MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND PUBLIC REACTIONS TO AI-BASED TRAFFIC CAMERAS: THE CASE OF NORTHERN CYPRUS

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Abstract
This study examines how AI-supported traffic camera systems are represented in the media and how these representations shape the public's perceptual and behavioral responses. It is based on the assumption that media content does more than transmit information, it transforms surveillance into a socially learned experience. Within this framework, Emel Yılmaz proposes the *Perceptual Surveillance Learning Theory (PSLT)*, which conceptualizes surveillance not merely as a mechanism of control but as a learning process structuring social perceptions, ethical judgments, and public reactions. The theory integrates Foucault's notion of the disciplinary society, Castells' concept of the network society, Bandura's social learning theory, and Habermas's idea of the public sphere to explain how surveillance culture is internalized through media discourse. The case study conducted in Northern Cyprus shows that newspapers with differing ideological orientations frame surveillance in contrasting ways: left-leaning media present it as a violation of privacy and personal freedom, while centrist and right-leaning outlets legitimize it as essential for public safety and social order. These representations reveal how compliance, anxiety, resistance, and acceptance toward surveillance are socially learned through mediated discourse. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes surveillance as a social experience shaped by perceptual learning at the individual level and by the formation of behavioral responses within the public sphere, offering an original conceptual and contextual contribution to the literature on surveillance culture.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, surveillance cameras, privacy, media representation, behavioral response, Northern Cyprus, Perceptual Surveillance Learning Theory

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid integration of artificial intelligence into surveillance infrastructures has profoundly redefined the boundaries between technology, society, and individual privacy. Once associated merely with ensuring public safety, traffic camera systems have evolved into complex socio technical networks that not only monitor but also normalize surveillance in everyday life. The growing use of AI-based visual recognition technologies enables the continuous collection and analysis of behavioral data, reinforcing new forms of visibility, control, and consent. This transformation has intensified scholarly debates on the ethical, political, and psychological dimensions of surveillance and made questions about how societies perceive, interpret, and respond to such systems increasingly critical (Foucault, 1975, pp. 200–204; Lyon, 2018, pp. 56–59).

Surveillance technologies, one of the defining features of the digital age, should no longer be understood solely as tools for monitoring individual behavior but as cultural forms that reshape social relations, the public sphere, and notions of personal privacy. In particular of the defining features of the digital age, should no longer be understood solely as tools for monitoring individual behavior but as cultural forms that reshape social relations, the public

sphere, and notions of personal privacy. In particular, AI-supported traffic cameras represent not merely a technological regulation but a form of power expressed through visibility.

This visibility corresponds to Michel Foucault's concept of panopticism as articulated in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1975). For Foucault, modern power operates not only through physical coercion but through an internalized perceptual awareness that compels individuals to regulate their own conduct. The individual, constantly aware of the possibility of being seen, becomes both the subject and the object of surveillance. Power thus shapes not only bodies but perceptions; surveillance ceases to be an external imposition and becomes a learned, internalized mode of self-governance.

The media constitutes one of the most critical domains in which the multidimensional nature of surveillance is produced and circulated. News discourse does not merely report on surveillance; it interprets, legitimizes, and at times normalizes it. As Habermas (1989, pp. 86–88) emphasized in his theory of the public sphere, the media are not simply channels for transmitting information; they are communicative arenas where social consensus, critique, and power relations are continually renegotiated. Accordingly, understanding how surveillance technologies are represented in media discourse is essential to comprehending how societies learn and internalize the logic of surveillance (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, pp. 94–96).

Castells's (2009, pp. 423–425) concept of the "network society" underscores that communication in the digital age operates within horizontal and interconnected systems. In such a society, surveillance is produced not only vertically from the state or institutions but also horizontally through social networks and algorithmic participation. This dynamic reshapes behavioral responses, generating patterns of obedience, resistance, consent, or indifference. Bandura's (1977, pp. 40–43) *Social Learning Theory* provides a strong foundation for understanding this process: individuals do not merely witness surveillance; they learn it through mediated representations.

One of the most subtle yet profound effects of technological progress is that surveillance has become not only physical but also a digital and cognitive experience. AI-powered monitoring systems, now an inseparable part of urban life, blur the boundaries between security, control, and ethics. These systems record not only behavior but also shape the way societies perceive and conceptualize surveillance itself. In the context of Northern Cyprus, the ways in which such technologies are legitimized, contested, or internalized in the public sphere provide a valuable lens through which to analyze local social experience (Yılmaz & Bektaş, 2019b, p. 64).

The scope of analysis is limited to mainstream news media and official digital platforms in Northern Cyprus; however, this focus provides a strong contextual framework for understanding the local social dynamics that shape public responses to surveillance. By analyzing the discursive framing of news articles and official Facebook communications in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), this study explores how surveillance is constructed along the axes of privacy, security, and consent. In doing so, it contributes to the limited body of research in this area by offering an original perspective that integrates behavioral and sociological dimensions of surveillance culture (Yılmaz, 2025, pp. 1456–1459).

Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative discourse analysis approach. News coverage related to surveillance technologies was examined in terms of discursive framing, conceptual metaphors, and patterns of representation. The scope of analysis is limited to the printed press in Northern Cyprus; however, this focus provides a strong contextual framework for understanding the local social dynamics that shape public responses to surveillance.

Within this framework, the Perceptual Surveillance Learning Theory (PSLT) conceptualizes surveillance not as a mechanism for regulating individual behavior but as a cultural experience learned and reproduced through media. The theory intersects Foucault's (1975) notion of panopticism, Castells's (2009) network society, Bandura's

(1977) social learning model, and Habermas's (1989) theory of the public sphere to construct an original theoretical foundation.

The Perceptual Surveillance Learning Theory frames surveillance as a process that is simultaneously behavioral, perceptual, and ideological. Surveillance practices function across three interrelated dimensions: social learning, cultural internalization, and media-based normalization. Within this cycle, individuals develop learned public reactions through mediated representations, sometimes manifesting as trust and conformity, and other times as resistance or ironic detachment. This iterative process explains how surveillance becomes normalized and embedded within digital public life and everyday culture.

Accordingly, this study redefines the relationship between surveillance, media, and behavior through a behavioral-sciences perspective, offering both a theoretical and a locally grounded contribution to the literature. Surveillance is no longer merely a mechanism of control; it is a learned, felt, and culturally shared experience.

In the following section, the theoretical foundations of surveillance will be elaborated upon through three key dimensions: perceptual, representational, and ideological, drawing on Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge, Bandura's observational learning, and Habermas's communicative concept of the public sphere as the main pillars of the Perceptual Surveillance Learning Theory.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon the critical tradition of discourse analysis, integrating theoretical insights from Michel Foucault, Albert Bandura, and Jürgen Habermas, while extending them through contemporary frameworks developed by Teun A. van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, Norman Fairclough, and Stuart Hall. Together, these scholars illustrate that surveillance and political communication are not merely technical or institutional phenomena but deeply discursive and ideological constructions (Van Dijk, 1993, 2006; Wodak, 2002, 2007; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Hall, 1998; Eagleton, 2011).

Foucault's analysis of disciplinary mechanisms reveals how visibility operates as a subtle form of power, producing subjects who internalize surveillance as part of social order (Foucault, 1975). Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* (1977, 1986) explains how individuals acquire perceptual and behavioral norms through observation, imitation, and social reinforcement. Habermas (1989), by conceptualizing the public sphere as a communicative domain of shared meaning, connects these dynamics to the ideological structures of media discourse.

This theoretical foundation is expanded by the critical discourse analysis approaches of Van Dijk, Wodak, and Fairclough, who emphasize the relationship between language, ideology, and power. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model (1993, 2006) demonstrates how mental representations sustain social hierarchies, while Wodak's discourse-historical approach (2002, 2007) situates language within institutional and political contexts.

Fairclough (1995) complements these by framing discourse as both a medium and a site of social struggle, where hegemony is linguistically reproduced.

In the Turkish context, this critical orientation is deepened by the contributions of scholars such as İnal (1996), Binark (2007), Gazioğlu Terzi (2014), Doyuran (2018), and Sancar (2008), who have shown how ideological power and gendered representation are embedded in media narratives and visual culture. These works collectively reveal that surveillance, representation, and communication are intertwined cultural processes shaped by ideology and perception.

The theoretical aim, therefore, is to conceptualize surveillance not as a static mechanism of control but as a learned discursive practice, a form of social learning. This perspective unites Foucault's disciplinary power, Bandura's social learning, and Habermas's communicative rationality within the broader framework of critical discourse

theory, providing a comprehensive foundation for analyzing how individuals learn to participate in and reproduce the culture of surveillance.

2.1. Foucault and the Perceptual Foundations of Surveillance

Michel Foucault's (1975, 1987) conceptualization of discipline and the Panopticon illustrates how modern power relies on continuous observation and normalization. This idea parallels the analytical stance of Van Dijk (1983), who argues that power is reproduced through discourse structures, and Wodak (2002), whose discourse-historical approach situates communication within socio-political contexts.

In Turkey, Gazioğlu Terzi (2014) and Sancar (2008) demonstrate similar dynamics, showing how political discourse constructs gendered and ideological hierarchies within parliamentary speech. These processes exemplify Foucault's "microphysics of power," in which individuals internalize norms through exposure to dominant discourses.

Elbirlik (2015) and Elbirlik and Karabulut (2015) emphasize that the discursive systems in Ottoman and early modern Turkish political thought also functioned as instruments of ideological control. This continuity between classical and contemporary discourse further supports Foucault's claim that power is sustained through normalization and representation rather than overt coercion.

2.2. Bandura and the Social Learning of Surveillance: From Observation to Internalization

Albert Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* (1977, 1986) offers a framework for understanding how surveillance is learned behavior. Observation, imitation, and reinforcement are central to how individuals adopt the values and expectations presented through media.

As Bayraktutan et al. (2012, 2013) and Aziz (2013) show, digital communication platforms transform political participation into a cycle of mediated observation, in which citizens simultaneously observe, imitate, and internalize the behaviors of political actors. Similarly, Aygül (2013) and Çomu (2012) demonstrate that new media spaces such as Facebook and YouTube produce environments where ideological narratives and surveillance norms are emotionally reinforced. Within this learning framework, Van Dijk (2006) conceptualizes ideology as the mental architecture that organizes social knowledge, while Wodak (2007) highlights the linguistic strategies through which these ideologies are enacted and legitimized. Together, these models reveal that surveillance functions not only through technology but also through learned cognitive and emotional adaptation.

2.3. Habermas and the Public Sphere of Surveillance

Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere provides a crucial framework for understanding how surveillance discourse operates as a communicative and ideological practice within society. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas defines the public sphere as a domain of rational and critical debate where citizens form opinions through communication rather than coercion. However, in the digital age, this sphere has become increasingly mediated by institutions of representation, most notably the media.

Within this mediated environment, surveillance ceases to be a purely technical process and becomes a communicative phenomenon. Media discourse frames, interprets, and legitimizes surveillance through language and imagery that shape collective understanding. The framing of surveillance as either a necessity for public safety or a violation of personal privacy reflects ideological struggles over the definition of normality and freedom (Habermas, 1989; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2002).

In this regard, Yılmaz and Bektaş (2019b) provide empirical evidence showing that media outlets do not merely reflect but actively reproduce ideological boundaries through linguistic framing. Their analysis of Cypriot newspapers demonstrates that national identity and ideological positioning are constructed and maintained discursively through the reproduction of dominant political narratives. Yılmaz (2019) further elaborates that these

media discourses are not neutral but pedagogical in nature, teaching audiences how to interpret identity, ideology, and visibility within a polarized public sphere.

The Perceptual Surveillance Learning Theory (PSLT) builds upon this communicative and ideological framework by conceptualizing the media as a pedagogical actor within the public sphere. Through repetitive visual and textual representations, audiences learn not only what to think about surveillance but also how to feel about it. Each news narrative, photograph, or editorial functions as a micro-lesson in civic behavior, subtly instructing citizens on acceptable emotional and ethical responses.

This dynamic aligns with Habermas's notion of communicative action, wherein social understanding emerges through the interaction of meaning, validity, and consensus. In the context of mediated surveillance, the process of learning to consent replaces rational deliberation with affective normalization. As Foucault's disciplinary power and Bandura's behavioral learning intersect within this sphere, surveillance becomes a shared language of visibility, a social grammar of observation and acceptance (Habermas, 1989; Bandura, 1977; Foucault, 1975).

Through this lens, the public sphere becomes the cognitive and emotional space where surveillance culture is collectively constructed. Media representations operate as sites of social pedagogy, teaching audiences the language of compliance and visibility. Thus, Habermas's public sphere converges with the perceptual logic of surveillance, forming a communicative loop where perception, ideology, and consent are co-produced (Habermas, 1989; Yılmaz, 2019; Yılmaz & Bektaş, 2019b).

2.4. Ideology, Representation, and Discursive Power

Ideology, as Eagleton (2011) defines it, functions as the symbolic glue binding perception to power. Hall (1998) adds that representation is the central mechanism through which ideology becomes meaningful. Following Fairclough (1995), Wodak (2007), and Van Dijk (2006), this study conceptualizes media discourse as a site where surveillance and consent intersect, showing that citizens learn not only what to believe but also how to see themselves being seen. In this context, Yılmaz (2019) highlights that in the Cypriot media, identity and ideology are continuously negotiated through the repetition of symbolic and discursive patterns. This process not only reflects power relations but also constitutes them by teaching audiences how to perceive national belonging and civic responsibility. Similarly, Yılmaz and Bektaş (2019b) show that ideological discourse operates through the normalization of difference, framing certain political ideologies as natural while marginalizing others.

Within Turkish media, İnal (1996) and Tokgöz (1993, 1994) demonstrate how ideological structures are linguistically constructed through framing and repetition, producing consent and emotional alignment with authority. Keskin (2015) and Toruk and Sine (2012) extend this argument, showing how televised debates and political news replicate power through discursive cues that reinforce hegemonic narratives.

At a broader theoretical level, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) and Phillips and Hardy (2002) emphasize that discourse functions as both a methodological lens and a social process, mediating between symbolic systems and material practices. Howarth and Griggs (2016) and Ercan and Marsh (2016) further underline the value of qualitative analysis for revealing how ideology is produced and circulated within political communication.

Ultimately, surveillance and ideology converge as mutually reinforcing processes. Individuals learn the language of compliance, while media narratives naturalize visibility as civic virtue. This synthesis aligns with the foundational insights of Foucault (1975), Van Dijk (2006), Wodak (2007), and Habermas (1989), revealing that the modern subject is simultaneously the watcher and the watched, learning participation through discourse and perception (Yılmaz, 2019; Yılmaz & Bektaş, 2019b).

3. Materials and Methods

This research aims to examine the debates surrounding AI-supported traffic cameras that took place in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) during the summer of 2025. The study specifically analyzes the official statements made by the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation on its official Facebook page, as well as how these statements were reproduced, interpreted, and discussed in the media and among the public. The main objective is to reveal how social media, as a tool of political communication, transforms digital forms of the public sphere, particularly in times of crisis.

Data were collected from Facebook and online news platforms. The research universe includes posts from the official Facebook page of the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation, user comments on these posts, and newspaper articles reflecting the same debates (Kıbrıs Postası, Yenidüzen, Topuz, Gıynık, and MHA News). In addition, statements made by Turan Büyükyılmaz, Deputy Chairman of the Rebirth Party (YDP), were included in the sample, as they represent different ideological emphases and legitimation strategies within the same political discourse.

The dataset consists of social media content and news texts published between April and September 2025. This period was deliberately chosen to encompass the preparatory phase before the cameras were activated, the peak of public reaction, and the subsequent discursive shift in the government's communication. Thus, both digital public responses and the rhetorical strategies of political actors could be compared within the same time frame.

The study employs Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model as the analytical framework. This approach enables the examination of how ideologies and power relations are constructed, legitimized, and reproduced through discourse (Van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Within this framework, both written (newspaper articles, official statements) and visual-verbal (social media posts, televised remarks) texts were analyzed in terms of linguistic structure, lexical choices, narrative form, persuasion strategies, and contextual indicators (İnal, 1996).

Van Dijk's model of news discourse analysis was later systematized in tabular form by Özer (2009) and adapted to social media interactions by Bayraktutan et al. (2013) and Çomu and Halaiqa (2014). Following these adaptations, this study evaluates the "comments" section of Facebook posts as the primary interactional domain reflecting citizen participation. User comments were analyzed as discursive indicators that demonstrate public reactions and the direction of the ongoing debate.

The analysis process was also interpreted through the lens of behavioral-cognitive theory. This perspective allows for the assessment of individuals' responses to surveillance discourse not only on a linguistic level but also in cognitive and emotional dimensions. The behavioral-cognitive framework posits that individuals are active agents who interpret environmental stimuli, construct meaning, and restructure their reactions accordingly. Within this context, the individual in social media environments is viewed not merely as a respondent but as a meaning-making and position-taking actor. Hence, the findings of discourse analysis are interpreted within the dynamic interaction between individual perception, the sense of privacy, and social cognition.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Surveillance Discourse and Public Reaction: Contradictory Discourses in Media and Social Media

The announcements regarding the implementation of artificial intelligence-based traffic cameras initiated an intense public debate in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in August 2025, centered on the themes of security, order, and privacy. This debate was not limited to the technical introduction of a system but created a multilayered arena of negotiation between the state's security- and order-oriented discourse and the citizen's privacy-based counter-discourse. Throughout the process, traditional media, social media, and official statements

formed an interconnected discursive chain in which headlines, posts, and comments carried the same event into different ideological worlds of meaning (Van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997)

4.1.1. Macro-Level Discursive Structure

The macro-level discourse analysis examines the general ideological structure of the debates surrounding AI-supported traffic cameras through media discourse, political statements, and social reflections. At this level, the social meaning of surveillance is reproduced through the thematic organization of news, headline selection, and the positioning of actors (İnal, 1996; Özer, 2009).

August 2025 marked a period of intense discursive polarization in the TRNC media landscape following the introduction of AI traffic cameras. Kıbrıs Postası and Gıynık legitimized surveillance through the notions of modernization, civilization, and order, while Yenidüzen, Topuz, and Kıbrıs Objektif framed the issue around privacy, the inviolability of private life, and rights-based citizenship. In this way, the media became an ideological arena mediating between the state's official discourse of security and the citizen's demand for individual freedom.

News published in *Kıbrıs Postası* (August 7, 2025) included statements from the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation emphasizing that AI cameras were necessary for public safety and the maintenance of order. The ministry underlined that the system would record "only when a crime is committed," thereby legitimizing technological surveillance as a matter of public benefit. In this discourse, state authority was equated with public security, while individual privacy was subordinated in favor of social order.

Conversely, *Yenidüzen* (August 8 and 13, 2025) questioned the surveillance system within the framework of democratic oversight and privacy through headlines such as "Artificial Intelligence: Arbitrary Decision," "Insufficient Infrastructure Risks Waste," and "Traffic Commission Bypassed." The emphasis on "arbitrary decision" highlighted the critique of technological neutrality and, through expert legal opinions, brought the issue of protection of personal data to the public agenda.

Similarly, *Kıbrıs Objektif* made public reactions visible by reporting on protests organized through social media. The headline "Protest Against AI Cameras!" transformed citizens' digital resistance into physical action, demonstrating how online reactions materialized in the public sphere. This situation exemplifies Habermas's (1989) theory of the public sphere, showing how digital platforms can transform into arenas of political deliberation.

At the macro level, this structure clearly reveals two opposing axes within media discourse: the state axis legitimizes surveillance through notions of security, order, and technological progress, whereas the citizen axis opposes it through discourses centered on privacy, accountability, and rights. This dual structure parallels Foucault's (1977) model of disciplinary power, indicating that surveillance operates not only as a top-down mechanism but is also socially reproduced through media representations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

4.1.2. Micro-Level Discursive Structure

The micro-level analysis focuses on the formal elements of language and the construction of discourse. At this level, word choices, emphasis patterns, repetitions, and linguistic strategies constitute the most visible areas of ideological positioning.

Topuz (August 13, 2025) and *Gıynık* (August 13, 2025) both shifted the focus of the debate to social media posts during the same period. In *Gıynık's* article titled "Citizens React to AI-Supported Cameras," the following statements were included: "A text that has been circulating on social media in recent days is being shared by many users. The text expresses that people do not consent to the recording of the inside of their vehicles by cameras. [...] 'I am ... from the residents of ... This is my official written declaration... I DO NOT GIVE MY CONSENT OR PERMISSION!...'"

The widespread circulation of this post demonstrates how an individual reaction in the digital sphere transformed into a collective discourse of legal resistance. Similarly, *Kıbrıs Postası* (August 12, 2025) reproduced the same text directly, noting that it had been "shared thousands of times" on social media.

Although written as an individual legal declaration, it carried a strong counter-power discourse. The repeated expressions ("for any purpose whatsoever"), the use of uppercase letters ("I DO NOT GIVE MY CONSENT OR PERMISSION"), and the inclusion of official legal terminology ("this is my legal statement," "my right to compensation") indicate that anger was transformed into a form of cognitive regulation. This structure reflects Foucault's (1977) concept of the micro-level reversal of power, where individuals construct their own legality and produce counter-discourse against surveillance. At the micro level, the opposing discourse was represented by state actors. Officials of the M

inistry of Transportation stated, "Those who oppose cameras are encouraging traffic monsters," reestablishing authority through a blaming tone. Similarly, the phrase "Roads are public, not private" redefined the distinction between public and private space, legitimizing surveillance. In this discourse, the state was positioned as a protective authority, while dissenting voices were labeled as "those who oppose order."

These examples demonstrate that the state constructs its discourse around the axes of security and civilization, while citizens construct theirs around privacy and rights. Facebook and online news platforms thus functioned as digital public spaces where negotiation and conflict between these two poles took place simultaneously.

4.1.3. General Evaluation

The debate surrounding AI-based traffic cameras in August 2025 created a multilayered arena of struggle between the state's discourse centered on security and order and the citizen's counter-discourse grounded in privacy. *Kıbrıs Postası* and *Gıynık* legitimized surveillance through the notions of modernization and civilization, whereas *Yenidüzen*, *Topuz*, and *Kıbrıs Objektif* developed a critical counter-discourse emphasizing individual rights, private life, and public accountability.

During this process, Facebook and similar digital platforms functioned as digital public spaces where negotiation and conflict between these two discursive poles occurred simultaneously. The statements of state actors were reproduced through news texts, while citizens generated counter-discourses through comments, posts, and calls for protest, thereby reconstituting power relations within discourse itself. As Van Dijk's (2001) model of ideological polarization suggests, the binary opposition of "us versus them" was reconstructed through media language. Foucault's notion of the micro-level reversal of power became visible in citizens' individual posts, particularly in the "No Consent" declarations that circulated widely across social media.

5. Conclusions

This study evaluated the social and discursive reactions that emerged in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) during the implementation of AI-supported traffic cameras within a behavioral-cognitive theoretical framework. The main objective was to understand the perceptual, emotional, and cognitive reactions that surveillance technologies evoke in individuals, and how these reactions are transformed into collective social discourses through media and social media (Foucault, 1975; Bandura, 1977; Habermas, 1989; Van Dijk, 2001).

The behavioral-cognitive approach assumes that individuals are not passive recipients but active subjects who interpret environmental stimuli, make sense of them, and restructure their patterns of response accordingly (Bandura, 1986). Within this framework, reactions to AI cameras are not simply "technological fears" but cognitive processes shaped by reassessments of trust, privacy, authority, and personal space (Dökmen, 2009; Yılmaz & Bektaş, 2019b). The widespread statement "I do not give my consent or permission" represents an externalization of the individual's internalized sense of privacy.

This discourse signifies not a behavioral rejection but a cognitive effort to draw boundaries and construct a subjective domain of control (Foucault, 1977). From the perspective of surveillance theory, this process reproduces Foucault's "panopticon" model within a contemporary digital context (Foucault, 1975; Lyon, 2018). However, what is striking in the TRNC case is that these forms of surveillance are legitimized not only through state authority but also through a discourse of technological modernization (Yılmaz, 2025). While state actors redefine surveillance in terms of "civilization" and "order," citizens defend privacy within the framework of "rights" and "freedom." Thus, the tension between privacy and security was elevated from the individual level to a broader public debate (Habermas, 1989; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

This study demonstrates that discussions on surveillance technologies in the TRNC carry profound implications not only on legal or technical levels but also on the dimensions of identity, belonging, and governance (Castells, 2009; Hall, 1998). In a small-scale society where the boundaries between public visibility and private life are historically permeable, AI-supported cameras have made this permeability even more pronounced, linking individual behavior in public space directly to processes of cognitive self-regulation. While this has led to the internalization of surveillance, it has simultaneously produced new forms of resistance (Foucault, 1977; Bandura, 1986).

The findings reveal that in the TRNC context, surveillance and privacy are intertwined at cultural, political, and psychological levels. In the state's discourse, security becomes dominant, while in the citizen's discourse, freedom prevails; the media, in turn, serves as an intermediary platform between these two poles (Yılmaz & Bektaş, 2019b; İnal, 1996; Bayraktutan et al., 2012). This triadic structure (state, media, and citizen) shapes the cognitive map of the surveillance society.

Ultimately, this study shows how surveillance and privacy are conceptualized at both discursive and cognitive levels. From a behavioral-cognitive perspective, the individual does not perceive surveillance merely as an external mechanism of control but evaluates it within their own mental processes, producing reactions, consent, or resistance accordingly (Bandura, 1986; Dökmen, 2009). The TRNC case demonstrates that surveillance is not only a technological mechanism but also a cognitive experience that transforms social behavior patterns. In this respect, the research can be interpreted as an indicator of a new era in which the boundaries of privacy and the public sphere are being redefined in the digital age (Habermas, 1989; Foucault, 1977; Yılmaz, 2025).

4.1. Theoretical Evaluation and Contribution

This research combines the behavioral-cognitive approach with surveillance theory and public sphere discussions to present a new interpretation of the digital age (Habermas, 1989; Foucault, 1975; Bandura, 1986). In this framework, the individual is not merely the object of surveillance but an active subject who interprets environmental stimuli and produces patterns of reaction through cognitive processes.

Thus, the privacy discourse that emerges in social media can be interpreted as a practice of public subjectivity at the level of cognitive awareness (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2007; Yılmaz & Bektaş, 2019b). This theoretical framework gains particular significance within the small-scale and highly visible social structure of the TRNC. Here, surveillance technologies are not only instruments of technical control but also cognitive and social experiences in which notions of security, modernization, and belonging are redefined (Castells, 2009; Yılmaz, 2025). The behavioral-cognitive principle that "the individual regulates behavior by interpreting environmental stimuli" has proven functional in explaining forms of consent or resistance to surveillance (Bandura, 1977; Dökmen, 2009).

In this sense, the study goes beyond classical critiques of surveillance by revealing the intersection between cognitive processes and public discourse (Van Dijk, 2006; Wodak, 2007; Hall, 1998). It demonstrates that privacy is not merely an individual right but also a determinant of collective cognition and social behavioral patterns (Ercan & Marsh, 2016). Ultimately, this research contributes to the literature on both surveillance and the public sphere

by introducing a cognitive-discursive analytical perspective that redefines state–citizen relations in the digital era (Habermas, 1989; Foucault, 1975; Bandura, 1986; Yılmaz, 2025).

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