



Manosphere: Online Spaces for Executing Misogyny

Simran Gupta, MA in Political Science. School of Open Learning, University of Delhi, simrangupta2027@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Online platforms are often used to promote extremist views and weaponized information, which can lead to violent incidents. The "manosphere" includes websites, blogs, and forums that promote hegemonic masculinity and criticize feminism. It is a collection of masculinist social media communities linked by an anti-feminist mindset. Through hate speech and violent threats, attacks on women's rights and gender become frequent in virtual spaces on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Although existing journalism and social media scholarship successfully identify the manosphere as a significant social problem by linking it to misogynist cybercrime and cyberhate, the resulting narrative simplifies manosphere discourse while leaving its misogyny unexplored. These stereotypes perpetuate gendered power dynamics by portraying males as victims and women as evil. I have looked at the significant roles that hashtags, meme culture and emojis can have in countering feminist ideologies. I also aim to highlight how #MeToo debate is discussed in the manosphere implying that the manosphere is a collection of misogynistic networks with varying degrees of violence and differing points of view rather than a single, homogenous network. To achieve a world where extreme misogyny and gender violence are recognized as atrocities, we must face the manosphere, a new form of misogyny. Toxic gender stereotypes are spreading from online platforms to the real world, and action is necessary to prevent them from affecting everyone.

Keywords: manosphere, misogyny, anti-feminism, #MeToo, social media

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media, a byproduct of the Web 2.0, has profoundly changed practically everyone's lifestyle. Most importantly, the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 implies that each person is provided with a distinct view based on their personal network, past interactions, interests, and other data gathered by various online platforms to promote social interaction. Social media can promote both openness and compassion, but also bias and hatred. Social media has influenced both offline and online behaviour, enabling new kinds of self-expression, activism and violence (Lüders et al., 2022). For instance, there are visible gender battles that take place in both online and offline settings, sometimes involving actual violence. Attacks against women's rights and gender become widespread in these virtual places on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Eslenziya, 2022). Online anti-feminist groups highlight the harmful ways in which misogynist beliefs can proliferate via the Internet. The "manosphere" is understudied in academic literature, especially when it comes to narratives and actions that are hostile to feminist initiatives, despite its negative effects. The manosphere is characterized by misogyny, which refers to extreme views against women. Misogyny, on the other hand, has deep roots in patriarchal customs and power structures that cause everyday instances of sexism (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023).

"Sexism and misogyny are similar terms but not identical: sexism includes stereotypes against women and sexual objectification, but it is not necessarily violent. Misogyny may employ sexism in an attempt to "punish" women who are not perceived as conforming to patriarchal norms." (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023)

Most of the journalistic accounts and feminist blog posts highlight the manosphere's including four main categories, amongst others: Pick Up Artists (PUAs), Involuntary Celibates (Incels), Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) numerous instances of hateful, brash, and abusive language in order to illustrate its relevance and significance as an independent subject of inquiry (Valkenburgh, 2019). Collective threats led to the emergence of some of the major hashtag movements (e.g. #MeToo). #MeToo was followed by #HimToo, #MenToo, #NotAllMen, which sparked #YesAllWomen, which is substantially discussed in article further. When online interactions are accompanied with offline actions, such as protests, they tend to reinforce one other (Lüders et al., 2022).

Seems like the digital space has been divided between men and women like many other spaces and there is a constant fight between the two to fit and prove themselves anyhow or it can be interpreted the way that the virus of patriarchy is spreading itself from offline to online spaces, in an effort to maintain their domination, the only difference is that the faces are younger generation with traditional old patriarchal minds.

Within this context, this article explores the what, why and how of manosphere and online misogyny.

1. What do manosphere ideologies entail?
2. Why is the manosphere drawing men to misogyny?
3. How misogynistic networks operate in web?

2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The objective of this article is to develop knowledge about how digital media platforms enable the spread of anti-feminist ideologies. The research areas of emphasis include the manosphere, misogyny, masculinity, social media, and online ecosystems. The measures are to be comprehensive, objective, and consistent, and to reflect the serious harm caused by misogynist online groups from a feminist perspective. The measures highlight that there is a need to recognize these groups and learn their true nature. The key stakeholders and their means who are responsible for executing misogyny online and then transferring it to offline spaces were to be identified and their interests described. The framework was to include specific examples of these anti-feminist groups and their respective activities.

This aim was carried out by exploring (1) what is manosphere and what it constitutes, (2) what is the factor or underlying motivation which is attracting youngsters to online misogyny (3) various means, ways and practices which become catalyst in its advancement. The analysis used qualitative research methodologies from Thematic Analysis and Content Analysis. Alleged evidence was used to support the claim that the online and offline domains are not separate but rather convergent and mutually reinforcing. This writing is based on a series of small statements or summaries of larger insights. Certain narratives are paraphrased and summarized as needed to improve their conciseness. Observational notes were also obtained during this research.

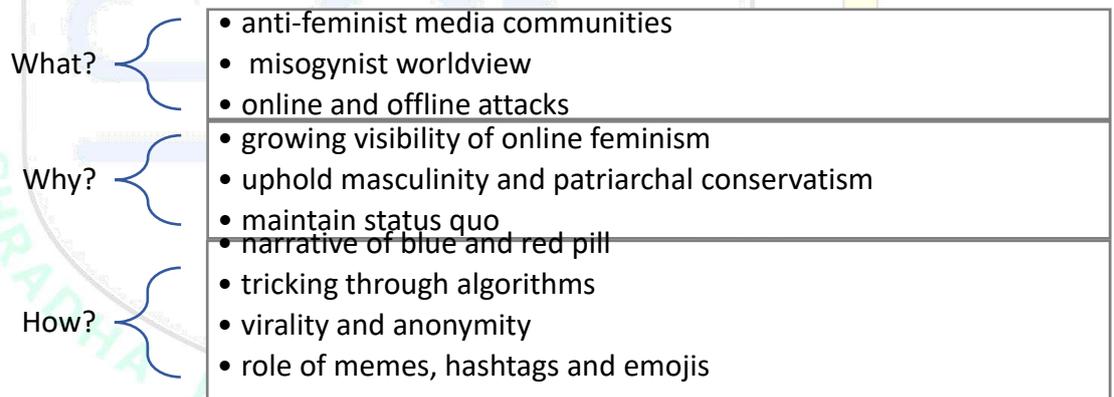


Figure 1: Illustrating what, why and how of manosphere and online misogyny

2.1 What do manosphere ideologies entail?

Manosphere are the online based sphere of men for men and by men marking its presence or nexus on various social media platforms. The word "manosphere" refers to a loosely connected yet powerful set of anti-feminist social media communities linked to misogynistic internet occurrences (Valkenburgh, 2019) and has been the source of an increasing number of online and offline attacks (Rothermel, 2023). It is a nexus of blogs, websites, forums, and social media threads where users share their bigoted, sexist, and toxic views of society in general and masculinity and femininity in particular. Web-based platforms are often used to promote hate, extremist ideas, and weaponized information, which can lead to real-world violence. Manosphere communities exist on several platforms, including subreddits, blogs,



YouTube channels, and forums. It is argued that traditional views about masculinity and misogyny are being expressed in new and profound ways online (Ribeiro et al., 2020).

Manosphere activism has spread beyond the internet into the physical world. Manosphere activists use post-feminist discourse to explain their misogynist worldview, including the idea that feminism is obsolete, that women's advances came at the expense of men's rights, and that women are unstoppable. Feminists have successfully used online platforms to organize and promote offline movement that reclaims the female body. As women utilize social media to question gender hierarchies, the manosphere attempts to reinforce them through sexualized attacks on women's bodies that women are reclaiming (Hopton & Langer, 2021).

Manosphere is a broad range of subgroups, including Men's Right Activists (MRAs), Pick-Up Artists (PUAs), Involuntary Celibates (incels), and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOWs). Although these groups belong to rather varied beliefs, they are all bound by a sexist and male supremacist worldview that holds that males must protect their freedoms and rights from the "feminization" of their communities, which is seen as a loss of power and privileges for men (Rothermel, 2023).

2.1.1 Attack on #MeToo

After actress Alyssa Milano encouraged women to share their experiences of sexual assault and harassment on Twitter in 2017, the hashtag #MeToo—which was created in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke—gained attention on social media. The growing popularity of #MeToo-related narratives also drew backlashes, including the aggressive anti-feminist discourses that are characteristic of the manosphere (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023).

Online misogyny serves as opposition to feminism and feminist changes all around the world. These conservative, patriarchal, and masculinist groups oppose measures that address sexual assault, gender inequality, and violence against women. As Eslen-Ziya, (2022) puts it, "to protect the gender order or guard traditionalism, violence becomes the norm." As a result, they oppose feminist-led efforts to advance women's equality and autonomy as well as to put an end to gender-based violence. For instance, one could argue that the perceived necessity to counterbalance the rise of online feminist discourses, themes of which include perceived oppression of men, verbal and physical abuse directed against women, and a desire to restore patriarchal ideals, has impacted and increased manosphere's operations (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023).

Thus, manosphere creates and reinforces traditional gender norms. #MeToo was accused of transferring male domains and inherent power to women. Men used #MenToo to deny women's sole claim to victimhood. "#MenToo" advocates for male victims of sexual assault, but "#HimToo" is ambiguous and could refer to the accused "Him" of sexual harassment (Hopton & Langer, 2021). Although there is no harm in organizing counter movements, especially when someone is suffering from an issue and collectively wants to bring awareness, but problem arises when these discourses suggest a view of masculinity that ignores the seriousness of rape allegations and sees #MeToo as primarily harming men rather than giving women a voice. This narrative seeks to reestablish a hegemonic masculinity that only confers social power to men. As a result, protecting women and condemning sexual violence is associated with an attack on men and misogynist narratives are portrayed as attempts to resist feminist misandry (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023). Consequently, the manosphere is widely regarded as a materialization of men's innate misogyny, provoked by the significant successes of feminist's social movements (Valkenburgh, 2019) as well as the invasion of women into masculinized offline spaces.

Certain groups have experienced an increase in paranoia as a result of women using the MeToo hashtag more frequently to criticize men's behaviour. These groups fear being blamed by feminist activists. Men are frequently portrayed as victims in narratives that attempt to counter #MeToo by focusing on the supposed harm that feminism does to men's self-esteem and masculinity. As a result, the manosphere strengthens its measures to counter the perceived threat of online feminism and affirm masculinity. The narratives around the hashtag #HimToo are an example of networked misogyny. #HimToo demonstrates that networked misogyny,

can substantially impact their mental health by exposing them to poisonous concepts about masculinity and have long-term consequences for their relationships and social conduct. Manosphere beliefs can potentially radicalise young males. [2] Social scientists are lacking to identify manosphere culture only in extreme or violent cases, whereas it can be seen operating in daily commentary on social media.



Figure 3: Cybercriminal Engaged in Malicious Online Activities

2.3. How misogynistic networks operate in web?

People can meet, exchange ideas, and look for information across physical borders in real time or asynchronously in today's social media ecosystems. Social media is not limited to individual users. Major social networks like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter focus their marketing tactics on connecting individuals and facilitating large-scale exchanges. Social media's ability to connect individuals across boundaries has a significant impact on citizen's perceptions and responses. Social media's ability to promote viral content is a major feature that users exploit to create effective campaigns (Lüders et al., 2022). Members of the manosphere use what Rothermel, (2023) calls as "evidence-based misogyny", a discursive approach, to support their essentializing and divisive views about gender relations in society. They do this by misinterpreting and referring to knowledge in the form of studies, statistics, news articles, and pop culture, as well as by imitating established methods of knowledge presentation.

There are four major groups through which networked misogyny majorly operates. Men Right Activists (MRAs) push for political changes that benefit males. Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) contend that women are so toxic that men should avoid them entirely. Pick-up artists (PUAs) educate males seduction techniques to increase their chances of attracting women. Many of these approaches entail mistreating women, such as insulting or ignoring consent. Involuntary celibates (incels) believe they have the right to a relationship with a woman but are unable to find one. This group has been accused of committing numerous acts of extreme violence, including murder. [1]

For instance, Elliot Rodger, 22, shot and killed six people in Isla Vista, California, in 2014. Before conducting the act and dying himself, Rodger wrote a misogynistic manifesto about his hatred for women. Previously, he described himself as an incel. Four years later, Alek Minassian crashed a van into pedestrians on a Toronto street, killing ten people. Just before the attack, he wrote a Facebook post supporting Rodger and claiming that the "incel rebellion" had begun. [2]



Figure 4 : Groups involved in misogyny



2.3.1 Red Pill and Blue Pill

The manosphere presents itself as a unique, "alternative" arena for the creation of gender knowledge. The idea that members of the manosphere are "pilled" is a significant component of their shared identity. The narrative of "taking the pill," which was first featured in the movie "The Matrix," has become widely accepted (Rothermel, 2023). The red pill refers to men who have "woken up" to the alleged fact that the world favours and advantages women more than men.[2] The blue pill implies not having taken the red pill and hence living in blissful ignorance. [1]

2.3.2 The Algorithm tricks

Platform algorithms, interact with human behaviour by prioritizing the material that appears in people's feeds, which has sparked debate. Facebook algorithms, for example, reward material that increases engagement and so actively helps to content virality (Lüders et al., 2022). Young people may also discover the manosphere through YouTube, where the 'watch next' algorithm has been known to propose progressively sexist and anti-feminist content to keep users engaged. TikTok could be another option, as the MGTOW and pick-up artist communities, in particular, are getting increasingly popular there.[1]

2.3.3 Anonymity

Networked misogyny poses a difficulty due of its anonymity and capacity to reach a larger audience compared to offline conversation (Eslén-Ziya, 2022). Anonymity in the manosphere allows for the expression of antifeminist discourses that are socially unacceptable. Masculinist social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, foster similar beliefs. Men can use social media to perform a variety of "cybercrimes" against women, such as intense online harassment, threats of rape or death, and the publication of private information (Valkenburgh, 2019). They can spread such misogynist cyber-abuse, cyber-victimization, and cyberhate going unnoticed.

2.3.4 Attack through Memes, Hashtags and Emojis

In 2022, "Women ☕" was the most popular and mysterious of all viral memes. The term "Women" refers to a scene from YouTuber Topsy Duck's iconic Team Fortress 2 animated video. At the start of the video, two men (Team Fortress 2 characters Medic and Soldier) are standing in a yard, holding coffee, while a woman (Scout's Mom) goes by. Medic humphs and says, "Women," and both men laugh as they sip from their cups and coffee pots. "Women ☕" is a common comment on videos depicting women performing actions that may be seen as foolish, irrational, stereotypical of women, or insensitive.[3]

The "Women ☕" counterpart "Men 🍺" or Men Beer Emoji is the masculine variant of the "Women". In contrast, "Men" humorously highlights male triumph through staunch disregard, paired with the aesthetic of drinking beer. It began on TikTok in early 2022, then moved to Reddit and other platforms.[5]

"Make me a sandwich," sometimes intentionally misspelled as "Make me a sammich," is a catchphrase commonly used by male online users to insult, ridicule, or upset female internet users, relying on the sexist notion that women belong in the kitchen. [4]

#SorryFeminists is a Twitter hashtag intended to mock preconceptions about feminist codes and ideas.[4]

3. CONCLUSION

In this paper, by studying the elements of manosphere and online misogyny, I highlight the link between technology and misogyny. I discuss how anti-feminist ideologies have this tendency to move from offline to online and online to offline, reaffirming violence and hate against women even more. As Eslén-Ziya, 2022 argue, the anti-feminist organizations function in internet and new media environments. They make advantage of new channels of communication. Harassing others online with anti-gender discourses reinforces patriarchy and victimizes women. Online harassment and misogyny on social media reinforce patriarchal power structures.

I further emphasised, how online users creatively use social media features to express and exchange feelings for various forms of goals. Social media users utilize emojis to express



feelings, connect with like-minded individuals, and avoid those with opposing beliefs. Likes, hashtags, comments, and emojis let users form groups, agree on norms, and align emotions (Lüders et al., 2022). Also, it is doubtful to call them as movement like feminism which is both ideology and movement as studies shows that manosphere discourses often portray women, particularly feminists, as intellectually and physically inferior, rather than calling as social movement, I prefer them calling as anti-feminist agenda. To quote Hopton & Langer, (2021) "Manosphere gender identities were dependent on the continued existence of an enemy-other, in the form of women. It therefore exposed the hollowness of men's claims to be "going their own way" and drew attention to cracks in their ideology."

Using the networked misogyny paradigm, it is important to consider the heterogeneity of the manosphere. Since networked feminism is a global phenomenon that incorporates diverse feelings and methods of activism, online misogyny involves narratives that may target numerous social groups like LGBTI rather than being solely an anti-feminist force (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023) and future researches should highlight it as well.

To sum up, the problem with manosphere is that they are not understanding the core issue which lies in misunderstanding feminism. All the men problem which can be considered valid and raised by manosphere are addressed by feminism, only if they are ready to understand the core of feminism which is about both men and women because by excluding men, feminist ideology also cannot achieve the equality it desires. Manosphere is causing harm to men more than benefitting them because it is preventing some of the genuine causes to come to light, thus, covering the substantial under negative and violent language.

4. REFERENCES

1. Eslen-Ziya, H. (2022). Establishing networked misogyny as a counter movement: The analysis of the online anti-Istanbul convention presence. *Convergence*, 28(6), 1737–1753. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565221089218>
2. Rothermel, A. K. (2023). The role of evidence-based misogyny in antifeminist online communities of the 'manosphere.' *Big Data & Society*, 10(1), 205395172211456. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517221145671>
3. Dickel, V., & Evolvi, G. (2022). "Victims of feminism": exploring networked misogyny and #MeToo in the manosphere. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(4), 1392–1408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2022.2029925>
4. Hopton, K., & Langer, S. (2021). "Kick the XX out of your life": An analysis of the manosphere's discursive constructions of gender on Twitter. *Feminism & Psychology*, 32(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09593535211033461>
5. Horta Ribeiro, M., Blackburn, J., Bradlyn, B., & De Cristofaro, E. (2021). *The Evolution of the Manosphere Across the Web*.
6. Van Valkenburgh, S. P. (2019). "She Thinks of Him as a Machine": On the Entanglements of Neoliberal Ideology and Misogynist Cybercrime. *Social Media + Society*, 5(3), 205630511987295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119872953>
7. Lüders, A., Dinkelberg, A., & Quayle, M. (2022). Becoming "us" in digital spaces: How online users creatively and strategically exploit social media affordances to build up social identity. *Acta Psychologica*, 228, 103643. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103643>
8. Aiston, J. (2021, October 4). What is the manosphere and why is it a concern? Retrieved from internetmatters.org: <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/news-blogs/what-is-the-manosphere-and-why-is-it-a-concern/>
9. Inside the manosphere understanding extreme misogyny online. (2024, April 12). Retrieved from Center for Countering Digital Hate. What Does 'Women ☕' Mean? The Hidden Code Behind The 'Women Coffee Emoji' Meme Explained. (n.d.). Retrieved from Know Your Meme: <https://knowyourmeme.com/editorials/guides/what-does-women-%E2%98%95-mean-the-hidden-code-behind-the-women-coffee-emoji-meme-explained>
10. What Does 'Women ☕' Mean? The Hidden Code Behind The 'Women Coffee Emoji' Meme Explained. (n.d.). Retrieved from Know Your Meme: <https://knowyourmeme.com/editorials/guides/what-does-women-%E2%98%95-mean-the-hidden-code-behind-the-women-coffee-emoji-meme-explained>
11. Feminism. (n.d.). Retrieved from Know Your Meme: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/cultures/feminism>
12. Women ☕ / Women Coffee Emoji. (n.d.). Retrieved from Know Your Meme: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/women-%E2%98%95-women-coffee-emoji>