

# The Modern Panopticon: Reflections of Social Surveillance on Consumer Perception and Behavior

Ela Yağmur Açikkaya<sup>1\*</sup>, Zehra Betül Akay<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Besiktas Kabatas Erkek Lisesi, Istanbul, Türkiye

## Abstract:

With the increasing role of digital technologies and social media in daily life, individuals have become part of a continuous process of digital and social surveillance, both consciously and unconsciously. Jeremy Bentham's panopticon model and Michel Foucault's theory of surveillance have evolved into the concept of the "modern panopticon" in contemporary societies (Foucault, 1977). Through social media platforms, online shopping sites, advertisements, and social norms, individuals experience a sense of being watched in both digital and social environments. In this process, personal data collected through targeted advertisements and personalized content creates an invisible control mechanism that shapes consumption preferences, weakening the perception of free will (Zuboff, 2019). This study aims to examine the effects of digital and social surveillance on consumer perception within the framework of the modern panopticon and to investigate how advertisements, popular brands, and personalized content influence purchasing behaviors. A literature review was conducted to establish the theoretical framework, followed by a quantitative survey applied to participants from different age groups and educational levels. The findings show that many participants feel watched and regulate their physical appearance and behaviors accordingly. In addition, social media, advertisements, and influencers significantly affect aesthetic perceptions and purchasing decisions. Overall, the results indicate that the modern panopticon has a guiding effect on consumer behavior.

**Keywords:** panopticon, social surveillance, consumer behavior, advertising

## INTRODUCTION:

In today's world, individuals are rarely alone, even when they believe they are. Every click, search, and interaction leaves a trace, creating a system in which behavior can be observed, recorded, and influenced. What once required physical structures of control has now become embedded within digital and social environments. In this sense, surveillance is no longer limited to institutions but has become an ordinary and often unnoticed part of everyday life. The concept of surveillance was first systematically explained through Jeremy Bentham's panopticon model, later developed by Michel Foucault as a mechanism of modern power. In this model, individuals regulate their own behavior because they internalize the possibility of

\*Corresponding Author Email: [eyacikkaya@gmail.com](mailto:eyacikkaya@gmail.com)

Published: 04 May 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i3.301034>

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

being watched (Foucault, 1977). Rather than direct control, the system operates through the awareness of constant visibility. In contemporary societies, this idea has evolved into what can be described as the “modern panopticon,” where surveillance extends beyond institutions and becomes embedded in both digital and social interactions. Individuals are not only observed by centralized systems but also by one another, particularly through online environments.

With the rapid development of technology, new forms of surveillance have emerged through social media platforms, online shopping systems, and digital communication tools. These environments collect and process large amounts of personal data, often without individuals being fully aware of the extent of this process. Through mechanisms such as targeted advertisements, personalized recommendations, and algorithm-based content, individuals are subtly guided in their preferences and behaviors. This creates an invisible system of influence in which individuals may believe they are making independent decisions, while their choices are shaped by external inputs (Zuboff, 2019).

At the same time, surveillance is not only technological but also social. Individuals continuously observe, evaluate, and compare one another, especially in digital spaces where visibility is constant and widespread. Social media platforms, in particular, create environments in which individuals are both observers and the observed. The desire for approval, recognition, and belonging encourages individuals to regulate their behavior, appearance, and self-presentation. In this process, social norms and expectations become powerful tools of control, shaping not only how individuals act but also how they think and perceive themselves. These dynamics are particularly significant when examined in relation to consumption behavior. In modern societies, consumption is no longer limited to meeting basic needs but has become closely connected to identity, social status, and self-expression. Individuals’ preferences regarding products, brands, and lifestyles are increasingly influenced by social media interactions, influencer culture, and digital marketing strategies. As a result, consumption decisions are shaped not only by individual needs but also by external pressures and expectations.

This situation raises important questions about autonomy and freedom of choice. If individuals are constantly influenced by both digital systems and social environments, to what extent can their decisions be considered independent? Understanding this issue requires examining the interaction between technological surveillance mechanisms and social dynamics. It also requires considering how individuals adapt to, resist, or internalize these forms of control in their daily lives. Based on this perspective, the present study aims to examine the effects of digital and social surveillance on consumer perception within the framework of the modern panopticon. By focusing on the role of social media, targeted content, and social influence, the study seeks to understand how surveillance mechanisms guide individuals’ purchasing behaviors. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of how control operates in contemporary society and how individuals position themselves within this system.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### **1. Consumption and the Individual**

Consumption in modern societies is no longer limited to meeting basic needs; it has become a

multidimensional phenomenon related to identity, social status, and belonging. Through consumption, individuals express themselves and make their social positions visible. Therefore, consumption is shaped not only by personal preferences but also by social structure, cultural norms, and media influences. In this context, individuals are positioned not only as producers but also as subjects constantly directed toward consumption. Advertisements, popular culture, and social environments present specific lifestyles associated with consumption, making it a key element of self-realization and social acceptance (Baudrillard, 1998; Zuboff, 2019).

### **1.1. Consumption Culture**

Consumption culture refers to a structure in which consumption determines individuals' lifestyles and social roles. According to Bauman (2005), individuals in consumer societies define themselves primarily through consumption rather than production. This culture creates a system of needs shaped by external forces and requires individuals to continuously consume. Goods and services are valued not only for their use but also for their symbolic meanings, making consumption central to identity construction. As Bauman (2006) states, individuals are evaluated by their ability to fulfill consumer roles, and social norms reinforce this expectation. Thus, consumption culture functions as a mechanism that shapes behavior and perception, directing individuals through media and social environments.

### **1.2. Contemporary Understanding of Consumption**

Today, consumption has shifted from a need-based structure to one shaped by desires. Advertisements, social media, and popular culture constantly create new needs and encourage consumption. Individuals may purchase products not out of necessity but to fit into social environments or follow trends. Digital platforms, through personalized content and data-based advertising, play a significant role in shaping consumption preferences. Although individuals believe they act freely, their choices are often influenced by algorithms, weakening the perception of free will (Zuboff, 2019; Bauman, 2023).

## **2. The Concept of Surveillance**

Surveillance refers to monitoring, recording, and controlling individuals' behaviors. While defined as supervision by the Turkish Language Association, in social sciences it is also linked to power relations and social structures. According to Lyon (2007), surveillance involves systematically collecting information to direct behavior and has become normalized in modern life. Similarly, Mazıcı (2014) emphasizes that surveillance is used not only for security but also to shape consumer preferences, acting as an invisible mechanism influencing behavior and appearance.

### **2.1. The Panopticon Approach**

The panopticon, designed by Bentham, is a structure where individuals behave as if they are constantly watched due to uncertainty about observation (Bentham, 1791). Foucault (1977) interprets this model as a broader social mechanism in which power operates through internalized surveillance rather than direct force. Individuals regulate their behavior because they assume they may be watched at any moment. This logic extends beyond prisons to

institutions such as schools and digital environments. Today, social media and digital platforms function as modern panoptic spaces where individuals voluntarily make themselves visible (Öztürk, 2019).

## **2.2. The Internalization of Surveillance**

The perception of constant observation leads individuals to regulate their behavior without external pressure. Surveillance becomes a psychological mechanism, shaped by social evaluation and self-awareness. Individuals act according to how they believe others perceive them, leading to the internalization of social norms. In consumer societies, this process is reflected in appearance and consumption choices. Individuals adjust their behaviors to gain social acceptance and maintain a positive image (Mazıcı, 2014; Dedeoğlu and Baybars, 2017). As a result, surveillance weakens the perception of free will and directs behavior unconsciously.

## **3. Social Surveillance in Modern Society**

In modern societies, surveillance is no longer limited to institutions but has become part of everyday life. Individuals are constantly exposed to evaluation by others in social environments. Social surveillance refers to this continuous monitoring and judgment process, leading individuals to regulate their behavior according to social norms (Lyon, 2007).

### **3.1. Anxiety of Being Watched in the Social Sphere**

Individuals shape their behavior according to how they are perceived in social environments. The desire for acceptance and positive evaluation increases conformity to social norms. This creates a constant awareness of being watched, making individuals regulate their actions and appearance (Foucault, 1977). Over time, this perception influences consumption behavior, directing individuals toward socially accepted products and lifestyles.

### **3.2. Surveillance in Digital Environments**

With digitalization, surveillance has become more continuous and visible. Online platforms collect and analyze data on individuals' behaviors and preferences. Zuboff (2019) defines this process as "surveillance capitalism," where behavioral data is transformed into economic value. Digital surveillance is used not only for security but also to create consumer profiles and direct purchasing behavior, making it a key component of modern surveillance systems.

### **3.3. The Role of Social in the Surveillance Process**

Social media platforms represent the most visible form of surveillance in digital environments. Individuals voluntarily share their lives, creating a constant cycle of observation and evaluation. According to Öztürk (2019), social media forms a panoptic structure where individuals are both observers and the observed. Likes, comments, and follower counts influence self-perception and behavior. Influencers and advertisements also shape consumption patterns, making social media a powerful mechanism directing consumer behavior.

## **4. Psychological Effects of Social Surveillance**

Social surveillance affects not only behavior but also thoughts, emotions, and self-perception.

The constant sense of being watched increases anxiety, stress, and self-control. Individuals may limit their natural behavior and act according to social expectations. Studies indicate that this perception influences thinking processes and encourages cautious behavior (Scientific American, 2025).

#### **4.1. The Perception of Being Watched and Individual Psychology**

The perception of being watched leads individuals to regulate their behavior in both public and private spaces. Goffman (1956) describes social life as a “stage” where individuals perform roles based on others’ expectations. With digital surveillance, this performance becomes continuous, increasing anxiety and dependence on external evaluation.

#### **4.2. Self-Control and Behavioral Change**

Individuals under surveillance regulate their behavior without direct control, internalizing social norms. As explained by Foucault (1977), individuals act as if they are constantly observed. This leads to cautious behavior, increased self-monitoring, and alignment with social expectations, weakening the perception of free will.

#### **4.3. The Need for Social Approval**

The need for social approval becomes stronger in environments of constant surveillance. Individuals seek acceptance and shape their behavior accordingly. According to Maslow (1943), belonging and esteem are fundamental needs. Social media reinforces this need, making external approval a determinant of self-worth and influencing consumption behavior.

### **5. Social Surveillance and Consumer Perception**

In modern consumer society, purchasing behavior is shaped not only by needs but also by social and surveillance mechanisms. Individuals consider how they will be perceived when making consumption decisions. Surveillance weakens the perception of free will and turns consumption into a socially driven process (Foucault, 1977; Lyon, 2007).

#### **5.1. The Effect of Surveillance on Consumption Behavior**

Individuals regulate consumption according to social expectations. Products and brands become tools of social representation. Consumption turns into a performance shaped by the question “How will others see me?” (Goffman, 1956). This process connects consumption with social approval (Mazıcı, 2014).

#### **5.2. Advertisements and Manipulation**

Advertisements have become mechanisms that shape desires and lifestyles rather than simply promoting products. Digital platforms collect data and present personalized content, directing consumption behavior. Zuboff (2019) describes this as “surveillance capitalism,” where behavior is monetized. Advertisements create new needs and normalize them, influencing decision-making (Foucault, 1977; Dedeoğlu and Baybars, 2017).

#### **5.3. Purchasing Decisions**

Purchasing decisions are shaped not only by functionality but also by social perception.

Individuals consider how their choices will be evaluated and tend toward socially accepted options (Goffman, 1956). Social media and popularity further reinforce this process, making consumption a social obligation rather than a personal choice (Lyon, 2007). As a result, purchasing decisions are increasingly influenced by external factors, reflecting the impact of the modern panopticon.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

This study examines how social surveillance in digital media, social media, and daily life affects individuals' consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviors. It focuses on individuals' awareness of being monitored, the impact of targeted advertisements, and how surveillance influences self-control, social approval, and consumption-based self-expression. The main hypothesis is that perceived social surveillance significantly shapes consumer behavior. It is also proposed that increasing levels of perceived surveillance alter consumption patterns, direct purchasing decisions, strengthen self-control, and weaken the perception of free will. Additionally, individuals with a higher need for social approval are expected to prefer socially accepted products, and social media interactions are assumed to influence aesthetic perception and consumption choices. The study assumes that participants responded honestly and actively use digital platforms, but it is limited to a specific sample group and survey-based data.

Both literature review and quantitative (survey) methods were used. A theoretical framework was first established through existing studies, followed by the application of the "Panopticon Scale". The independent variable is perceived social surveillance, while the dependent variable is consumer perception and purchasing behavior. The sample consists of 124 students selected through disproportionate (simple random) sampling (Karasar, 2004), which is considered appropriate within the 30–500 range suggested by Rescoe (Ural & Kılıç, 2005). The data collection tool includes demographic variables (gender, education level, age, income, social media use) and survey questions consisting of response options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Participation was voluntary, permissions were obtained, and data were analyzed using descriptive methods based on frequency and percentage distributions.

### **FINDINGS:**

The data obtained in the study were evaluated using descriptive analysis. Responses to demographic and survey questions were presented in tables based on frequency and percentage values. The "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses were evaluated together, and the relationship between social surveillance and consumer perception was interpreted.

#### **1. Demographic Variables of the Panopticon Scale**

In this section, the frequency and percentage values of the demographic variables of the Panopticon Scale will be presented in tables.

##### **1.1. Gender Variable**

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
--	-----------------	---------------------	------------------------------

Female	74	59.7	59.7
Male	50	40.3	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

Table 1: Gender Variable

### 1.2. Educational Level Variable

	n sample	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Primary/Secondary Education	67	54.0	54.0
University	57	46.0	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

Table 2: Educational Level Variable

### 1.3. Age Variable

	n sample	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
14	23	18.5	18.5
15	9	7.3	25.8
16	11	8.9	34.7
17	21	16.9	51.6
18	9	7.3	58.9
18+	51	41.1	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

Table 3: Age Variable

### 1.4. Income Variable

	n sample	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Very Low	7	5.6	5.6
Low	13	10.5	16.1
Medium	93	75.0	91.1
High	9	7.3	98.4

Very High	2	1.6	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

Table 4: Income Variable

### 1.5. Social Media Usage Variable

	n sample	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
0-1 hour	5	4.0	4.0
1-3 hours	54	43.6	47.6
3-5 hours	44	35.5	83.1
>5 hours	21	16.9	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

Table 5: Social Media Usage Variable

## 2. Findings Related to the Survey Questions

In this section, the frequency and percentage values of the responses given by the participants to each survey question will be presented in tables.

	n sample	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0	0.0
Disagree	6	4.8	4.8
Partially	26	21.0	25.8
Agree	60	48.4	74.2
Strongly Agree	32	25.8	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

Table 6: “The fact that people feel constantly watched causes them to control their physical appearance more.”

A majority of participants think that feeling constantly watched increases control over physical appearance, with high “agree” (48.4%) and “strongly agree” (25.8%) responses.

	n sample	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Disagree	4	3.2	3.2

Disagree	16	12.9	16.1
Partially	29	23.4	39.5
Agree	59	47.6	87.1
Strongly Agree	16	12.9	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 7: “The feeling of being watched affects my clothing preferences.”*

Nearly half of the participants (47.6%) agree that the feeling of being watched affects clothing preferences, with an additional 12.9% strongly agreeing.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	1	0.8	0.8
Disagree	4	3.2	4
Partially	26	21.0	25.0
Agree	62	50.0	75.0
Strongly Agree	31	25.0	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 8: “Brands and platforms determine aesthetic trends by monitoring user behavior.”*

Most participants agree that brands and platforms shape aesthetic trends by monitoring user behavior (50% agree, 25% strongly agree).

These findings suggest that surveillance plays a strong role in shaping appearance-related behaviors, particularly through the internalization of being constantly observed.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	9	7.3	7.3
Disagree	20	16.1	23.4
Partially	48	38.7	62.1
Agree	34	27.4	89.5
Strongly Agree	13	10.5	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 9: “My regular posts on social media affect how people see me.”*

Responses are more moderate, with the highest proportion in “partially” (38.7%), while 27.4% agree that social media posts affect how others perceive them.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	21	16.9	16.9
Disagree	47	37.9	54.8
Partially	38	30.7	85.5
Agree	15	12.1	97.6
Strongly Agree	3	2.4	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 10: “Television and magazine content changes my appearance preferences.”*

Participants generally do not think that television and magazine content significantly affects appearance preferences, with disagreement rates being higher.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	18	14.5	14.5
Disagree	30	24.2	38.7
Partially	46	37.1	75.8
Agree	26	21.0	96.8
Strongly Agree	4	3.2	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 11: “The content on social media platforms determines my aesthetic expectations.”*

Responses are mixed, though “partially” (37.1%) is the most common, indicating moderate influence of social media on aesthetic expectations.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	28	22.6	22.6
Disagree	46	37.1	59.7
Partially	27	21.8	81.5
Agree	19	15.3	96.8

Strongly Agree	4	3.2	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 12: “The number of likes/comments on social media plays an important role in my decisions about my appearance.”*

Most participants do not consider likes and comments a major factor in appearance decisions, with disagreement (37.1%) and strong disagreement (22.6%) outweighing other responses.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	30	24.2	24.2
Disagree	49	39.5	63.7
Partially	23	18.6	82.3
Agree	17	13.7	96.0
Strongly Agree	5	4.0	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 13: “I believe that popular brands/products make me look more ‘attractive.’”*

A majority reject the idea that popular brands increase attractiveness, as “disagree” (39.5%) and “strongly disagree” (24.2%) responses dominate.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	38	30.6	30.6
Disagree	46	37.1	67.7
Partially	24	19.4	87.1
Agree	16	12.9	100.0
Strongly Agree	0	0.0	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 14: “I would like to try the products used by influencers because they make people look ‘beautiful’/‘handsome.’”*

Similarly, most participants do not believe that influencer-used products increase attractiveness, with 37.1% disagreeing and 30.6% strongly disagreeing.

Overall, these results indicate that while individuals may not fully acknowledge the influence of social media and external factors, such effects may still operate indirectly on their perceptions and decisions.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	22	17.7	17.7
Disagree	40	32.3	50.0
Partially	36	29.0	79.0
Agree	24	19.4	98.4
Strongly Agree	2	1.6	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 15: “The visuals of products in advertisements do not produce similar results in real life, but I am still influenced by them.”*

Responses are more balanced, with 29% partially agreeing, 19.4% agreeing, and 32.3% disagreeing, suggesting indirect influence of advertisements.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	10	8.1	8.1
Disagree	34	27.4	35.5
Partially	44	35.5	71.0
Agree	30	24.2	95.2
Strongly Agree	6	4.8	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 16: “I accept that my appearance preferences are shaped by consumption and surveillance mechanisms.”*

A considerable proportion accept that surveillance and consumption shape appearance preferences, as 35.5% partially agree and 24.2% agree.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	2	1.6	1.6
Disagree	14	11.3	12.9
Partially	38	30.6	43.5
Agree	42	33.9	77.4
Strongly Agree	28	22.6	100.0

Total	124	100.0	
-------	-----	-------	--

*Table 17: “I would prefer to live a life on social media that is less focused on visibility/interaction.”*

A majority prefer less visibility-focused social media use, with 33.9% agreeing and 22.6% strongly agreeing, alongside 30.6% partial agreement.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	2	1.6	1.6
Disagree	16	12.9	14.5
Partially	19	15.3	29.8
Agree	55	44.4	74.2
Strongly Agree	32	25.8	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 18: “I do not find it ethical for brands to use user data to manipulate aesthetic preferences.”*

Most participants find it unethical for brands to use user data, as 44.4% agree and 25.8% strongly agree with this statement.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	26	21.0	21.0
Disagree	56	45.2	66.2
Partially	24	19.4	85.6
Agree	15	12.0	97.6
Strongly Agree	3	2.4	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 19: “Expensive products generally help me look more attractive.”*

Participants largely reject the idea that expensive products increase attractiveness, with 45.2% disagreeing and 21% strongly disagreeing.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	8	6.5	6.5

Disagree	19	15.3	21.8
Partially	43	34.7	56.5
Agree	40	32.2	88.7
Strongly Agree	14	11.3	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 20: “The desire to look ‘beautiful/handsome’ is one of the most important factors in my decision to buy a product.”*

A notable proportion considers attractiveness an important factor in purchasing, with 32.2% agreeing, 11.3% strongly agreeing, and 34.7% partially agreeing.

These responses highlight that consumption is not only based on functional needs but is also influenced by aesthetic concerns and the desire for self-presentation.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	30	24.2	24.2
Disagree	50	40.3	64.5
Partially	27	21.8	86.3
Agree	13	10.5	96.8
Strongly Agree	4	3.2	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 21: “When buying popular/promotional products, I feel anxious about being ‘trendy.’”*

Most participants do not feel pressure to be trendy, as 40.3% disagree and 24.2% strongly disagree.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	13	10.5	10.5
Disagree	33	26.6	37.1
Partially	44	35.5	72.6
Agree	29	23.4	96.0
Strongly Agree	5	4.0	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 22: “I prefer the products that my social circle considers ‘beautiful.’”*

Preferences are moderate, with 35.5% partially agreeing and 23.4% agreeing that social environment influences product choice.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	31	25.0	25.0
Disagree	42	33.9	58.9
Partially	34	27.4	86.3
Agree	15	12.1	98.4
Strongly Agree	2	1.6	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 23: “The models in advertisements make me feel that ‘if I buy this product, I will become more beautiful/handsome.’”*

Participants generally do not believe that advertisement models create attractiveness perception, as 33.9% disagree and 25% strongly disagree.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	46	37.1	37.1
Disagree	46	37.1	74.2
Partially	15	12.1	86.3
Agree	15	12.1	98.4
Strongly Agree	2	1.6	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 24: “Sharing this on social media after purchasing and receiving likes is one of my motivations for buying the product.”*

Social media sharing is not seen as a strong motivation, with 37.1% disagreeing and 37.1% strongly disagreeing.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	43	34.7	34.7
Disagree	52	41.9	76.6
Partially	19	15.3	91.9

Agree	7	5.7	97.6
Strongly Agree	3	2.4	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 25: “I buy some aesthetic products only for ‘showing off.’”*

Participants largely reject the idea of purchasing aesthetic products for showing off, with 41.9% disagreeing.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	6	4.8	4.8
Disagree	11	8.9	13.7
Partially	37	29.8	43.5
Agree	39	31.5	75.0
Strongly Agree	31	25.0	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 26: “My style and appearance preferences are only for myself; what others think does not affect me much.”*

Many participants state that their preferences are personal, as 31.5% agree and 25% strongly agree.

	<b>n sample</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	16	12.9	12.9
Disagree	44	35.5	48.4
Partially	36	29.0	77.4
Agree	25	20.2	97.6
Strongly Agree	3	2.4	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 27: “Buying a product with the promise of making me look ‘attractive’ raises my expectations about myself.”*

Responses are moderate, with 29% partially agreeing and 20.2% agreeing that attractive-product promises increase expectations.

	n sample	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Disagree	69	55.6	55.6
Disagree	34	27.4	83.0
Partially	11	8.9	91.9
Agree	8	6.5	98.4
Strongly Agree	2	1.6	100.0
Total	124	100.0	

*Table 28: “Even if I am dissatisfied after purchasing, I may defend the product / make positive posts because of social pressure.”*

Most participants reject the idea of defending a product due to social pressure, with 55.6% strongly disagreeing.

Taken together, these findings suggest that individuals attempt to maintain a sense of independence in their decisions, even though they are still partially influenced by social and digital environments.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study show that a large proportion of individuals perceive themselves as being constantly watched in both digital environments and social life, and that this perception has a noticeable effect on physical appearance, aesthetic expectations, and consumption behaviors. In particular, the high level of agreement with statements indicating that feeling watched leads individuals to control their physical appearance and influences their clothing preferences suggests that surveillance is not only an external mechanism but also an internalized form of self-regulation. This result is consistent with Foucault’s (1977) panopticon approach and shows that individuals adjust their behaviors according to the possibility of being observed. In addition, the majority of participants agreeing that brands and digital platforms shape aesthetic trends by monitoring user behavior supports Zuboff’s (2019) concept of surveillance capitalism and indicates that personal data plays a role in directing both aesthetic perceptions and consumption preferences. The finding that participants think their social media posts affect how they are perceived by others also highlights that social media functions both as a space of surveillance and as a field of self-presentation, in line with Goffman’s (1956) perspective.

On the other hand, the relatively lower agreement levels regarding the influence of television, magazines, influencers, and likes/comments suggest that individuals do not always openly accept the effect of these factors on their own behavior. However, this does not necessarily mean that these factors are ineffective; rather, it indicates that their influence may operate more indirectly and sometimes unconsciously. When the findings are considered as a whole, it can be seen that individuals are influenced by surveillance mechanisms not only through direct

exposure but also through the internalization of social expectations. In this sense, individuals may believe that they are making independent decisions, while their preferences are shaped by social and digital norms in subtle ways. The finding that a considerable proportion of participants associate the desire to look attractive with purchasing decisions further supports the idea that consumption is no longer limited to basic needs but has become a tool for self-expression and social acceptance. At the same time, the fact that most participants consider the use of personal data for manipulating aesthetic preferences unethical shows that individuals have a certain level of awareness regarding digital surveillance. Despite this awareness, the continued influence of these mechanisms points to a gap between awareness and actual behavior. This gap suggests that awareness alone may not be sufficient to prevent the effects of surveillance, as individuals continue to be shaped by the systems they critically evaluate. Furthermore, the preference expressed by many participants for a social media experience that is less focused on visibility and interaction indicates an awareness of the psychological pressure created by constant observation and reflects an emerging tendency to reduce or avoid this pressure.

Overall, the results indicate that the modern panopticon has a significant effect on consumer perception, shaping behavior not through direct pressure but through internalized control and social expectations. In this context, the study contributes to understanding how digital and social surveillance influence consumption in everyday life. Based on these findings, it can be suggested that increasing awareness of digital surveillance and strengthening media literacy may help individuals make more conscious consumption decisions. In particular, educational programs that focus on how personal data is collected, processed, and used in digital environments may enable individuals to better understand the mechanisms that shape their preferences. In addition, improving transparency in data use and personalized advertising practices could reduce the gap between awareness and behavior by allowing individuals to make more informed choices. Furthermore, offering alternative social media usage options that reduce visibility, comparison, and interaction pressure may help individuals feel less controlled by social expectations and more independent in their decisions. Encouraging more critical engagement with digital content and promoting responsible use of social media platforms may also support individuals in developing a more balanced relationship with consumption. Overall, such measures may contribute to minimizing the effects of surveillance and strengthening individuals' sense of autonomy in their daily consumption behaviors.

## REFERENCES

Baudrillard, J. (1988). *The consumer society: Myths and structures*.

SAGE Publications.

Bauman, Z. (2005). *The individualized society*. Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (2006). *Globalization: The human consequences*. Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (2023). *Consumed life*. Polity Press.

Bentham, J. (1791). *Panopticon; or, The inspection-house*. T. Payne.

- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Pantheon Books.
- Goffman, E. (1956). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday Anchor.
- Karasar, N. (2004). *Bilimsel araştırma yöntemi* [Scientific research method]. Nobel Yayınları.
- Lyon, D. (2007). *Surveillance studies: An overview*. Polity Press.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396.  
<https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>
- Mazıcı, E. (2018). Tüketim toplumunda gözetim uygulamaları ve tüketici bakış açısından bir değerlendirme [Surveillance practices in consumer society and an evaluation from the consumer perspective]. *Gümüşhane Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Elektronik Dergisi*, 6(1), 149–171. <https://doi.org/10.19145/e-gifder.393162>
- Öztürk, İ. D. (2019). Panoptikon 2.0: Alternatif medya ve karşı gözetim [Panopticon 2.0: Alternative media and counter-surveillance]. *Erciyes İletişim Dergisi*, 6(1), 701–712.  
<https://doi.org/10.17680/erciyesiletisim.454559>
- Scientific American. (2025, May 6). *How being watched changes how you think*.  
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-being-watched-changes-how-you-think/>
- Ural, A., & Kılıç, İ. (2005). *Bilimsel araştırma süreci ve SPSS ile veri analizi* [Scientific research process and data analysis with SPSS]. Detay Yayıncılık.
- Yanıklar, C. (2010). Tüketim kültürü, kapitalizm ve insan ihtiyaçları arasındaki ilişki üzerine bir tartışma [A discussion on the relationship between consumption culture, capitalism, and human needs]. *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 34(1), 25–32.  
<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/49816>
- Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. PublicAffairs.