonstrate another way that visible consumers are incorporated into Instagram's profits.

Conclusion

This article offers a preliminary outline of how visible viewership is embedded in surveillance economies on Instagram Live. Making consumers visible turns them into social and economic producers, often involuntarily. First, visible consumption is exploited through direct surveillance that quantifies and intensifies user engagement. Visibly metrified consumers can be used to signal social value for the creator. Furthermore, visibly metrified consumers can spur further engagement, and, thus, economic value for creators and Instagram. Visible consumers also become producers as their screennames and profiles become part of livestreams. Each time consumers become personally visible, Instagram prompts greater interaction with those users, effectively creating more opportunities for social and economic value production through surveillance. Furthermore, consumers are prompted to become more visible as "guests." While creators and Instagram benefit monetarily from making consumers visible, consumers do not. Yet, as consumers become personally visible, they perform greater visibility labour, which disproportionately distributes risk.

Second, visible consumption facilitates self-governance labour through lateral surveillance. As consumers become visible, Instagram can outsource moderation labour to moderators, who perform visibility labour. Finally, as consumers become visible producers, Instagram increases consumers' social responsibility by "recommending" that consumers report all questionable content. Because consumers are visible to each other, they may weigh social costs when reporting, again performing visibility labour. Importantly, although the visibility labour that people perform when laterally surveilling each other does not directly produce valuable surveillance data, some of consumers' visibility labour is recuperated by Instagram. Namely, their labour legitimizes the social relations of capitalist production by justifying minimal oversight while protecting Instagram's economically valuable brand and reputation.

Ultimately, Instagram Live demonstrates how making visible consumers into visible social producers is an example of neoliberal surveillance culture (Lyon 2018). As surveillance is normalized, visible consumption extends market forces into another aspect of people's social lives; it brings the act of consuming content into the social public sphere, making it profitable and commodifiable under surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019). Furthermore, it outsources self-governing and Instagram's branding-labour to visible consumers, who are expected to take on the risks of visibility.

My critiques here are largely structural because I focused on digital economies. Still, social relationships are beyond quantification. Yet, to understand how people resist the commodification of social relationships between visible viewers and creators, scholars also need a model of the structures that people are resisting.

This article also offers future directions for scholars. Scholars could explore how visible consumption and visibility labours are different on different platforms. For instance, visible consumption is often asynchronous, as with Instagram Stories. Future scholars could also add case studies and interviews. Another key area of research might be examining the practices that underrepresented people have already developed to resist and subvert visible consumption. Although difficult, scholars could also examine who is excluded. Who does not participate in social media features where they must become visible as consumers, and why?

Acknowledgments

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