BILINGUAL PUBLISHING GROUP

Forum for Linguistic Studies

https://journals.bilpubgroup.com/index.php/fls

ARTICLE

Surveilled Selves and Silenced Voices: A Linguistic and Gendered Critique of Privacy Invasion in Marie Lu's *Warcross*

Tuyba Fatima Bhat [1] **, *Rayees Ahmad Bhat*** [1*] **, *Ishfaq Ahmad Tramboo*** [2] **, *Sinoj Antony*** [3]

[1] *Department of English, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara 144411, Punjab, India*

[2] *Department of Communication Skills, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara 144411, Punjab, India*

[3] *Divine Institute of Media Science, University of Calicut, Thrissur 680309, Kerala, India*

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary digitized world, the intersection of language, technology, and identity has grown increasingly complex, raising critical ethical concerns. Technological systems—especially those powered by artificial intelligence and algorithmic design—not only mediate communication but also shape, filter, and manipulate language, impacting identity construction and gendered representation within surveillance-heavy digital environments. This paper offers a linguistic and gendered critique of *Warcross*, a dystopian science fiction novel by Marie Lu, focusing on the NeuroLink system—an advanced AI interface that governs users' digital lives. Through the journey of Emika Chen, a skilled coder and bounty hunter, the novel exposes how digital technologies operate as both tools of empowerment and mechanisms of control. Emika's experiences highlight how women's voices are often marginalized or erased within male-centric technological structures. Using critical discourse analysis, feminist linguistics, and digital ethics, this study examines how language is surveilled, identities are algorithmically reconstructed, and personal data is manipulated. These fictional representations parallel real-world issues such as gender bias in AI, misinformation, and privacy violations. The analysis underscores the urgency of ethical digital design and advocates for inclusive practices aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to privacy, equity, and mental health. Employing a qualitative narrative discourse approach, the study reveals that NeuroLink enforces linguistic erasure and narrative silencing, particularly affecting female users, and positions Emika's resistance as symbolic of the broader struggle for digital justice and gender-aware AI systems.

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Rayees Ahmad Bhat, Department of English, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara 144411, Punjab, India; Email: bhatrayees315@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 14 April 2025 | Revised: 20 April 2025 | Accepted: 25 April 2025 | Published Online: 28 April 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i5.9505

CITATION

Bhat, T.F., Bhat, B.A., Tramboo, I.A., et al., 2025. Surveilled Selves and Silenced Voices: A Linguistic and Gendered Critique of Privacy Invasion in Marie Lu's *Warcross*. Forum for Linguistic Studies. 7(5): 437–448. DOI: https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i5.9505

Keywords: Digital Surveillance; Gendered Disinformation; Linguistic Identity; Privacy Invasion; Marie Lu's *Warcross*

1. Introduction

The digital age has ushered in a transformative period marked by unprecedented access to information, communication, and global interconnectivity. These advances, while offering immense potential for social inclusion and empowerment, have also led to the normalisation of surveillance, algorithmic control, and the commodification of personal data. In this new paradigm, digital technologies are no longer neutral tools but rather active agents in shaping discourse, regulating identity, and influencing sociocultural dynamics [1]. Within this framework, language—whether verbal, symbolic, or algorithmic—becomes a pivotal instrument of inclusion, exclusion, surveillance, and control. It functions not only as a means of communication but also as a system through which power relations are enforced and contested.

Marie Lu's *Warcross* (2017), a speculative fiction novel grounded in a technologically advanced future, offers a compelling critique of this digital landscape. At the centre of this narrative is NeuroLink, an omnipresent augmented reality platform that enables users to interact with both virtual and physical spaces through neural connectivity. Although portrayed as an innovation that enhances connectivity and entertainment, NeuroLink simultaneously functions as a mechanism of control, observation, and behavioural regulation. Through the covert use of algorithmic surveillance, it encodes, monitors, and potentially manipulates user behaviour, presenting itself as a form of digital panopticon.

This study undertakes a linguistic and gendered critique of *Warcross*, examining how digital systems like NeuroLink both surveil and silence users—particularly women—within virtual spaces. Language in this context is analysed not only in its spoken and written forms but also as a system embedded in code, algorithms, and digital interactions. The notion that language constructs reality is extended to consider how coded language, digital interfaces, and algorithmic design encode sociocultural biases, including gender hierarchies and systemic silencing. The character of Emika Chen, a young, resourceful hacker and bounty hunter, becomes a focal point for understanding these dynamics. Her journey through the male- dominated realms of digital engineering and cyber-investigation offers valuable insight into how female agency is negotiated, constrained, and, at times, reclaimed in technological systems driven by patriarchal ideologies.

By bridging literary analysis with critical discourse theory, feminist digital studies, and sociolinguistics, this paper interrogates how *Warcross* presents a fictional yet highly resonant critique of real-world digital ecosystems. The AI-driven environment depicted in the novel mirrors contemporary technological trends, where artificial intelligence systems often reflect the biases of their predominantly male creators. These systems are frequently opaque, unaccountable, and hostile to diversity, resulting in algorithmic discrimination that disproportionately impacts women and other marginalised groups.

Furthermore, this paper connects the narrative elements of *Warcross* to broader contemporary debates about data ethics, surveillance capitalism, and the socio-technical construction of identity. Through the linguistic analysis of dialogues, internal monologues, and techno- linguistic cues embedded in the novel, the study reveals the intricate ways in which language is shaped by power structures in the digital realm. It explores how Emika's voice—both in terms of personal agency and communicative autonomy—is challenged by an artificial intelligence system that enforces behavioural compliance and suppresses dissenting narratives.

In addition to literary inquiry, this analysis is situated within ongoing discourses related to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those concerned with gender equality (SDG 5), mental health and well-being (SDG 3), and digital privacy (SDG 16). By highlighting the fictional representations of gendered surveillance and digital disempowerment, the study seeks to underscore the real-world implications of unchecked technological growth. It urges a reconsideration of how language and code are designed, deployed, and regulated in digital platforms that have significant bearing on human rights, social equity, and democratic participation.

Ultimately, this paper argues that *Warcross* serves not only as a narrative of technological adventure but also as a cautionary tale that critiques the masculinised logic of digital systems. It demands greater scrutiny of how linguistic

structures—whether natural or coded—can perpetuate systemic inequality. Emika's resilience and tactical navigation through these

structures call for an ethical reevaluation of our digital futures, where language and identity must be protected from erasure and commodification. The interplay of language, gender, and power in digital contexts, as illustrated in *Warcross*, reinforces the urgency for inclusive and transparent technological design that respects privacy, affirms diverse identities, and promotes equitable representation in virtual spaces.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Digital Linguistics and Online Identity Construction

The advent of digital platforms has significantly transformed how individuals construct and express their identities. Digital linguistics explores how language use in online environments influences identity formation, with particular attention to the interplay between linguistic choices and algorithmic preferences. Baron indicates that online platforms facilitate the construction of linguistic identities through social interaction and platform-specific constraints, allowing for diverse expressions of self[2]. According to Tagliamonte code- switching, online slang, and manipulation of registers are instrumental in shaping digital personas, a process often referred to as digital self-fashioning[3]. Antony and Tramboo argue that the technological culture has not only transformed modes of communication but has also reshaped the global linguistic landscape, enabling new digital dialects and reconfiguring identity formation[4]. Their analysis supports the present study's exploration of how linguistic expression is restructured in algorithmic environments like *Warcross*, particularly in relation to surveillance and gendered discourse.

Duek and Nilsberth emphasise how multilingual students' digital literacy practices intricately link language use with identity construction, revealing that online environments offer both spaces for self-representation and sites of linguistic negotiation. Their study shows that digital platforms not only amplify multilingual voices but also impose new linguistic hierarchies, mirroring broader power dynamics in digital discourse[5]. Biró explores how digital spaces facilitate the formation and performance of complex linguistic identities, highlighting that users actively curate their language choices to navigate multiple cultural affiliations. The study illustrates that online communication fosters both the preservation of minority languages and the emergence of hybrid linguistic practices, reshaping traditional notions of identity[6].

Moreover, studies have highlighted the role of social media in influencing language variation and identity construction within digital communities. The rise of platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok has led to distinct linguistic practices that reflect both social affiliations and individual identities[7]. These practices underscore the dynamic nature of language in digital spaces and its impact on identity formation.

2.2. Feminist Media Studies and Algorithmic Bias

Feminist media scholars have critically examined how artificial intelligence (AI) and surveillance systems often reproduce patriarchal ideologies, thereby limiting women's agency both online and offline. McNeil and Haraway introduced the concept of the cyborg to challenge traditional notions of gender and identity, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of technology's role in shaping human experiences[8]. Building on this, Baltezarević argued that search engines and other AI systems are not neutral but are embedded with biases that reflect and reinforce existing social inequalities[9].

Recent scholarship has further explored the gendered implications of AI technologies. Wajcman discusses how the digital gender divide manifests globally, not only in terms of access to technology but also in learning and skills development. They highlight the underrepresentation of women in high-level professions and the systemic barriers that perpetuate this disparity[10]. Additionally, Gestoso critiques the design of AI systems that disregard women's needs and experiences, leading to the automation and amplification of online harassment and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes[11].

Fraile-Rojas, De-Pablos-Heredero, and Mendez-Suarez emphasise that algorithmic systems often replicate societal gender biases, disproportionately disadvantaging women in digital environments. Their findings argue for the urgent need for feminist-informed frameworks in AI design and governance to ensure equitable technological development[12].

Candidatu and Leurs propose feminist research methodologies as critical tools to interrogate and resist algorithmic management practices that reinforce gendered hierarchies. They argue that rethinking computational logic through a feminist lens is essential for creating more inclusive and equitable digital infrastructures [13].

These studies underscore the importance of incorporating feminist perspectives into the development and regulation of AI technologies to mitigate gender bias and promote equity.

2.3. Surveillance Studies and Power Dynamics

Surveillance studies have long examined the ways in which data collection serves as a form of power and control. Foucault's concept of the panopticon illustrates how surveillance operates as a mechanism of discipline, shaping behaviour through the perception of constant observation [14]. Lyon expands on this by analysing the societal implications of surveillance in the digital age, where data collection is pervasive and often conducted without individuals' explicit consent [15]. Nagpal et al., highlight how digital artefacts such as memes, emojis, and GIFs have contributed to a postmodern transformation of language, creating fragmented yet meaningful expressions that challenge traditional linguistic norms [16]. Their findings resonate with the present study's concern for how digital systems like NeuroLink in *Warcross* mediate communication and identity, particularly by privileging certain semiotic forms over others within gendered frameworks.

Rudschies explores how contemporary surveillance societies operate through diffuse power mechanisms, where control is exercised not only through overt monitoring but also through the structuring of everyday digital interactions. The study emphasises the need for methodological innovations to capture the subtle, often invisible, ways surveillance reshapes agency and autonomy in modern societies [17]. Conrey and Zurbriggen argue that surveillance systems often reinforce existing gender-based power imbalances by disproportionately targeting and controlling women's behaviours and self-expression. Their psychological analysis reveals how surveillance not only limits autonomy but also induces long-term impacts on identity formation and perceived agency among marginalised gender groups [18].

These frameworks are instrumental in understanding the dynamics of surveillance in digital environments, particularly concerning how data collection and algorithmic monitoring can infringe upon privacy and autonomy. However, there is a need to integrate literary narratives to reveal the socio-linguistic mechanisms behind these issues. Literary works like Lu's *Warcross* offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals navigating surveillance-laden digital landscapes, highlighting the intersection of technology, language, and power [19].

2.4. Dystopian Literature and Linguistic Representation

Dystopian literature often serves as a critical lens through which societal issues, including surveillance and authoritarian control, are examined. Marks analyses how fiction encodes surveillance critiques, illustrating how narratives reflect and challenge real-world power structures [20]. In *Warcross*, the NeuroLink system exemplifies a technologically advanced society where surveillance is normalised, and individual autonomy is compromised. The novel's portrayal of a male-centric AI system that strips users, particularly women, of basic human rights underscores the gendered dimensions of surveillance and control [19].

Mazzarella examines how processes of globalisation and mediation reshape cultural and linguistic expressions, often leading to homogenised forms of communication that suppress local identities [21]. His insights provide a critical backdrop for understanding how dystopian narratives like *Warcross* portray the manipulation of language and discourse as a form of cultural and political control in mediated, globalised societies.

Furthermore, linguistic landscape theory highlights how voice, silence, and representation are linguistically coded in virtual spaces. This theoretical framework is essential in analysing how language functions within digital environments to include or exclude certain groups. By examining the linguistic choices and discourse patterns in *Warcross*, we can better understand the mechanisms through which digital systems perpetuate gendered disinformation and privacy invasion.

2.5. Intersectionality and Ethical Considerations in AI

The intersection of gender, technology, and ethics is a critical area of inquiry in understanding the implications

of AI systems. Studies have shown that AI technologies often lack transparency and accountability, leading to discriminatory outcomes that disproportionately affect women and marginalised communities. For instance, a case study in Argentina revealed how an AI system was used to predict teenage pregnancies, targeting poor, Indigenous, and migrant girls for surveillance without their consent [22]. This example illustrates the potential for AI to be utilised as a tool of control and discrimination, reinforcing existing social inequalities.

Mickel emphasises that integrating multi-dimensional intersectionality is crucial for achieving true algorithmic fairness, arguing that AI models often fail when they overlook complex, overlapping social identities [23]. This perspective strengthens the call for ethical AI development that recognises the interconnected experiences of gender, race, class, and other social categories, which is especially relevant to the concerns highlighted in *Warcross*.

Feminist and anti-colonial critiques of AI emphasise the need for inclusive and context- sensitive approaches to technology development. These perspectives advocate for the incorporation of diverse voices in the design and implementation of AI systems to ensure that they serve the needs of all users equitably. By aligning AI development with ethical frameworks that prioritise human rights and social justice, we can work towards mitigating the harmful effects of surveillance and algorithmic bias.

3. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, foregrounding narrative discourse analysis and critical feminist linguistics to examine the representation of gendered power, surveillance, and digital linguistics in Marie Lu's speculative fiction novel *Warcross*. The focus is on how language and surveillance technologies intersect to marginalise female voices, especially within AI-controlled environments. The research also aligns fictional depictions with real-world examples, enabling a socio-critical approach that bridges literature with digital humanities, feminist theory, and surveillance studies.

3.1. Research Design and Theoretical Framework

The design of this study is interdisciplinary, combining tools from literary criticism, gender studies, and digital linguistics. The chosen methodologies—narrative discourse analysis and critical feminist linguistics—offer a suitable lens for understanding how language and power dynamics are coded within the text. Narrative discourse analysis examines the structure, themes, and linguistic strategies used in the narrative to represent social realities, while feminist linguistics focuses on how gendered power is constructed, contested, or suppressed through language.

Key to this approach is the notion that language in *Warcross* operates not merely as a vehicle for storytelling but as a discursive terrain wherein gender, control, identity, and technology are negotiated. Drawing on Sara Mills' (1995) work in feminist stylistics and Judith Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, this study explores how linguistic choices—such as the suppression of female dialogue, use of imperatives, erasures of female agency, or symbolic metaphors—signal systemic silencing.

3.2. Primary Text and Case Focus

Marie Lu's *Warcross* (2017) serves as the primary literary text under investigation. As a work of young adult dystopian science fiction, the novel is rich in metaphorical and literal representations of digital control, algorithmic bias, and gendered surveillance. The novel centres on Emika Chen, a skilled female hacker and coder who becomes embedded within the NeuroLink system—an advanced augmented reality technology that both enhances and monitors the mental and physical experiences of its users.

Key narrative scenes involving NeuroLink's interface, Emika's interaction with male-coded technologies and corporate hierarchies, and moments where her agency is questioned or overridden by the system are identified as core units of analysis. For instance, dialogues where Emika is interrupted, mistrusted, or excluded from critical decisions by male figures are closely analysed for tone, modality, and discourse structures. Additionally, narrative episodes where the NeuroLink system imposes control over users' thoughts, decisions, or emotions are examined semiotically to uncover symbolic representations of technological patriarchy.

3.3. Analytical Tools and Procedures

This research undertakes close reading and annotation of selected passages using narrative discourse techniques.

Scenes are categorised thematically—such as "Surveillance and Mental Invasion," "Silencing Through Code," "Resistance and Linguistic Agency," and "Gendered Disinformation." Within each thematic category, narrative voice, syntactic structures, modal verbs, and lexicon are scrutinised to determine how gendered power relations are linguistically constructed.

A combination of tools is employed:

. Discourse Marking and Speech Act Analysis: To assess how power manifests in dialogues, especially through interruptions, commands, hedging, or silences.

. Metaphor and Symbolism Tracking: To map how technological systems like NeuroLink function as metaphors for surveillance capitalism, digital patriarchy, and loss of identity.

. Semiotic Analysis: Inspired by Roland Barthes and Kress & van Leeuwen (1996), this helps decode visual and narrative symbols such as holograms, avatars, neural interfaces, and biometric scans that reinforce or challenge hegemonic systems.

. Intertextual Mapping: By situating *Warcross* within a broader landscape of feminist dystopias (e.g., *The Handmaids' Tale*, *The Power*), connections are drawn to shared thematic concerns of gender and control.

4. Results

The analysis of *Warcross* through the combined lenses of narrative discourse analysis and critical feminist linguistics revealed four interwoven thematic patterns that illuminate the intersection of surveillance, gender, and language in digital systems. These themes— *surveillance as linguistic erasure*, *male-coded AI and power asymmetry*, *gendered speech patterns*, and *data manipulation as narrative control*—highlight the nuanced and often insidious ways in which language and identity are regulated within both fictional and real- world technoscapes. The findings are discussed below in detail.

4.1. Surveillance as Linguistic Erasure

One of the most prominent themes is the role of surveillance technologies in suppressing, filtering, or erasing expressions of dissent—particularly those articulated by female characters. Within the *Warcross* narrative, the NeuroLink system operates as a powerful surveillance tool that does not simply observe but actively curates and sanitises language. Through the system's ability to access thoughts and emotions, it effectively marginalises any speech or internal dialogue that deviates from the expected behavioural norm.

This form of linguistic erasure functions metaphorically and literally. For instance, when Emika voices her moral concerns about NeuroLink's growing control, her perspective is frequently dismissed or met with paternalistic reassurances by male figures in power. Moreover, the omnipresent AI infrastructure selectively mutes expressions of emotional distress, coding such articulations as "glitches" or threats to the system's harmony. This echoes the findings of feminist surveillance theorists, such as Noble, who argue that digital architectures often algorithmically suppress the voices of women and other marginalised communities[24].

Linguistically, the silencing is enacted through narrative gaps, abrupt interruptions in dialogue, and instances where Emika's insights are internalised but not verbally acknowledged by others. The surveillance system becomes not just a watcher but a linguistic gatekeeper, redefining who may speak, what may be said, and when. This resonates with real-world concerns where online platforms use algorithmic filtering to remove content deemed "inappropriate," a category often skewed against feminist or marginalised discourse[25].

NeuroLink's surveillance infrastructure is not merely a technical mechanism; it is a linguistic filter that subtly erases dissenting voices, particularly emotional and gendered expressions. For instance, Emika reflects: "Everyone's' thoughts, feelings, dreams, neatly packaged into streams of code. Editable. Deletable"[19]. This quotation underlines how NeuroLink transforms human emotions into manipulable code, allowing the system to erase or edit subjective expressions at will. It particularly affects marginalised voices, diminishing the nuances of female agency and emotional authenticity.

4.2. Male-CodedAI and Power Asymmetry

The NeuroLink system, conceptualised and developed by Hideo Tanaka, symbolises a gendered hierarchy of technological control. Although positioned as a benevolent creator, Hideo's authority within the narrative represents a distinctly male-coded dominance over language, data, and representa-

tion. His vision of a perfectly regulated world is underpinned by a desire to algorithmically enforce behavioural norms—essentially curating human experience through a patriarchal lens.

This power asymmetry is not merely institutional but linguistic. Hideo's speech is frequently authoritative, measured, and laden with modal certainty, contrasted with Emika's exploratory and affective verbal style. The narrative reinforces this divide through their interactions, where Hideo's dialogue often overrides Emika's with a logic rooted in control rather than empathy. The AI system thus becomes an extension of his ideology—reaffirming traditional hierarchies where masculine rationality is privileged over feminine intuition.

The feminisation of resistance and the masculinisation of control are starkly drawn in these exchanges, echoing Wajcman's assertion that technology design frequently embeds dominant gender ideologies[10]. The NeuroLink system is not neutral; its logic is deeply embedded with patriarchal values that reinforce the marginalisation of female agency in both digital and narrative spaces.

Hideo Tanaka's creation of NeuroLink reflects a patriarchal coding of authority and control, positioning male figures as arbiters of morality and behaviour. His statement reveals his mindset: "People are weak. They need someone stronger to guide them, to fix them"[19]. This perspective positions Hideo—and by extension, male-coded technology—as the rational corrective force over "weaker" users, echoing historical gender hierarchies where women's agency is suppressed under the guise of protection.

4.3. Gendered Speech Patterns and Discursive Resistance

Despite the structural constraints imposed by surveillance and male-coded systems, the character of Emika demonstrates discursive resistance through assertive and affect-rich speech patterns. Unlike passive or reactive female protagonists often found in traditional science fiction, Emika exhibits a confident and often confrontational use of language, especially in digital contexts such as code writing, virtual negotiation, and team leadership. Her linguistic identity is marked by high modality, direct address, and rhetorical questioning, all of which serve to position her as a subject rather than an object within the techno- discursive space. However, her speech is frequently challenged or undermined—either by male authority figures or by the AI system itself—indicating a persistent attempt to curtail her agency.

This tension is described as "gendered discursive asymmetry," wherein women's assertiveness is often interpreted as defiance, prompting corrective or silencing responses. The narrative thus illustrates not only how women navigate technological spaces but also how language becomes a terrain of struggle for visibility and legitimacy within male- dominated structures[26].

Despite operating within a surveillance-heavy environment, Emika's language remains assertive, rebellious, and resistant. In a confrontational moment, she asserts: "You don't get to decide what people think. You don't get to erase who they are"[19]. Her speech contrasts sharply with the silencing mechanisms of NeuroLink, highlighting a gendered struggle for discursive autonomy. Emika's linguistic defiance becomes an act of reclaiming agency against algorithmic oppression.

4.4. Data Manipulation as Narrative Control

The fourth thematic pattern centres on the manipulation of personal data as a form of narrative control. The NeuroLink system is portrayed not merely as a technological tool but as a narrator in its own right—curating identities, filtering memories, and rewriting user experience. Through its selective data collection and behavioural modification features, the system constructs alternative realities that distort or erase individual subjectivities.

This phenomenon is most apparent when NeuroLink begins to override user autonomy, effectively scripting decisions and emotional responses. In doing so, it redefines not only users' behaviour but also the narratives they live by. Emika's struggle to maintain her authentic identity becomes a metaphor for resisting algorithmically produced versions of the self.

In literary terms, this represents a meta-narrative manipulation, where the authorial voice of the AI system competes with the protagonist's narrative voice. It aligns with critiques by scholars such as Van Dijck, who argue that algorithmic logic increasingly determines how stories are told, shared, and remembered in the digital age. By curating reality, data systems usurp traditional forms of self-expression, reducing complex

human identities to algorithmically determined scripts [27].

The selective curation and manipulation of data by NeuroLink not only surveil users but also rewrite their personal narratives. As Emika uncovers: "Every emotion flagged. Every unusual behaviour recorded and corrected before it could grow" [19]. Here, the language of control extends beyond surveillance into narrative engineering. The AI system edits users' identities in real-time, erasing anomalies and enforcing a homogenised digital citizenship that marginalises non-normative voices, particularly female and dissenting users.

Collectively, these thematic findings underscore the powerful role of language in shaping and regulating identity within surveillance systems—both fictional and real. Marie Lu's *Warcross* not only critiques the socio-technical apparatus of digital control but also illuminates how such systems disproportionately impact female users through linguistic erasure, discursive subordination, and narrative manipulation. The novel's resonance with contemporary concerns around AI ethics, gender bias, and surveillance capitalism offers a valuable lens for understanding the linguistic dimensions of digital injustice.

Expanding on these findings, it is crucial to recognize that *Warcross* not only critiques existing digital power structures but also issues a call for resistance through linguistic and technological agency. In an era where AI systems increasingly mediate human communication, the novel invites readers to interrogate who controls digital narratives and whose voices are being privileged or erased. Emika Chen's fight for self-representation highlights the urgent need for more ethical, transparent, and inclusive AI infrastructures that prioritize user autonomy and cultural diversity. Furthermore, the narrative emphasizes the importance of feminist intervention in the design and governance of digital systems to ensure that marginalized voices are not algorithmically silenced. By showcasing how language, emotion, and identity are entangled with data politics, *Warcross* offers a prescient warning about the socio-political costs of unchecked surveillance capitalism. Future scholarship must therefore continue bridging literary, linguistic, and technological analyses to advocate for digital justice and equitable narrative agency.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that surveillance in the digital era transcends mere technological mechanisms, extending deeply into the realms of language, discourse, and symbolic representation. Marie Lu's *Warcross* offers a powerful allegorical critique of these socio-linguistic and gendered dynamics, particularly through the operation of the NeuroLink system. Within the narrative, NeuroLink not only surveils its users but also determines which expressions are permissible, effectively rewriting personal agency and identity. This mode of control reveals how algorithmic structures can privilege specific forms of speech while silencing others, especially those of marginalised genders.

At its core, NeuroLink is not merely a tool of surveillance but a linguistic apparatus. It operates by coding and decoding user behaviour, employing patterns of symbolic representation that reflect broader sociocultural biases. As such, it functions as a metaphor for real-world algorithmic systems that categorise, prioritise, and often marginalise certain discourses. The privileging of normative, male-coded expressions within this system underscores the ongoing gender asymmetry in digital spaces. Emika Chen's struggle within the novel symbolises the broader tension faced by women in contemporary digital ecosystems, where their voices are often devalued or misrepresented.

Emika's resistance manifests through her active manipulation of both language and code. As a coder and hacker, she occupies a traditionally male-dominated space and asserts herself not only through her technological skills but also through her linguistic assertiveness. Her character resists the hegemonic language of control, challenging NeuroLink's narrative dominance. This dual modality of resistance—technological and linguistic—serves as a powerful critique of the digital patriarchy embedded within AI-driven platforms.

This fictional representation resonates with real-world critiques of algorithmic bias and the erasure of marginalised voices in technological design. Research by Noble on algorithmic oppression illustrates how search engines and AI systems often reproduce and reinforce existing societal prejudices, particularly against women and people of colour [24]. Similarly, studies by Buolamwini and Gebru reveal that facial recognition technologies exhibit significant inaccuracies when identifying women and individuals with darker skin tones. These technological failings are not neutral; they are the consequence of data sets, design choices, and linguistic framings that exclude certain identities from the normative technological narrative [28].

Moreover, the concept of linguistic erasure as depicted in *Warcross* reflects Foucault's theory of discourse and power. According to Foucault, power is not only exercised through institutions but also through the production and regulation of discourse[29]. In the context of NeuroLink, discourse is curated to maintain control, and deviation from accepted norms is treated as a form of deviance. This creates a system in which alternative voices, especially those of dissenting women, are systematically excluded. The AI, acting as a gatekeeper of discourse, thus becomes an instrument of both surveillance and symbolic violence.

The implications of this analysis extend beyond literary critique to the domain of AI ethics and digital governance. The politics of voice, representation, and agency are deeply embedded in the design and function of digital platforms. As scholars such as Crawford and Paglen argue, datasets used in AI development are not neutral repositories of knowledge but are imbued with historical and cultural biases[30]. These biases influence how AI interprets language, determines relevance, and allocates visibility. In this way, the linguistic structures of AI systems can reinforce systemic inequalities and silence marginalised communities.

Furthermore, Emika's journey in *Warcross* reflects a growing awareness in feminist digital studies of the need to reclaim narrative agency within technological spaces. The novel positions language as both a site of oppression and a tool of empowerment. Emika's code, much like her speech, becomes a mode of self-expression and resistance. Her capacity to navigate, manipulate, and ultimately challenge the algorithmic system reflects the potential for subversion within the very structures that seek to control her.

From a linguistic standpoint, Emika's discourse patterns are characterised by directness, emotional authenticity, and rhetorical questioning—features that deviate from the emotionally muted and logic-oriented speech favoured by the AI system. Her narrative voice is constructed through introspective monologues, vivid descriptions, and a persistent questioning of authority. These linguistic choices underscore her resistance to being reduced to a data point within NeuroLink's controlled environment.

Additionally, the novel critiques the illusion of neutrality in digital design. NeuroLink, though presented initially as a beneficial and inclusive technology, is ultimately revealed to be deeply exclusionary and authoritarian. This mirrors real-world concerns where tech companies promote inclusivity and transparency while implementing systems that perpetuate surveillance and discrimination. As Lyon contends, surveillance in the digital age often masquerades as convenience, efficiency, or security, thereby obscuring its true function as a mechanism of control[15].

The embeddedness of surveillance within linguistic and symbolic frameworks calls for a broader re-evaluation of digital ethics. It is insufficient to view surveillance as a purely technical issue; it must also be understood as a linguistic and cultural one. The power to determine which voices are amplified and which are silenced is a critical form of agency, one that AI systems currently hold without adequate accountability[31]. In this light, *Warcross* functions as a speculative warning against the unchecked development of AI technologies without critical engagement with gender, language, and power.

In conclusion, the discussion highlights how *Warcross* serves as a rich textual site for examining the intersections of surveillance, language, and gender. Through Emika Chen's character and the NeuroLink system, the novel articulates a complex critique of how digital infrastructures encode and enforce gendered power relations. The linguistic and symbolic dimensions of this critique offer valuable insights for understanding the ethical and cultural stakes of emerging AI technologies[32]. By foregrounding the politics of voice and representation, *Warcross* challenges readers to critically engage with the hidden structures of power that shape our digital futures.

6. Recommendations and Limitations

6.1. Recommendations

The findings of this study offer several actionable insights for academia, digital policymakers, and technological designers. First, there is an urgent need to develop gender-aware artificial intelligence models that are sensitive to linguistic bias embedded in data sets. As demonstrated in the fictional system of NeuroLink, algorithms that are trained on skewed data can replicate and even amplify existing power hierarchies, especially those rooted in patriarchal structures. By integrating gender-based parameters and inclusive language corpora into AI development, designers can mitigate these systemic inequities and ensure a more equitable digital

environment.

Secondly, digital literacy programmes must expand to include critical discourse education. By equipping users—particularly women—with the tools to recognise, decode, and challenge linguistic manipulation within digital platforms, these initiatives can foster a more empowered and conscious user base. This kind of linguistic empowerment is vital in resisting both overt surveillance and the more subtle, insidious forms of data-driven control illustrated in Marie Lu's *Warcross*.

Thirdly, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations between linguists, gender theorists, ethicists, and computer scientists is essential to building transparent and accountable technological systems. The siloing of technical and sociocultural expertise has often led to blind spots in the design and regulation of AI tools, a gap that must be bridged for sustainable, ethical digital futures. Finally, the enforcement of robust data privacy regulations must address gender-specific concerns, recognising that women are disproportionately affected by breaches in digital privacy and misinformation.

6.2. Limitations

This study carries certain limitations. It is grounded in a fictional narrative, which, while rich in metaphorical insights, may not fully capture the complexity of real-world digital surveillance systems. Additionally, the linguistic analysis is restricted to English representations, thereby overlooking the multilingual and culturally varied nature of online communication. These factors limit the generalisability of the findings across broader contexts. Future research should engage with empirical studies based on real-world digital platforms and multilingual datasets to further validate, refine, and expand upon the discursive and gendered patterns identified in this investigation.

7. Conclusions

Marie Lu's *Warcross* serves as a nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of the complexities of the digital age, particularly about surveillance, gender, and linguistic representation. The novel's depiction of the NeuroLink system—a technologically advanced, AI-driven interface—offers more than a speculative dystopia; it functions as an allegorical representation of real-world digital infrastructures that increasingly shape human interaction, identity formation, and access to information. Through a critical linguistic and gendered lens, this study has unpacked how NeuroLink mirrors contemporary algorithmic systems that curate, manipulate, and often silence user expression, especially that of women.

Emika Chen's journey as a skilled coder and bounty hunter underscores the struggle for agency within a male-dominated digital environment. Her resistance, framed through both verbal assertion and technical expertise, offers a literary embodiment of the broader fight against algorithmic erasure and patriarchal control within digital spaces. This fictional narrative provides valuable insights into how language—whether spoken, written, or coded— can be used as a tool of both empowerment and repression. The linguistic erasure experienced by Emika and other female characters in *Warcross* resonates with real-world issues such as gender bias in machine learning, the silencing of dissenting voices on social media, and the unethical manipulation of personal data.

By bridging literary analysis, feminist linguistics, and digital ethics, this paper contributes to the critical discourse on the socio-political implications of AI and surveillance in the twenty- first century. It advocates for more inclusive, ethical, and linguistically aware digital frameworks that uphold human rights and gender equity. Ultimately, *Warcross* becomes not just a young adult novel, but a meaningful entry point into urgent global conversations surrounding data justice, privacy, and the politics of voice in the digital era.

Building upon these findings, it is essential to recognize the broader implications of *Warcross* for policy-making, education, and AI development. As digital infrastructures become increasingly embedded in everyday life, there is a pressing need for regulatory frameworks that critically address algorithmic biases and ensure greater transparency in data governance. Educational initiatives must also empower users—particularly marginalized groups—to develop digital literacy skills that enable them to navigate and resist surveillance structures. Furthermore, AI researchers and developers must incorporate intersectional feminist perspectives to design systems that value diverse linguistic expressions and resist normative silencing. Literature such as *Warcross* serves not merely as a mirror to contemporary concerns but as a catalyst for interdisciplinary dialogue among technologists, ethicists, policymakers, and scholars. By heeding the warn-

ings embedded in such narratives, society can work toward building more equitable digital futures that prioritize human dignity, linguistic plurality, and gender justice over profit-driven surveillance imperatives.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, T.F.B. and S.A.; methodology, T.F.B.; software, T.F.B.; validation, T.F.B., R.A.B., and I.A.T.; formal analysis, T.F.B.; investigation, T.F.B.; resources, T.F.B.; data curation, T.F.B.; writing—original draft preparation, T.F.B.; writing—review and editing, S.A.; supervision, R.A.B.; project administration, I.A.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted following the ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The data for this study will be available upon request. Please contact the corresponding author for access.

Acknowledgments

We would like to sincerely thank the Lovely Professional University, Punjab, Research Department for all of their help and advice in this work. We would also like to thank our family members for their continuous support and patience while we conducted our research. We also want to express our sincere gratitude to DiMS Media College, Kerala.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Alsaleh, A., 2024. The impact of technological advancement on culture and society. Scientific Reports. 14(1), 32140. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-83995-z

[2] Maynard, M., 2009. Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World by Naomi Baron. Critical Inquiry in Language Studies. 6(4), 345–349. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/15427580903121501

[3] Tagliamonte, S.A., 2016. So sick or so cool? The language of youth on the internet. Language in Society. 45(1), 1–32. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404515000780

[4] Antony, S., Tramboo, I.A., 2023. Digital metamorphosis: Unraveling the evolution of global language in the technological culture. International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies. 12(4), 358–373. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55493/5019.v12i4.4921

[5] Duek, S., Nilsberth, M., 2022. Languages and identity constructions in multilingual students' digital literacy practices. Education Inquiry. 15(3), 295–311. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2022.2109561

[6] Biró, E., 2019. Linguistic identities in the digital space. Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Philologica. 11(2), 37–53. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2478/ausp-2019-0011

[7] Jebaselvi, C.A.E., Mohanraj, K., Thangamani, A., et al., 2023. The impact of social media on the evolution of language and communication trends. Shanlax International Journal of English. 12(1), 41–44. DOI: https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v12i1.6725

[8] McNeil, M., 1992. Review of Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, by D. J. Haraway. Feminist Review. 41(1), 135–136. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/1395245

[9] Baltezarević, B., 2023. Decoding identity and representation in the age of AI. Megatrend Review. 20(2), 141–146. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5937/MegRev2302141B

[10] Wajcman, J., 2006. TechnoCapitalism meets TechnoFeminism: Women and technology in a wireless world. Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work. 16(3), 7–20. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/10301763.2006.10669327

[11] Gestoso, P., 2024. Techno-patriarchy: How AI is misogyny's new clothes. Available from: https://patriciagestoso.com/2024/01/08/techno-patriarchy-how-ai-is-misogynys-new-clothes/ (cited 8 January 2024).

[12] Fraile-Rojas, B., De-Pablos-Heredero, C., Mendez-Suarez, M., et al., 2025. Female perspectives on algorithmic bias: implications for AI researchers and practitioners. Management Decision. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-04-2024-0884

[13] Candidatu, L., Leurs, K., 2023. Reconsidering algo-

rithmic management: feminist research tools for challenging computational thinking. In: Katila, S., Meriläinen, S., Bell, E. (eds.). Handbook of Feminist Research Methodologies in Management and Organization Studies. Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, United Kingdom. pp. 358–372. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377035.00033

[14] Foucault, M., 2021. Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison (an excerpt). In: Foucault, M. (ed.). Coronavirus, Psychoanalysis, and Philosophy. Routledge: New York, NY, USA. pp. 23–26. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003150497-3

[15] Lyon, D., 2001. Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life. Open University Press: Buckingham, UK.

[16] Nagpal, N.R., Tramboo, N.I.A., Antony, N.S., et al., 2024. The postmodern transformation of language through social media, memes, emojis, and GIFs: a study among selected North Indian university students. Forum for Linguistic Studies. 6(5), 574–587. DOI: https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v6i5.7057

[17] Rudschies, C., 2022. Power in the modern 'surveillance society': from theory to methodology. Information Polity. 27(2), 275–289. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3233/IP-211536

[18] Conrey, S.C., Zurbriggen, E.L., 2023. Surveillance and gender-based power dynamics: psychological considerations. In: Zurbriggen, E.L., Capdevila, R. (eds). The Palgrave Handbook of Power, Gender, and Psychology. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, Switzerland. pp. 129–150. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41531-9_9

[19] Lu, M., 2017. Warcross. G.P. Putnam's Sons: New York, NY, USA. pp. 1–353.

[20] Marks, P., 2002. Imagining surveillance: utopian visions and surveillance studies. Surveillance & Society. 3(2/3). DOI: https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v3i2/3.3503

[21] Mazzarella, W., 2004. Culture, globalization, mediation. Annual Review of Anthropology. 33(1), 345–367. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.33.070203.143809

[22] Hagerty, A., Jemio, D., 2022. The case of the creepy algorithm that 'predicted' teen pregnancy. Wired. Available from: https://www.wired.com/story/argentina-algorithms-pregnancy-prediction/ (cited 1 June 2022).

[23] Mickel, J., 2023. The importance of multi-dimensional intersectionality in algorithmic fairness and AI model development [PhD Thesis]. University of California: Berkeley, CA, USA.

[24] Noble, S.U., 2018. Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism. NYU Press: New York, NY, USA. pp. 1–256.

[25] Gillespie, T., 2018. Custodians of the Internet: platforms, content moderation, and the hidden decisions that shape social media. Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, USA.

[26] Kenny, E.J., Donnelly, R., 2019. Navigating the gender structure in information technology: how does this affect the experiences and behaviours of women? Human Relations. 73(3), 326–350. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726719828449

[27] Van Dijck, J., 2013. The culture of connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA. pp. 1–228.

[28] Buolamwini, J., Gebru, T., 2018. Gender shades: intersectional accuracy disparities in commercial gender classification. Proceedings of the 1st Conference on Fairness, Accountability and Transparency; 23–24 February 2018; New York, USA. Proceedings of Machine Learning Research. 81, 1–15.

[29] Foucault, M., 1994. The subject and power. In: Faubion, J.D. (ed.). Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Vol. 3. Penguin Books: London, UK.

[30] Crawford, K., Paglen, T., 2021. Excavating AI: the politics of images in machine learning training sets. AI & Society. 36(4), 1105–1116. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-021-01162-8

[31] Black, A., 2025. AI and democratic equality: how surveillance capitalism and computational propaganda threaten democracy. In: Steffen, B. (ed.). Bridging the Gap Between AI and Reality. Lecture Notes in Computer Science. Springer: Cham, Switzerland. Vol. 14129. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73741-1_21

[32] Bankins, S., Formosa, P., 2023. The ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI) for meaningful work. Journal of Business Ethics. 185(4), 725–740. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05339-7