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The Governance of Queer Visibility in Platformized Public Spheres

Irina Bănoiu and Laura Wiesböck

Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna, Austria

Correspondence: Irina Bănoiu (irina.banoiu@ihs.ac.at)

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Abstract

Queer visibility in contemporary digital cultures is increasingly mediated by platformized public spheres, where it is both produced and governed through socio-technical infrastructures. While social media platforms provide important opportunities for queer users—including community formation, identity exploration, and circulation of counternarratives beyond traditional gatekeeping institutions—they simultaneously organize visibility in uneven ways. Platform infrastructures embed normative assumptions and capitalistic incentives that selectively amplify, suppress, or modulate queer expression through mechanisms of datafication, selection, and commodification. As a result, queer visibility is a structurally precarious condition marked by the simultaneous presence of hypervisibility, erasure, and surveillance. Bringing critical platform studies and social justice theory into dialogue, this conceptual article analyses how new regimes of queer visibility emerge and are shaped by platform mechanisms and considers their implications for representation, recognition, and redistribution. In doing so, it develops an analytical framework centered on three interlocking governance logics—quantification, normativity, and profitability—that organize visibility as a site of contestation and an object of control. Finally, the article introduces the concept of "platformized (in)visibilization" to describe the ambivalent role of platforms as both enabling and constraining environments for expression in contemporary digital cultures, affecting political legitimacy, social equality, and economic justice.

Keywords

LGBTQIA+; platformization; platformized public spheres; queer visibility; social justice; social media

1. Introduction

Queer visibility in public spheres has long been intertwined with struggles for social justice, serving as a means of recognition and a site of political contestation. Visibility—understood as a socially organized field

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of acknowledgement in which subjects become intelligible and consequential within public life (Brighenti, 2007)—is closely linked to the legitimation of marginalized identities. It provides opportunities for representation and identification among queer audiences, carrying the potential to shape ideological conceptions of naturalness and desirability, while simultaneously functioning as a safeguard against social erasure and political exclusion (Brighenti, 2007, 2010; Casper & Moore, 2009). Historically, queer lives were frequently omitted from public spheres and the media, a process referred to as "symbolic annihilation" (Gross, 1991), whereby non-appearance signaled and sustained marginal status. Yet, in current times, the conditions under which visibility is produced, circulated, and valued have changed profoundly with the rise of platformized publics. Digital platforms enable unprecedented forms of self-expression, community building, and activism while subjecting queer visibility to algorithmic governance, commercialization, and intensified surveillance (Brighenti, 2022). As public discourse increasingly unfolds within platform infrastructures, questions of who becomes visible, under what conditions, and with what political implications have become central to understanding contemporary struggles for queer legitimacy and social justice.

These digital reconfigurations are particularly evident on social media platforms which have become key sites for producing and negotiating the socio-technical processes of queer (in)visibilization. This development can be traced back to trans persons and HIV/AIDS activists being amongst the early adopters of online bulletin boards for their accessibility and anonymity, countering stigma, harassment, and exclusion from public discussions (Brewster & Ruberg, 2020; Wagner, 2024). Early accounts of cyberqueer spaces highlighted their association with pornography, censorship justified through "harm to children" rationales, and the commodification of access to "others of your kind" (Wakeford, 1997/2000, p. 410). While capitalist, patriarchal, and platform-mediated public spheres sustain these dynamics, they also open space for agency, representation, and resistance. Currently, in legislative contexts where queerness is prohibited, social media is framed as a crucial—if not the only—space that enable queer individuals to be visible, express themselves, and form communities (Ncube & Sibanda, 2024). Such platforms provide access to communicative resources and support, permit the emergence of counterpublics, and allow the circulation of counternarratives beyond traditional gatekeeping institutions (Dyer & Abidin, 2023). Thus, social media are central infrastructures for the societal dissemination and collaborative creation of alternative understandings of gender and sexuality, including narratives emphasizing gender self-determination, sexual fluidity, critiques of compulsory monogamy, as well as intersectional approaches to identity and inequality (Hammack & Manago, 2025). At the same time, however, enhanced queer visibility itself cannot be equated with progressive social change. While the public visibility of queerness is linked to processes of opinion formation concerning the salience, legitimacy, and perceived appropriateness of identities and behaviors, it may simultaneously produce increased exposure to violence in the form of scrutiny, ridicule, and marginalization (Brighenti, 2007, 2010, 2022). As key infrastructures of contemporary public spheres, platforms do not merely host public discourses but actively structure the creation, circulation, and exposure of it through algorithmic systems, economic incentives, and governance mechanisms.

Heteronormative bias is systematically embedded in digital platforms in both their design histories and contemporary governance cultures (Wajcman & Young, 2023). From their inception, platform architectures have been shaped by patriarchal assumptions about gender, sexuality, and social visibility, which become encoded in technical affordances, ranking systems, and policies. Thus, more than representing an "imperfect translation of an already inequitable reality" (Dyer & Abidin, 2023, p. 9), platforms produce new forms of injustice, operating as socio-technical environments that shape social interaction and mediate processes of

visibilization. Through platform policies, logics, and practices—such as automatic flagging of reclaimed language as "toxic" (Dias Oliva et al., 2021), "shadowbanning" (Rauchberg, 2022), or en masse account removals (Down, 2025)—social media infrastructures may intensify struggles over recognition and belonging of queer "users-citizens" (van Dijck, 2014). Consequently, visibility becomes a contested resource subject to strategic optimization, surveillance, and unequal distribution, simultaneously enabling and constraining queer expression and standing in platformized public spheres, and thereby being inherently of political relevance. As such, restrictions to the visibility of queer content on platforms reflect forms of biopolitical control, regulation, and erasure of sexuality and gender (Floegel, 2022).

While scholarship has generated important insights into both queer experiences on social media and the governance structures of digital platforms, the relationship between these two fields remains insufficiently theorized. So far, research has examined the visibility practices of queer users and content creators on social media, highlighting performances and expressions of gender and sexuality (Abidin, 2019), world-making (Ryan & Tileva, 2022), algorithmic imaginaries (Chartrand & Duguay, 2025), privacy and safety (Cho, 2018), identity development (Bates et al., 2020), or labor precarity (Stegeman et al., 2024). A further strand of research has elaborated on the implicit structures, logics, and platform mechanisms governing the creation and distribution of content from platforms in general (van Dijck et al., 2018), to social media as a field of study (van Dijck & Poell, 2013), to analyses of specific social media such as TikTok (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). What remains underexplored is how the governance logics of social media platforms—understood as expressions of power over the platform ecosystem through data collection, algorithms, interfaces, business models, and user agreements that shape social and economic interactions (van Dijck et al., 2018)—produce differential visibility regimes for queer users-citizens. This is becoming increasingly salient in sociopolitical terms as the infrastructures of social media platforms align more closely with reactionary political and cultural agendas.

Against this backdrop, this article develops a theoretical understanding of how queer (in)visibility is shaped by governance logics of social media platforms. By bringing critical platform studies (van Dijck et al., 2018) and social justice theory (Fraser, 2009) into dialogue, it analyses how new regimes of visibility are emerging, established, and shaped by social media platform mechanisms operating in conjunction with hegemonic norms and business interests. It further examines how these regimes reconfigure the conditions under which queer visibility—understood as the visibility of individuals identifying with non-normative genders or sexualities—is granted, negotiated, and contested in platformized public spheres, and introduces the analytical framework of platformized (in)visibilization. In doing so, the article foregrounds how the political legitimacy of minoritized groups is structured within current configurations of platformized public spheres, particularly in relation to discursive power, social standing, and material opportunities. The article proceeds as follows. First, it examines platformized public spheres and the reconfiguration of queer visibility within contemporary socio-technical systems in relation to Fraser's framework of social justice. It then elaborates on how platforms govern queer visibility through three logics: quantification, normativity, and profitability. Finally, it concludes with a discussion, followed by directions for future research on platformized (in)visibilization.

2. Visibility and Social Justice in Platformized Public Spheres

Conceptualizing queer visibility in contemporary contexts requires engaging with theories of the public sphere and their entanglement with questions of social justice. Originally, the public sphere was understood

as one singular discursive arena for public opinion formation through deliberation, which was open to all citizens, and shaped by media systems and their infrastructures (Habermas, 1991). In this pre-digital understanding, visibility is primarily conceptualized as the publicity afforded to actors in legacy media, serving as a condition for public sphere deliberation and democratic legitimacy. Subsequent scholarship has reframed the public sphere not as singular but as a plurality of overlapping and unequal discursive arenas, in which what counts as "public" is shaped by persons belonging to dominant social classes, genders, and races (Fraser, 1990). Foregrounding the unequal conditions structuring visibility in public spheres (Fraser, 1997), this framework guides our understanding of queer visibility in current digital configurations and its implications for social justice. The visibility of queer persons is closely intertwined with questions of social justice, as public arenas and governance infrastructures co-produce competing narratives and framings that shape which issues are recognized as legitimate subjects of public deliberation and which responses are considered appropriate for policymaking (Durnová et al., 2016). On the one hand, public spheres enable the articulation of injustices, the problematization of unequal conditions, and the recognition of those affected, thereby potentially influencing democratic decision-making processes (Trenz, 2024). On the other hand, the voices and standings of minoritized groups within public spheres are themselves shaped by the extent to which principles of social justice are realized (Fraser, 2009). In this sense, queer visibility emerges from and simultaneously conditions the capacity of queer citizens to articulate claims in public deliberation and to contest the economic and cultural structures that underpin marginalization (Fraser, 2008; Trenz, 2024).

Within Fraser's (2008) framework, social justice comprises the interrelated dimensions of representation, recognition, and redistribution, all of which are fundamental to democratic participation and legitimacy. These dimensions are mutually reinforcing and complexly related to visibility—understood as the political condition of being seen and rendered intelligible within public communicative arenas. While shaped by queer (in)visibilization in multiple ways, they simultaneously structure it. First, queer visibility is closely associated with political representation, which governs legitimacy and the boundaries of deliberation within public spheres (Fraser, 2008). As such, visibility and framing may shape social judgments concerning whether queer individuals and issues are understood as politically relevant or as private and trivial matters. Second, visibility is closely tied to cultural recognition, theorized as status equality regardless of identity (Fraser, 2008). For queer individuals, both invisibility and "hypervisibility" (Gailey, 2014)—understood as exposure to disproportionate attention and intensified critical scrutiny—imply exclusionary othering processes and consequently misrecognition within heterosexist social structures, thereby contributing to the denial of equal standing in social life and interactions (Ahmed, 2014; Fraser, 1997). Finally, recognition is intertwined with material redistribution, as in capitalist patriarchal societies the interrelated dimensions of social justice jointly shape queer lives through the mutual reinforcement of cultural and economic inequalities, thereby compounding disadvantages associated with both class and social status (Fraser, 1997, 2008). This triad specifies the political stakes of queer visibility: legitimacy in political debates (representation), social standing (recognition), and access to resources (redistribution).

Bringing Fraser's understanding of public spheres and social justice into dialogue with scholarship engaging with the platformization of public spheres (Fischer & Jarren, 2024), this theoretical article analyses how new regimes of queer visibility emerge and are shaped by social media platform mechanisms and considers their implications for representation, recognition, and redistribution, as shown in Figure 1. Platformized public spheres differ from previous theoretical understandings in substantial ways, particularly with regard to agency and risks for queer persons. On the one hand, platform-mediated public spheres offer reduced

barriers to participation and facilitate the circulation of diverse narratives, collective identities, and eyewitness accounts (Wallaschek et al., 2024). Social media platforms can be described as carrying democratizing potential: they are accessible, low-cost, and highly effective in the large-scale dissemination of content, enabling users-citizens to produce and circulate their own representations, circumvent the centralized gatekeeping of legacy media, and address queer exclusion (Fischer & Jarren, 2024; Floegel, 2022). For queer individuals, these lowered barriers to participation create new opportunities for visibility in emergent discursive arenas, facilitating public self-expression, awareness-raising, and the formation of support networks and counterpublics (Edingo, 2021; Lee et al., 2018). Related to that, there is an increasing fragmentation of public spheres under platformization, enabling the formation of segmented digital publics organized around shared identities, characteristics, and affinities. These alternate discursive arenas allow queer individuals to articulate non-hegemonic identities, interests, and political positions, with potential implications for public opinion formation, institutional critique, and accountability (Edingo, 2021; Lee et al., 2018).

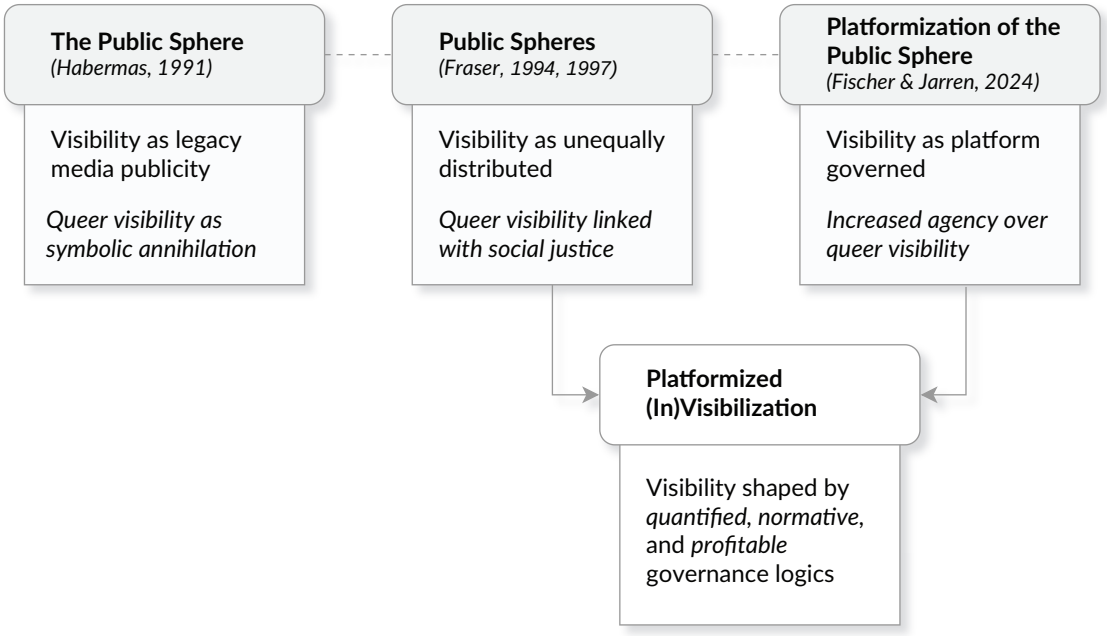


Figure 1. Theoretical strands of public spheres and their relation to queer visibility.

On the other hand, queer visibility has not simply expanded in platformized public spheres but was rather rendered contingent, given that dominant meanings of gender and sexuality emerge through an ongoing struggle over visibility between platform governance and users-citizens. Public communication within profit-oriented platform infrastructures embeds public spheres within capitalist logics, raising questions about the influence of commercial incentives on communicative autonomy and democratic deliberation (Habermas, 2022; van Dijck & Poell, 2015). As privately owned, profit-driven socio-technical ecosystems, social media platforms leverage their position as key infrastructures of contemporary public spheres to advance capital accumulation. This is reflected in marketing discourses that appeal to cosmopolitan ideals of democratization, as well as in the maintenance of a libertarian veneer in which notions of freedom and autonomy are foregrounded, whereas underlying governance processes remain largely opaque (Elkins, 2019; Obreja, 2026). Whilst corporate and algorithmic control is often obscured by democratic promises

within platformized public spheres (Obreja, 2026), platform governance logics nonetheless shape public deliberation and thereby influence conditions of social justice for queer users-citizens.

As central gatekeepers of public and political communication, platforms therefore require critical analysis through the lens of social justice, particularly in relation to queer users-citizens whose visibility and legitimacy are differentially affected by social media governance logics. Shifting from traditional conceptualizations of the public sphere to understandings in which visibility is unequally distributed and related to social justice, we critically examine how social media platforms configure the conditions under which visibility is produced, distributed, and contested. From this perspective, platforms establish and govern a complex dynamic grid upon which users-citizens are rendered (in)visible through specific sociotechnical logics, a process we understand as "platformized (in)visibilization."

3. Theorizing Platform Governance and the Politics of Queer (In)Visibilization

Investigating the governance logics of social media platforms is key to understanding emerging queer visibility regimes and more generally, processes of platformized (in)visibilization. A growing body of research highlights that the architectures of social media platforms shape societies through interlocking mechanisms that conjoin user practices, technical infrastructures, and commercial strategies, binding complementors such as advertisers and content creators (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Within this architecture, platforms enable, constrain, demand, encourage, sustain, intensify, and steer forms of behavior and social relations (Bauer, 2024; Wiesböck, Wang, et al., 2026). Part of this governance is the historical dominance of white, cisgender, heterosexual male actors in the tech industry, shaping not only organizational cultures but also the epistemic frameworks that guide developmental, architectural, and design decisions and data practices (Noble, 2018). Such concentration of power influences what is rendered visible within platform systems, embedding heteronormative and patriarchal biases into technical infrastructures, algorithms, and platform governance strategies (Chang, 2018), thereby marginalizing certain groups as outliers and perpetuating cycles of injustice (Wajcman & Young, 2023).

To theorize how queer visibility is conditioned by social media platforms and how this relates to social justice as well as equitable participation in public deliberation, van Dijck et al.'s (2018) account of datafication, selection, and commodification provides a productive analytical lens for understanding platform governance logics. As driving forces that steer social and economic interactions, we draw upon these mechanisms to unpack how power is redistributed and how public values are contested in the "platform society" (van Dijck et al., 2018). "Datafication" denotes the capturing, classifying, and organizing of online behavior, which supports personalization and targeted advertising, underpinning the two subsequent mechanisms (van Dijck, 2014). "Selection" curates content and governs its distribution and relevance by translating data traces into prioritization through algorithmic ranking and personalization (van Dijck et al., 2018). "Commodification" determines how visibility is valued and remunerated, employing attention as an intermediate currency between creators, users, and advertisers (van Dijck et al., 2018).

These mechanisms do not directly map onto, but can be read in relation to the social justice dimensions of representation, recognition, and redistribution in digital environments. We argue that these three platform mechanisms structurally condition queer (in)visibilization within platformized public spheres, shape political boundaries and the standing of users-citizens, thereby influencing the extent to which social justice is

enacted or constrained, as depicted in Figure 2. Building on this, we conceptualize three governance logics of social media platforms that shape queer (in)visibility in platformized public spheres: quantified, normative, and profitable visibilization, which jointly constitute the process of platformized (in)visibilization.

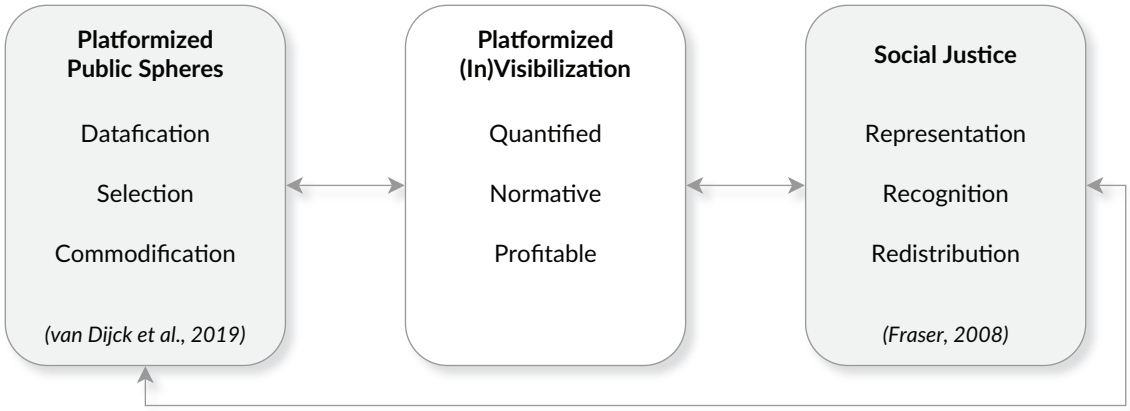


Figure 2. Platformized (in)visibilization in relation to platformized public spheres and social justice.

3.1. Quantified Visibilization: Identity Constraints Through Classification Practices

"Quantified visibilization" systematically disadvantages queer users-citizens through the reduction of complex identities to categories and binaries that flatten diversity and naturalize normative assumptions regarding gender and sexuality. As part of the platform mechanism of datafication, it operates through classification, enabling surveillance, prediction, and personalization.

Within this infrastructure, the process of classification is foundational for the enforcement of quantified visibilization. Through recording, counting, labeling, and categorizing platforms generate hierarchies of visibility that privilege legible, normatively stable identities while marginalizing those that exceed predefined categories. In this sense, classification does not merely sort individuals but actively stabilizes binaries such as "male/female" or "normal/deviant," thereby naturalizing existing social hierarchies (Saunders, 2025; Wajcman & Young, 2023). Inherent frictions exist in translating and scaling non-normative or fluid queer identities into data due to the shortcomings of demographic collection methods and vocabularies, for example, the lack of options for gender as a spectrum or self-reported (Weathington & Brubaker, 2023). Affordances and requirements of data fields reduce complexity and bind individuals to rigid conceptualizations of identities (Weathington & Brubaker, 2023), which are often treated as authoritative, and reinforce the visibility of privileged positionalities and cultures such as Western, white, masculine, bourgeois, heterosexual, and Christian (Zeffiro, 2019). Queerness is inherently opposed to and intentionally challenges classifications, resisting definitions, fixed groupings, and reductive categorizations that disadvantage queer users-citizens within visibilization regimes established on quantification principles (Saunders, 2025). One way in which quantified processes limit visibility is through automated content removal. For example, on Instagram, 90% of content removals are carried out before any user report is even submitted (Meta, n.d.). According to creators, these automated moderation systems discriminate against and routinely suppress queer content (Lightfoot, 2026).

Classification is extended through a continuous chain of surveillance, predictions, and personalization, with implications for behavioral modulation. Platform infrastructures not only collect large-scale behavioral data but also infer preferences, anticipate actions, and shape future conduct through algorithmic recommendation systems (Zuboff, 2019). Empirical evidence demonstrates that such systems can infer sensitive attributes, including sexual orientation, with high predictive accuracy (Kosinski et al., 2013). Simultaneously, they enable personalized identity-based marketing that reinforces hegemonial norms, as reflected in queer users-citizens' reports of being targeted with "homonormative" (Duggan, 2014) advertising (Sampson et al., 2023). This produces paradoxical visibility conditions for queer users-citizens: They are often statistically underrepresented within aggregated systems of classification which structure their visibility, yet simultaneously hypervisible within surveillance infrastructures that render their data actionable for commercial and political actors. At the same time, these mechanisms extend beyond prediction and surveillance into the shaping of subjectivity, as interactions with algorithmically curated environments or personalized feeds on social media inform self-understanding and influence self-making (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Repeated exposure to normative identity scripts can thus intensify self-presentation and behavioral alignment with hegemonic standards (Saunders, 2025), particularly as content recommendations can be understood as accurate reflections of identity or an "algorithmized self" (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).

Overall, quantified visibilization privileges normative forms of self-presentation, rendering queer individuals less visible by design, as their identities exceed predefined categories while simultaneously extracting and monetizing sensitive personal data in ways that sustain stereotypical and homonormative ideals of expression. Consequently, queer representation in platformized public spheres may be unevenly constrained and queer persons thereby delegitimized, which may influence the boundaries of inclusion and broader visions of social order (Saunders, 2025; Zeffiro, 2019).

3.2. Normative Visibilization: Silencing of Non-Conformity Through Moderation

Categories shaped by heteronormative biases further reinforce the governance logic of "normative visibilization," which relies on quantification and hierarchical ordering to privilege dominant groups. Informed by the platform mechanism of selection, it operates primarily through content moderation, which frequently targets queer content for visibility restrictions. In this sense, queer users-citizens are differentially disadvantaged, as their visibility is constrained by both heteronormative and homonormative regimes which construct dichotomies of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" forms of expression.

Within this constellation, moderation acts as a key process of normative visibilization, enacted through the filtering, restriction, and deletion of content according to patriarchal and capitalist principles of platform corporations (Gillespie, 2018). Platform policies regarding sexual, explicit, and pornographic content routinely conflate queer expression with obscenity, affecting educational, artistic, and political speech (Monea, 2022). In practice, queer content is more frequently flagged, deprioritized, invisibilized, labelled as non-recommendable, or removed than content conforming to dominant forms of gender expression (Monea et al., 2024). Recent examples point to the restriction and removal of Meta accounts of more than 50 international organizations discussing queer, gender, and sexuality issues, despite non-explicit content (Down, 2025).

Queer users-citizens experience overt and covert constraints, including content or account removal and "shadowbanning," namely the practice of unnotified content invisibilization (Rauchberg, 2022). While platforms deny the practice, an analysis of TikTok guidelines reveals that moderation operates along three categories: allowed, not allowed, and "For You Feed ineligible," whereby content remains on the platform but is excluded from the personalized feed curated by the recommendation algorithm (Xu, 2026). Further documented cases include YouTube's "restricted mode" for filtering mature content which blocks non-explicit queer videos such as "8 Black LGBTQ+ Trailblazers Who Inspire Me" (Abidin, 2019). When queer content is framed as "adult" or "controversial," affective judgments are encouraged through emotional framings of risk and morality, fostering fear and othering while echoing long-standing discriminatory arguments against queer people such as "protecting the children" (Ahmed, 2014; Jones, 2011). Beyond invisibilization, this form of "one-size-fits-all" moderation associates queerness with "explicit" or "unsafe" labels, reinforcing reductions of queer subjects to sexuality and (re)producing marginalization and stereotypes of queer persons as dangerous others, promiscuous, and unfit for being visible in public (Monea et al., 2024; Nedvědová, 2026; Southerton et al., 2021).

Anticipating such sanctions, creators may engage in a variety of strategies that could potentially interfere with their intended forms of self-expression. For example, queer users-citizens may employ "algospeak" (Aleksic, 2026), a form of coded communication based on intentional misspellings or phonetic substitutions designed to evade algorithmic detection of key terms—for instance, "le dollar bean" derived from "Le$bian," or "WLW" as an abbreviation for "woman-loving-woman"—in order to maintain visibility within platformized public spheres. Widely used among queer persons, these linguistic repertoires can become stabilized at the community level and may persist long after the original terms are no longer systematically targeted by platform moderation (Griffin, 2024; Monea et al., 2024). Other types of queer expression that elude algorithmic invisibilization are those aligned with homonormative assimilative practices that do not challenge but conform to heteronormative institutions and social standards in order to achieve greater acceptance into dominant society, or in this case, increased visibility in platformized public spheres (Liu, 2015; Sandoval, 2000).

Studies further show that content depicting privileged bodies and relationships, such as hypermasculine gay men with lighter skin tones and homonormative coupling narratives, is more likely to be algorithmically promoted than content featuring Blackness, fatness, or gender non-conformity, despite comparable or higher engagement (Souza et al., 2025). Moreover, trans creators and content that critiques patriarchal structures—such as the dominance of heterosexual white men—are among the most removed from social media despite complying with platform guidelines (Haimson et al., 2021). Research on fandom platforms similarly indicates that restrictions do not affect all queer persons equally: trans, non-Western, and POC content is more politicized and prone to expulsion as "adult," "not safe for work" (NSFW), or "pornographic," resulting in the most marginalized queer user-citizens experiencing the most harm within and beyond digital spaces (Floegel, 2022). Other scholars emphasize that the visibility of queer content depends on the concealing of queer desire to construct an image of a "good" user-citizen (Southerton et al., 2021). Thus, while instrumental in increasing visibility within platformized public spheres, homonormative expression does not entail equal standing but may instead imply hypervisibilization which risks crystallizing a one-dimensional image of queer identity for mainstream audiences.

Taken together, normative visibilization refers to the restriction of divergent forms of queer expression and the undermining of critique through the ranking and moderation of content in accordance with both heteronormative and homonormative standards. Since ranking algorithms prioritize normative content, regardless of user choices or preferences (Souza et al., 2025), queer visibility and representation are bound to homonormative depictions, such as white, fit, and hypermasculine gay men, thereby reproducing the image of legitimate political subjects in line with hegemonial norms. Given that these governance logics apply to all users-citizens, including queer political content creators who take stances and occupy issue spaces on topics of gender and sexuality (Bauer, 2024), normative visibilization significantly structures queer discourse in platformized public spheres through invisibility and hypervisibility.

3.3. Profitable Visibilization: Commodification of Expression in Advertising Economies

Lastly, platforms reinforce hegemonic standards through "profitable visibilization," highlighting the dominance of capitalist imperatives within platform ecosystems. Informed by the platform mechanism of commodification, monetization aligns queer visibility with advertiser suitability through financial incentives, rendering it dependent on brand safety and commercial risk assessments. Building on quantified hierarchies produced through datafication and normative selection processes, platforms privilege brand-safe representations while penalizing non-conforming expressions and re-establish norms of "good" and "bad" queerness (Kopf, 2020). Under this logic, diverse creators are rendered invisible through the interlinked processes of recommendation and remuneration.

Within these dynamics, monetization functions as a key mechanism of profitable visibilization, intensifying the stakes of the algorithmic visibility economy to the detriment of queer creators by compounding losses in reach with economic disadvantage (Cotter, 2019; Stegeman et al., 2023). Positioning themselves as intermediaries between creators, audiences, and advertisers, platform companies shape the allocation of resources and power by aligning public communication with marketing goals (Stegeman et al., 2023; van Dijck et al., 2018). Demonetization is often linked to "non-recommendable" classifications and disproportionately affects queer users-citizens, whose content is more frequently labeled "unsafe" for advertisers than comparable content by non-queer persons. Empirical studies highlight that queer content creators disparately experience invisibilization, reduced discursive influence, metal health and well-being harms, alongside economic losses due to demonetization (Kingsley et al., 2022). Such classifications reinforce stereotypes of queerness as inherently explicit or dangerous, narrow the scope of articulable topics, and enhance the invisibilization of political debates, particularly regarding trans topics, queer struggles, and content that critiques dominant groups, as evidenced by reported cases (Haimson et al., 2021; Monea, 2022).

Since visibility is a prerequisite for remuneration, a recognizable template of "marketable queerness" is fostered and sustained (Stegeman et al., 2023), alongside "rainbow capitalism" (Chasin, 2000), foregrounding consumption, lifestyle, and spectacle while obscuring social, structural, and material inequalities (Hennessy, 1994, 2017; Liu, 2015). In a similar vein, queer creators are highly aware of the instrumental value of visibility, with empirical studies showing that drag live streamers adapt their performances of queerness to both monetization standards and followers' expectations (Persaud & Perks, 2022). Examples include carrying out "visibility labour" (Abidin, 2016), presenting queer experiences in commercially legible forms such as coming-out narratives, homonormative coupling and uncoupling stories, or partial identity disclosure

through innuendos or "queerbaiting" (Abidin, 2019). Further research suggests that the commercial logics of the content creation economy reward the disclosure of vulnerability as a marker of authenticity with increased visibility, while simultaneously incentivizing antagonism, potentially amplifying harms, particularly for marginalized groups (Duffy et al., 2024). Conversely, hypervisible queer creators may be "tokenized" (Kanter, 1977) and scrutinized as representative of the entire queer community (Gailey, 2014; Mercer, 1990).

As a consequence, commercialization is intrinsically linked to the depoliticization of queer culture, since queer expression is adapted to revenue-generating standards in order to achieve visibility and is thereby likely to be stripped of its radical political potential, equality concerns, and subversive elements (Wiesböck, Osipova, et al., 2026). Given that the queer premise of challenging cisgender and heteronormative narratives becomes increasingly untenable, the mainstreaming of queer culture familiarizes broader audiences with homonormative forms while simultaneously reducing space for non-conforming expression. In a manner analogous to normative visibilization, dominant modes of representation and practice are appropriated by audiences, thereby extending and stabilizing capitalist platform logics beyond digital contexts.

In sum, profitable visibilization ties recommendation to remuneration, rewarding market-aligned representations and disadvantaging non-conforming expression, ultimately marginalizing queer voices through both non-recommendation and demonetization. Since platforms implement (de)monetization according to normative judgments of desirability, the boundaries of platformized public spheres are increasingly shaped by profit logics and marketing objectives which may narrow the repertoire of topics available for public deliberation. Commodified depictions of queerness risk portraying it as a lifestyle choice, thereby negatively affecting its legitimacy and political standing (Raymond, 2003). Related inequalities in status and standing within platformized public spheres may be further reinforced by uneven capacities for self-commodification within heteronormative and homonormative systems. Jointly, reduced visibility and demonetization constrain the discursive power of creators addressing non-hegemonic topics and limit their access to social, political, and financial resources and opportunities. In interrelation with quantified and normative visibilization, this governance logic ties queer visibility to commercial viability, perpetuates stereotypes, and promotes a mainstreamed, marketable template of queerness, ultimately constraining the articulation of social justice claims in platformized public spheres.

4. Reconceptualizing (In)Visibility in Platformized Environments: Discussion and Conclusion

In contemporary public life, queer visibility is increasingly entangled with platform infrastructures, algorithmic systems, and corporate governance regimes. While social media platforms have expanded opportunities for queer self-representation and the formation of counterpublics, they are inseparable from mechanisms of datafication, automated classification, and commercial optimization that shape what can be seen, amplified, or rendered intelligible. This carries significant political implications, since queer visibility is understood as a condition for social justice, particularly in its dimensions of representation, recognition, and redistribution (Fraser, 2008). By shaping the boundaries of public deliberation, it influences which subjects are valued, included, and legitimized, thereby affecting discursive power, social standing, and material opportunities. Against this backdrop, this article systematically examines how queer (in)visibility is produced through platform governance.

We conceptualize three interlocking governance logics that affect queer users-citizens in differential ways. First, quantified visibilization renders identities and interactions legible through categories and metrics, extending from counting and labeling to prediction and behavioral modulation. For queer users-citizens, the same classificatory systems that enable discovery can also encode misrecognition, underrepresent non-normative identities, and expose users-citizens to profiling and targeting through homonormative advertising. Second, normative visibilization governs circulation by filtering, ranking, and enforcing policies that delineate what is seen, by whom, and under which conditions. By classifying queer content as sexually explicit, moderation practices both overtly and covertly reduce its visibility, while also incentivizing anticipatory self-censorship and promoting homonormative expressive scripts. Third, profitable visibilization links attention and revenue, selectively rewarding commercially compatible depictions while penalizing critical, activist, or non-normative content through demonetization and reduced reach, thereby reinforcing tokenization and the mainstreaming of marketable queerness. Together, these dynamics disadvantage non-normative expressions while amplifying culturally and commercially legible depictions, narrowing representational diversity and shaping who can convert visibility into recognition and material opportunities. As a whole, the three governance logics fall under the framework of "platformized (in)visibilization," which we propose to describe how opportunities for representation, recognition, and redistribution are mediated by platforms through algorithmic classification, moderation, and revenue alignment, under heteronormative and profit-oriented constraints.

For queer users-citizens, governance logics of social media platforms carry considerable implications because they operate through at least two intertwined layers of normative constraints. The first is heteronormative: Platform rules, automated moderation systems, and advertiser-friendly policies often encode assumptions about binary gender and "acceptable" forms of sexuality, leading to the suppression, downranking, or contextual restriction of queer expression, especially when it is sexual, political, or non-conforming. The second is homonormative: Even when queer visibility is granted, it is frequently filtered through dominant, platform-legible representations of queerness that privilege depoliticized, assimilationist, and stereotypically "acceptable" identities, while marginalizing queer expressions that are racialized, trans, gender-nonconforming, sex-positive, or otherwise deviate from traditional norms of respectability. These two layers produce a form of "stereotyping within stereotyping" in which queer users-citizens are not only subjected to broader heteronormative erasure but are also differentially rendered visible according to internal hierarchies of legibility and desirability within queerness itself. As a result, platform governance does not simply regulate the degree of queer visibility but actively structures its quality, stratification, and political intelligibility.

Taken together, quantified, normative, and profitable governance logics produce visibility regimes that (re)shape social justice concerns for queer individuals in platformized public spheres. With regard to representation, platform logics narrow what is deemed legitimate for circulation, redraw the boundaries of public debate, and privilege depictions that fit algorithmic legibility and brand-safety frames, thereby reducing the range of identities and issues rendered politically relevant and worthy of public attention. For recognition, status equality is conditioned by heteronormative standards further reinforced through homonormative templates, as moderation and ranking practices signal which forms of queerness are acceptable and which are treated as risky, explicit, or out of place, thereby normalizing misrecognition of queer users-citizens. These conditions extend to material redistribution, where attention is linked to monetization and advertiser suitability, resulting in less visibility for non-conforming creators, as well as

fewer resources and discursive power. Taken together, platformized (in)visibilization ties the legitimacy of claims, the standing of speakers, and access to remuneration to socio-technical and commercial criteria that queer users-citizens meet unevenly, constraining the capacity to articulate and advance demands for social justice.

Building on this, social media generally falls short of constituting a public sphere in a democratic sense, despite its apparent resemblance in terms of openness to participation in public communication. Access to visibility and influence is systematically uneven, as communicative prominence is shaped by algorithmic ranking systems, engagement logics, and commercial imperatives. Moreover, as privately owned infrastructures, platforms regulate the conditions of discourse through opaque and mutable governance regimes that remain largely outside democratic accountability and scholarly investigation. This also constitutes a limitation of the present article, as the analysis of social media governance logics relies primarily on secondary accounts. As a result, inequalities in communicative power are not only reproduced but potentially amplified, shaping which issues gain societal relevance and which remain peripheral. At the same time, the privatized governance of communication infrastructures shifts fundamental decisions about speech, visibility, and amplification away from democratic institutions toward corporate actors, raising questions about accountability and public oversight. Collectively, these developments contribute to a fragmented and stratified public communication environment, in which the conditions for shared understanding and coordinated collective action are weakened and the boundaries of legitimate public discourse are increasingly shaped indirectly by market logics rather than democratic deliberation.

For future research, transparency regarding algorithmic structures and biases that shape visibility in platformized publics would be of crucial relevance. Such transparency would also be essential for public policy, an arena where the invisibilization of minoritized groups on social media is insufficiently considered, despite its democratic implications. Democratic interventions could include ensuring more inclusive queer representation in training data for AI models and maintaining human oversight (GLAAD, 2026). To address quantified visibilization, it would be beneficial to incorporate options for gender as a spectrum or allow users-citizens to self-report their gender (Weathington & Brubaker, 2023), while normative visibilization could be countered by increasing the customizability of platforms and profiles to allow greater freedom of (self-)presentation (Brough et al., 2020). Further interventions could reduce the influence of popularity metrics and develop algorithms that privilege “positive” content, as suggested by underrepresented youth (Brough et al., 2020), thereby mitigating concerns surrounding profitable visibilization. In addition to structural regulation, the agency of citizens and civil society should not be underestimated. Examples comprise algorithmic resistance practices such as hijacking hashtags and content indexing to fight discrimination of minoritized groups (Velkova & Kaun, 2021), backlash against unwanted features leading to their removal (Instagram, 2026), or drag as a form of hypervisible performance of queerness that circumvents identity disclosure, disrupts platformized heteronormative binaries, and challenges technological presumptions of individuals as coherent, consistent, and quantifiable (Kornstein, 2019).

Looking ahead, the political relevance of platformized (in)visibilization is likely to intensify due to the growing alignment and mutual infrastructural dependence between social media platforms and reactionary and right-wing ideologies. This includes their inscription into algorithmic systems, reconfiguring visibility regimes in ways that may further restrict the expressive and political affordances available to queer users-citizens. Importantly, such developments raise concerns that queer individuals may be increasingly exposed to

intensified forms of discrimination, targeting, and surveillance. In addition, emerging conditions of platformed communication characterized by personalized distribution and synthetic media are expected to intensify epistemic uncertainty and can expose queer persons to heightened risks of misrepresentation, harassment, and the political delegitimization of queer visibility. Based on these developments, the implications of unequal visibility regimes are increasingly pressing. Future research should therefore extend analyses of platformized (in)visibilization beyond queer persons and social media platforms to examine how visibility, justice, and resistance are negotiated across diverse marginalized user-citizens and digital environments.

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Conflict of Interests

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About the Authors



Irina Bănoiu (MA) is junior researcher in the junior research group Digitalization and Social Transformation at IHS Vienna, and doctoral candidate in sociology. In her PhD, she investigates visibility and platformization in the case of queer Romanian-speaking TikTok creators. Her research interests further include digital games and identity.



Laura Wiesböck (PhD) is head of the junior research group Digitalization and Social Transformation at IHS Vienna. She holds a PhD in sociology from the University of Vienna. Her research interests lie in the causes, forms, and consequences of social inequality, with a particular focus on labour, gender, and digitalization.