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Mapping the Germanosphere. A Pilot Study

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Mapping the Germanosphere

A Pilot Study

Gülay Çağlar, Dominik Hammer, Charlotte Drath, Paula Matlach, and Karolin Schwarz

ABSTRACT

This pilot study is the first analysis of German misogynous online milieus across platforms and sub-groups. The „Mannosphäre“ – the German variant of the anglophone manosphere – encompasses movements such as „Incels“, „Pick-Up Artists“, and „Men’s Rights Activists“ that propagate misogynist ideology, reject gender equality and the liberal social order, and spread violent fantasies. The study uses a mixed methods approach, including expert interviews, digital ethnography, and a network analysis. In total, over 350 websites and social media accounts with misogynist content were identified, classified, and analysed. Links between websites and guest appearances on YouTube channels were examined to better understand the importance of individual actors and narratives, as well as their political or commercial motivations. Findings show that the „Mannosphäre“ mirrors the manosphere in its narratives and structure. However, platform usage differs between the individual manosphere sub-groups. Based on the study’s results, recommendations were developed for dealing with misogynous online milieus.

1 INTRODUCTION¹

Increasingly, misogynist images and narratives are disseminated in the virtual public space of the

internet, fuelling an “online hate culture” (Moloney/Love 2018: 2). Online misogyny can take various forms ranging from online hate speech, sexualised cyber harassment and digital violence against women. These misogynist acts in the virtual space are not trivial and, in fact, are more than “just words” (Ging/Siapera 2018: 520). Online hate and death threats can easily escalate into real-world violence against women (see Filipovic 2007), as the Isla Vista killings in California in 2014 and the Toronto vehicle-ramming attack in 2018 brutally demonstrate. The effects of online misogyny are far-reaching, as many studies have shown (Barker/Jurasz 2019; Bladini 2020; Chess/Shaw 2015; Massanari 2017; Poland 2016; Vitak et al. 2017). Women exposed to such hate and harassment experience high levels of stress and anxiety (Amnesty International 2017; Ging/Siapera 2018: 520) and, as a result, may refrain from articulating their (political) views online or may even withdraw from virtual public life altogether. This issue affects not only women who actively engage in online feminist activism, such as the #MeToo-movement but all women who stand for an emancipated way of life and who, thus, challenge traditional gender relations (Dickel/Evolvi 2023; Ging/Siapera 2018).

Anti-feminist and misogynist masculinists form the so-called “manosphere” (ISD 2022a), which can broadly be described as a “conglomeration of blogs, websites, and forums” (Rothermel et al. 2022: 122). This online milieu creates a toxic virtual environment where misogynist narratives, hate, and violence are mobilised to “discipline” and silence women. A variety of masculinist groups with

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distinct ideological orientations are active within the manosphere, yet they are united by the belief in a natural disparity between the sexes and male superiority (Rothermel et al. 2022: 122). As many studies show, this misogynist and male supremacist thinking intersects in many cases with anti-liberal, right-wing, racist, and anti-semitic worldviews that are incompatible with individual freedom, equality and the liberal democratic order (DiBranco 2022; Ging 2019; Kaiser 2020; Rothermel 2023). In fact, the manosphere threatens the very foundations of liberal democracies. It not only denies women's fundamental rights to individual self-determination, bodily integrity, and autonomy but also restricts their freedom of expression and their rights to political and public participation (Barker/Jurasz 2019: 102). As Karla Mantilla persuasively contends, this online "harassment is about patrolling gender boundaries and using insults, hate, and threats of violence and/or rape to ensure that women and girls are either kept out of, or play subservient roles in, male-dominated arenas" (2013: 568; see also Ging 2019; Moloney/Love 2018). Ultimately, the manosphere creates an environment that hinders women from expressing their opinions publicly or participating in any public activities on an equitable footing with men.

A considerable body of research has been conducted on the phenomenon of the manosphere by feminist scholars from various disciplines, such as sociology, political science, and media and communication studies. These studies predominantly focus on different sub-groups within the manosphere (Rothermel et al. 2022: 117) which mostly operate transnationally. No research across platforms and sub-groups has been carried out so far on the manosphere within the German context – the GerManosphere, as we call it. Moreover, misogynist online communities are mostly depicted as homogenous (Rothermel et al. 2022: 117) and as monolithic echo chambers. We know little about the diversity within these communities, nor their networks and interactions.

This pilot study aims to map the GerManosphere in two steps: first, it identifies the various sub-groups, their characteristics, and their narratives; second, it showcases the networks by illustrating the links and interactions between the different communities and sub-groups. We are particularly interested in understanding whether contextual factors, such as national gender norms and ideals of masculinity and femininity, influence the way these communities operate. As a pilot study, this research does not seek to provide a definitive analysis on the manosphere in Germany. Instead, it aims to scope the field of study and provide starting points for further research.

The study is structured as follows: The next chapter gives an overview of the existing literature on the manosphere, presenting key findings on the different sub-groups and the theoretical concepts of misogyny and masculinity that form the basis of this study. This overview is followed by the methods section that elucidates the criteria for sample selection and outlines the methods used for data collection and analysis. Afterwards, the findings are presented in two parts: the first part presents the different misogynist communities identified in the German manosphere, detailing their characteristics and their specific narratives. The second part shows whether and how these groups are connected and actively form a network. The study concludes with recommendations for different stakeholders.

2 ONLINE MISOGYNY IN THE MANOSPHERE: RESEARCH REVIEW

Research on online misogyny in the manosphere has been conducted for more than a decade. Scholars of feminist media studies, in particular, focus on "cataloging and labelling acts of online misogyny" (Moloney/Love 2018: 5), which are directed either towards individual women or women as a social group. There is a wealth of literature

describing the different forms of online harassment, ranging from “gendertrolling” (Dafaure 2022; Mantilla 2013), sexualised memes, rape threats or “jokes” (Dickel/Evolvi 2023; Powell/Henry 2017), cyberbullying, and doxxing (e.g. Windisch et al. 2022; Vitak et al. 2017). All these forms of harassment are commonly analysed under the umbrella term “e-bile” (Jane 2012; 2014). This term denotes “a variety of denunciatory forms that share characteristic, signal features”, including “extravagant invective, the sexualised threats of violence, and the *recreational nastiness* that have come to constitute a dominant tenor of Internet discourse” (Jane 2012: 532, emphasis in original).

Many scholars also scrutinise the effects of the abovementioned harassment, pointing to the psychological as well as structural implications of online misogyny (Barker/Jurasz 2019; Bladini 2020; Chess/Shaw 2015; Massanari 2017; Poland 2016; Vitak et al. 2017). Most notably, these studies provide substantial evidence that the manosphere enforces exclusivity and structural inequalities in the virtual space by “silencing women’s public and political voices, driving women away from public and political spaces, and undermining any efforts directed at achieving gender equality in the public sphere” (Barker/Jurasz 2019: 100; see also Bladini 2020; Ging/Siapera 2018). The technical affordances of social media platforms, gaming sites, and blogs, along with the anonymity therein, hamper the governability of these spaces (Ganesh 2018) and, thus, encourage harassers to give free rein to their hatred, often in the most violent way (see also Rothermel 2020). This spectacle of hate is emblematic of the current “transgression of cultural norms and values” (Gaufman/Ganesh 2024: 2). There is ample evidence that misogyny within the broader digital hate culture intersects with racist and white supremacist ideologies (Jasser/Hammer 2022; Mamié et al. 2021; Pruden et al. 2022). Scholars show that all these ideologies are equally rooted in an aspiration to (re)introduce social hierarchies deemed to have existed in

a “retrotopia” – a bygone golden era of strict social norms when “men were indisputably ‘on top’” (Pruden et al. 2022: 218) of this hierarchy. More specific analyses that deal with sub-groups of the manosphere, such as Incels (Kracher 2020; Sugiyura 2022), Pick-Up Artists (PUAs) (Dayter/Rüdiger 2016), misogynist Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs) (de Coning 2021) or Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) (Lin 2017) (see Section 2.2), unequivocally demonstrate that these groups actively promote either biologically or culturally essentialist narratives about gender relations and men’s superiority over women. A broad array of scholarship has intensively analysed Incel ideology (Baele et al. 2019), for instance, also in the fields of terrorism studies and criminology, particularly due to several instances of mass violence and domestic terrorism where the perpetrators were linked to these Incel communities. A number of papers focus on the securitisation of these online communities (Hoffman et al. 2020; Zimmerman 2022).

Feminist researchers have called for researching Incels and the manosphere as a political movement rather than an identity that can be more or less prone to radicalisation (Carian et al. 2023; Gentry 2022). They particularly highlight the dominant focus on Incels’ mental health, often said to cause misogyny, glossing over the agency of misogynist individuals and communities. This observation is congruent with the common attribution of any misogynist violent act to Incels, concealing misogyny that can manifest in different forms and from different groups (Jasser et al. 2020).

Activities in the manosphere target feminists and all women (and gender-nonconforming people) who aim to blur the boundaries of the gender binary and undermine patriarchal norms. The alleged oppression of men and their masculinity becomes the starting point for the development of deeply misogynist and violent sentiments (Johannsen 2021; Lounela/Murphy 2023). The literature shows that the reference to male entitlement

is a central activating element for misogynist behaviour, as the denial of the (male) supremacy to which they feel entitled is perceived as a denigration and, thus, a form of victimisation.² This perception of male supremacist victimhood feeds into a worldview according to which male supremacy (often paraphrased as “traditional masculinity”) is in danger or already destroyed. The concept of feminism as the “enemy” is central to this narrative, which blames gender equality for the collapse of male dominance. This alleged danger is then used to legitimise efforts to abolish feminism, reconstruct male supremacy and engage in the violence necessary to achieve these objectives.

Studies have shown that this understanding is central to mobilisation within the manosphere (Bengtsson Meuller 2024; DiBranco 2022; Dickel/Evolvi 2019; Rothermel et al. 2022), which is why scholars explicitly point to the political nature of online communities (O'Donnell/Shor 2022). In this context, Valerie Dickel and Giulia Evolvi refer to the notion of “networked misogyny” to emphasise the very political and coordinated nature of these actions in creating “a toxic support system for men to spread sexist narratives [...] [and] ideologies that criminalise women and feminism” (2023: 1395). In this literature, misogyny is not only used to denote emotions of hatred against women. Rather, referring to Kate Manne’s seminal book “Down Girl. The Logic of Misogyny”, misogyny, “often personal in tone, is most productively understood as a *political* phenomenon” (2019: 33, emphasis in original). Manne emphasises that misogyny “operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women’s subordination

and to uphold male dominance” (2019: 33). She puts forth an analytical conception of misogyny that situates hate within a patriarchal social order. Consequently, misogyny is not “just” an affect, but, as Manne puts it, “the ‘law enforcement’ branch of a patriarchal order” (2019: 63). Misogynist activities are, thus, not coincidental, but very strategic and political, as these actions serve to sanction women and girls who dare to defy patriarchal norms. It is exactly this understanding of misogyny that underlies this study.

Another set of scholarship focuses on the group of men and their masculinities when analysing the manosphere. In particular, Debbie Ging (2019) identifies the distinct performances of masculinities in digital spaces. Distinguishing between “alpha masculinities” and “beta masculinities”, she argues that types of marginalised masculinities, such as “geek masculinity” within the digital space, are complicating the application of the concept of hegemonic masculinities (Ging 2019: 642). In her discussion, she employs the concept of hybrid masculinity to illuminate the ways in which marginalised masculinities serve to reinforce the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity by “confounding certain gender expectations in their attempts to defeat feminism and secure various online spaces as homosocial” (Ging 2019: 652).

Aside from the growing corpus of international literature on the manosphere, research into German online milieus is slowly increasing. Susanne Kaiser (2020), for instance, scrutinises the mobilisation of patriarchal sentiments in Germany, the US, and through transnational networks. Andreas Kemper (2012) inquired into German anti-feminist activities and their conspiracy narratives as early as 2012 when most of their content was website instead of social media-based. He further mapped an array of German anti-feminist narratives across right-wing and anti-feminist currents, including neoliberal, conservative, and right-wing nationalist anti-feminism (Kemper 2024). The Amadeu

2 A recent study conducted by Carsten Wippermann (2024) investigates the attitudes of young men between the ages of 18 and 29 in Germany towards gender equality. Wippermann identifies various “social characters” (2024: 9; own translation), some of which are prone to opposing gender equality, such as the social character “resistance club for old strength” (2024: 52ff.); these are traditionalists who are tired of and unsettled by societal changes. In contrast, the social character of the “masculinist fascist performer” (Wippermann 2024: 70ff.) openly propagates male supremacist positions.

Antonio Foundation (2021) published a study on women-hating online subcultures, in which the ideology and online strategies, but also the visual language and memes of manosphere groups like Incels, were discussed. The Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft “Gegen Hass im Netz” (directly translated “Federal Working Group Against Hate on the Net”), a German research and network group that analyses online hate movements, has researched online misogyny and the manosphere across different European countries, using case studies and quantitative analyses. Lead author Corinna Dolezalek and the research team also analysed German Incels and Pick-Up Artists in their study “Tracing Online Misogyny” (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft “Gegen Hass im Netz” 2024).

In the remainder of this chapter, we delve deeper into the insights found in literature on specific sub-groups of the manosphere. The broader literature identifies five sub-groups within the manosphere: Pick-Up Artists (PUAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), proponents of various “Red Pill” ideologies (“Redpillers”), Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs), which includes Fathers’ Rights Activists (FRAs), and Incels (involuntary celibates). The following section provides a short overview of these groups, referring to the most recent literature.

2.1 PICK-UP ARTISTS

Pick-Up Artists (PUAs) or their forerunners have existed in different iterations since the 1970s, when the so-called “seduction movement” started. Consequently, this sub-group has been the subject of extensive research that has, among other topics, been conducted with regard to communication within the community, e.g. self-praise (Rüdiger/Daiter 2020), PUAs’ downplaying and ignoring of rejection (Scotto di Carlo 2023), their role in the emergence of the Incel community (Bratich/Banet-Weiser 2019), and the gamification element of their approach (Almog/Kaplan 2015).

PUAs are a loose sub-group within the manosphere that acts based on “pick-up artistry”, an “art” that highlights the “relative speed with which the protagonist may gain intimacy with their fellow interlocutor” (Hambling-Jones/Merrison 2012: 1115). Self-acclaimed “dating coaches”, “relationship coaches”, and “Pick-Up Artists” offer counselling and produce content, teaching techniques and strategies for seducing women through tactics of games, scripts, and exercises and routines.

The objectification of women through pick-up artistry is manifested in actions and language, as women are described as a “target” or “obstacle” or rated on a scale from 0 to 10 (Rüdiger/Daiter 2020). Another key theme is hypergamy, which is commonly understood as the conviction that women strive to “marry up”. It suggests a mating strategy where women prefer men with the highest available “sexual market value” (SMV) – an economic metaphor that forms a key narrative for PUAs – at any time, which leads to women leaving relationships with men in search of other men with higher status, consequently leaving victimised men behind (Rothermel et al. 2022). This hypergamy, which is seen as biologically determined, is also responsible for men with an alleged low SMV remaining single. The desires of women are of limited interest to PUAs.

Based on these ideas, PUAs mainly follow two strategies: A concentrated effort on improving male performance and behaviour towards women following the study of women’s psychology and a strong focus on the male body, based on what PUAs value as important aspects of masculinity. In comparison to other manosphere sub-groups, most PUAs focus less on directly promoting an anti-feminist agenda (McGlashan/Krendel 2023) but instead on self-improvement and individualised success strategies. Some PUAs have a successful social media presence, offering dating and life advice, and promoting their paid services.

2.2 MEN GOING THEIR OWN WAY

“Men Going Their Own Way” (MGTOW) reject relationships with women. While some MGTOW still date or have sex with sex workers, they reject the idea of entering long-term relationships. Members of this community believe that men are inherently superior to women and see themselves as part of the tradition of creative geniuses such as Beethoven, van Gogh or Jesus (Rothermel et al. 2022: 217). MGTOW advocate hierarchical theories on gender relations, with some MGTOW viewing women as parasitic (see Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft “Gegen Hass im Netz” 2024: 41). In addition to viewing women through the lens of sexist and misogynist ideologies, some MGTOW rank women according to racist criteria, where ethnicities whose women they perceive as the most submissive score the highest. This blending of sexist and racist narratives by these MGTOW demonstrates the intersection of racism and misogyny. Further empirical evidence regarding MGTOW is presented in studies on this sub-group’s online behaviour (Górska et al. 2022: 3776; 3789). Some MGTOW express a fear of being falsely accused of rape by women (see Lin 2017: 86). They also believe that divorce laws and other parts of the legal system are deliberately designed to be anti-male, aiming to work towards an industry that favours women (Rothermel et al. 2022: 127–128). This assertion is an aspect of the more far-reaching MGTOW claim that society is organised around “gynocentrism” (Lin 2017: 78) and privileges women. MGTOW are convinced that this perceived social bias and the influence of feminism will ruin society.

MGTOW developed out of the Men’s Rights movement into their own distinct tendency in the late 1990s (Rothermel et al. 2022: 122). According to Scott Wright, Verity Trott, and Callum Jones (2020):

MGTOWs encourage a separatist approach in which men live a self-empowered life away from women. Rather than take part in collective

protests and attempt social reforms like MRAs, or the direct violence and terrorism of some Incels, MGTOWs choose to “go their own way” (Wright et al. 2020: 910).

While MGTOW claim that they want to be left alone and live in seclusion without bothering anyone, supporters of this movement are often involved in misogynist online harassment (Jones et al. 2020). Researching MGTOW tweets related to harassment, Jones, Trott, and Wright (2020: 11) find that these posts reflect casual sexism rather than violent control narratives: “the most prominent forms of harassment were casual sexism (38%), emasculation (16%) and anti-feminism (13%).” Research on MGTOW communities, such as forums, shows a high level of discussions around violence (see Farrell et al. 2019) and toxicity (see Horta Ribeiro et al. 2021). Another quantitative analysis of MGTOW tweets shows that despite their separatist self-presentation, the community indeed targets women’s emancipation and aims to defend male privilege (Górska et al. 2022: 3776).

2.3 INVOLUNTARY CELIBATES (INCELS)

Incels (“involuntary celibates”) as a group encompass different tendencies. What unites them is a shared understanding that they are celibate against their own will and that they suffer from not being in a relationship. However, Incels differ in their diagnosis of both their personal condition and a wider social crisis, as well as in the remedies they propose. Within the Incel milieu, there are those who have resigned themselves and given up hope for romantic partnerships, expressing misery or a tendency towards nihilism. Some Incels see violent attacks as a legitimate tool to exert revenge for what they perceive as unfair social conditions. Others develop political visions, either connecting explanations for and solutions to their situation to far-right ideas about society at large or discussing utopian remedies. There are also discussions on methods for individual

improvement to become more attractive to women (“looksmaxxing”).

Crucially, misogynist Incels believe they are entitled to sex and relationships with women and that their involuntary celibacy is a form of oppression. Some describe not having sex as “reverse rape” (Kini 2017). Some Incels believe their celibacy is based on their looks and assume they are ugly and that women only enter sexual relationships with physically attractive men. Incels compare themselves to these desirable men, calling them “Chads”. They are described as superior in terms of social status, wealth, or attractiveness. Incels revere “Chads” for their success but also hate them because they see them as one reason for their involuntary celibacy.

Aside from faulting “Chads”, Incels also blame women for their situation. While the reasoning varies between Incels, a shared narrative, similar to PUAs, is that women follow a “hypergamy” (ISD 2022) mating strategy. This tactic, Incels argue, leaves them, as men with lower status, without partners. A widespread explanation for hypergamy in the Incel community is that through feminism and greater gender equality in society, women now have a wider range of choices in selecting their partners. Incels see this as unfair, as many among them feel entitled to women’s sexuality and companionship. Incels broadly see women as inferior, with some fantasising about the extermination of women (see Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft “Gegen Hass im Netz” 2024: 49). Incel forums are therefore rife with misogynistic content that includes stereotypical generalisations about women, advocacy for sexualised and intimate partner violence, and open dehumanisation of women.

The violent misogyny of Incel ideology has repeatedly motivated deadly attacks in the US and in Canada (ISD 2022). Some Incels celebrate the perpetrators of these attacks as “saints” (for further

info on “saints culture”, see Manzi 2024) and discuss “going ER” (using the initials of the attacker that carried out the attack in Isla Vista) or “doing an hERo” (carrying out a suicide attack). Others distance themselves from violence and claim to be unfairly maligned when violent Incels are mentioned. Commentators have speculated that the perpetrators of the 2019 terrorist attack in Halle, Germany and of the 2020 terrorist attack in Hanau, Germany were Incels. While the perpetrators expressed misogynist viewpoints (see Jasser et al. 2020), no substantive evidence has been found to back the claims that they are Incels.

Currently, the German security services and police are unable to quantify the German Incel scene (NDR: n. d.). Research by CVE/PVE company Moonshot puts the number of German accounts on a well-known Incel forum at 189 for the time between 2017 and 2020, using location-identifying phrases in the forum like “I live in” (Radicalisation Awareness Network 2021: 12). Moonshot also estimates the number of Incels in Germany at around 1’000 (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung 2021: 26). The German Incel scene seems to move in a highly international context and use international forums. Only a few independent German-speaking accounts, channels, and websites were identified in this research.

2.4 MEN’S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs) have been analysed with a focus on the grievances they share in online spaces, for example, on Reddit (Rafail/Fraitas 2019). MRAs have also been researched with a focus on specific narratives, such as their claims about false allegations of sexual assault, which serve the movement as a counternarrative to discourse about rape culture (see Kettrey et al. 2024).

Generally, MRA associations and other related groups form a community that believes men are disadvantaged by feminism. They argue that

a masculinist countermovement is necessary to achieve equality between men and women in a moderate sense or, in a more radical interpretation, restore a traditional patriarchal world order (Dragiewicz 2011). Also called “masculinists” or “Maskulinisten” in German, MRAs see themselves as victims of a “state-based feminism” (Kemper n.d.). Unlike the discourse surrounding Incels or PUAs, MRA movements often strive to “formalise” their arguments by framing them in academic terms, sometimes submitted as formal statements to the federal government of Germany (Beck et al. 2024), thereby lending an air of legitimacy to their claims. Some MRAs work together with broader anti-feminist movements, whereby anti-feminism can be defined as follows: “Anti-feminism describes the countermovement opposing emancipatory or feminist ideals, that uses misogynist strategies and tactics. Anti-feminists oppose gender equality efforts and the democratic negotiation of gender relations” (Drath/Hevesi 2025: 6; see also Höcker et al. 2020: 249–282).

A recurring theme within MRA communities involves legitimate concerns about male health and mental health. These issues are frequently presented as being ignored by society, with the claim that female health issues receive disproportionate attention. Other prominent topics include parental alienation and perceived bias in divorce and childcare cases. While some of these concerns may have merit, much of the content produced by MRAs tends to promote anti-feminist and, at times, misogynistic rhetoric, ranging from mild to more radical expressions (Rosenbrock 2012).

MRAs argue that “gynocentrism” is pervasive in society, particularly in legal systems and legislation, which they claim favour women – especially in divorce settlements and rape cases. MRAs also view modern marriage as gynocentric, claiming it places undue financial and emotional burdens on men. This belief in male victimhood – centred on

the notion that women and feminism are responsible for the perceived decline in men’s status – leads to significant overlap in language and ideology among MRAs, Incels, and PUAs.

While MRAs advocate for systemic change through lobbying and legislative reform on issues such as marriage, custody, and sexual consent (Han/Yin 2022), other related groups, such as MGTOW and Incels, argue that systemic change is impossible.

A subcommunity of MRAs is Fathers’ Rights Activists (FRA). These groups argue that fathers are disproportionately disadvantaged by feminism, particularly in matters of visitation rights, childcare, and child support. However, misogynistic FRA movements often frame their discourse with hostile narratives, including accusations of “gold-digging” and portrayals of mothers as selfish or egocentric. Several websites summarise the demands and activities of German-speaking fathers’ rights groups. While their specific goals may vary in detail and intensity, their overarching demands and claims tend to follow a consistent pattern. An investigative report by German NGO Correctiv in 2023 revealed connections of German FRAs to other actors in the manosphere, as well as to right-wing politicians (Keller 2023).

2.5 REDPILLERS

Incels, PUAs, MRAs, and other groups frequently reference “red pills” and other metaphorical “coloured pills”, each representing a different type of belief about the world. The classification of different “pills” is informed by the idea that those who choose a different view of reality go against received wisdom. These metaphorical pills are inspired by the 1999 science-fiction movie “The Matrix”, in which the protagonist is offered a choice between a blue pill or a red pill. In the movie, taking the red pill awakens the protagonist to the grim reality of a postapocalyptic earth ruled by machines. Using this scene as a metaphor, taking

the red pill, according to members of the manosphere, reveals what they see as the truth about this world: that the global order is manipulated by feminists, that feminism undermines masculinity, and men must reclaim control.

Within the context of the manosphere, those who “take the red pill” believe they have awakened to this alleged manipulation and recognise men as victims of a gynocentric world. Among Incels, this belief often extends to the idea that men are entitled to sex and that women should, therefore, be sexually available to men.

Discussions about “how to redpill” (others) or “taking the red pill” are central to this ideology. Individuals who have not accepted this worldview are labelled “blue-pilled”, meaning they remain ignorant of the so-called truths espoused by red pill adherents. The “black pill”, meanwhile, mostly articulated by Incels, represents complete despair or nihilism in the belief that the system cannot be changed, where Incels accept their celibacy and inability to love and find happiness (Halpin 2022).

To support their claims of male supremacy, red pill followers often draw on themes of gender essentialism and evolutionary psychology (Botto/Gottzén 2024). The red pill ideology is also intertwined with other conspiracy narratives, such as the “Great Replacement” (Dixit 2022) or the conviction that feminists and “Jewish globalists” are manipulating the world order for profit. Andrew Tate, who promotes misogyny and has been charged with (among other offences) rape and human trafficking (BBC 2024), is widely regarded as a central figure in the international red pill movement. Social media posts indicate that some German red pill followers have a personal acquaintance with Andrew Tate. Additionally, some masculinity coaches emulate Andrew Tate’s narratives.

Among them are masculinity coaches in Germany who, media reports allege, exploit women through

the management of their accounts on the platform “OnlyFans” (NDR 2023a). The investigation revealed the existence of secret direct messaging channels connected to these masculinity coaches. In these channels, according to media reporting, affiliates are taught methods to manipulate and coerce women into creating content for OnlyFans, often through sexual, emotional, and financial exploitation (NDR 2023a). This promotion of “OnlyFans Management” as a business is based on the objectification, exploitation, and domination of women, with the red pill ideas of the manosphere serving as an ideological legitimisation of such practices.

2.6 THE NETWORK OF THE GERMAN MANOSPHERE

Together, the social media accounts and channels, forums, and websites from the described sub-groups of the manosphere form a loosely connected network of misogynistic actors operating both online and offline. While these sub-groups often share overlapping narratives, the adoption and emphasis of specific themes vary across movements. Contradictory narratives co-exist within this network and are unified by their underlying foundation of misogyny.

This study analyses the different spectra of the German-speaking manosphere (the “GerManosphere”). It examines networks within this community, exploring how central actors operate in the manosphere and on which platforms and websites the sub-groups of the manosphere are present. Background interviews with experts provide information on this milieu and help formulate initial recommendations for dealing with misogynist online violence linked to the GerManosphere. The study helps to answer the following research questions:

- What are the central sub-groups within the manosphere in Germany?

- How are these groups interconnected?
- Which platforms and websites does the GerManosphere use?
- Are there actors outside the manosphere milieu who convey its messages?
- How can online gender-based violence, like the harassment campaigns originating from the manosphere, be countered?

3 METHODOLOGY

The analysis of the GerManosphere's online spaces is based on four different qualitative and ethnographic research approaches and methods. These include expert interviews, coding of social media data and websites, qualitative analysis through memoing,³ and network analysis.

3.1 EXPERT INTERVIEWS

To gain deeper insight into current developments and the state of research on the German-language manosphere, guided interviews with experts from the fields of extremism and gender research were conducted. The results informed the actor analysis and impact assessment, as well as the development of policy recommendations on combating gender-based online violence emanating from the manosphere spectrum.

A guided, semi-structured interview format was chosen, as it allows answers to be compared and summarised but also gives each interview partner space for individual answers. The underlying interview guide was drafted by the research team and trialled in a test interview. After the trial

3 According to Melanie Birks and Jane Mills (2015: 179), memoing describes "a fundamental analytical process in grounded theory research that involves the recording of processes, thoughts, feelings, analytical insights, decisions and ideas in relation to a research project". The use of memoing as a method is not confined to Grounded Theory methodologies. The method can also be employed in the context of other methodological approaches. A description of the application of memoing in this study can be found in Section 3.3.

interview, the interview guide was revised, and a total of five expert interviews were conducted during the study. Before the interviews, the participants gave their consent in compliance with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation. The interviews were conducted online, transcribed automatically, and subsequently summarised by Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) researchers.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION AND CODING

Central websites of the German manosphere were manually collected and examined (in part, informed by expert interviews and a literature review, as well as snowball sampling⁴ from a Wiki page close to parts of the spectrum). Based on the analysis of the collected websites and known internet forums of the German manosphere, a database of central actors and accounts (e.g. social media profiles, podcasts, and websites) was created. The selection criterion was that they fall into one of two groups: (1) actors and accounts who clearly identify as part of a sub-group of the manosphere, including accounts that identify themselves as belonging to the MGTOW, Incels, Men's Rights or Fathers' Rights Movements, Redpillers, Dating Coaches, or PUAs, or (2) actors and accounts who regularly disseminate misogynist⁵ content and use manosphere narratives or

4 Snowball Sampling is a non-probability sampling method. It "consists of identifying respondents who are then used to refer researchers on to other respondents" (Atkinson/Flint 2001). In sociology, snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling is used to recruit respondents from hidden populations, such as criminal subcultures, for qualitative interviews. Through the evergrowing number of referrals, "the sample consequently expands wave by wave like a snowball growing in size as it rolls down a hill" (Etikan et al. 2015: 1), giving the method its name. In online research, the referral method does not rely on personal referrals but rather on connections via social networks or hyperlinks to websites. To collect data for a database of the German manosphere, an exponential discriminative snowball sampling was used (see Stewart n.d.) to choose websites and blogs associated with this online spectrum.

5 We define misogyny as follows: Misogyny is hatred or dislike of, contempt for, or prejudice against women that is manifested in diverse forms such as mental, verbal or physical intimidation, harassment or abuse of women that targets them based on their

terms, even if they do not identify as part of a manosphere movement.

Parallel to the data collection, the identified accounts categorised into manosphere groups through a qualitative coding process that uses a deductive approach. Known sub-groups of the manosphere were used as codes: PUA, Incel, MRA and FRA, MGTOW and Redpillers. In addition, inductive codes were used for accounts that did not clearly fall into these sub-groups but that nonetheless spread manosphere narratives and misogyny. These codes include “Masculinity Coach”, “Masculinity Influencer”, “Masculinist”, and “Finance Coach”. The publicly available platform metrics of the collected accounts were integrated into the database to document the accounts’ impact and reach. Additionally, accounts of the actors on other platforms and their websites were included in the database.

A list of in-group terminology and neologisms/reinterpretations was also created during this step. The database serves as a basis for mapping the German manosphere and examining the interconnections within and between its spectra. The manosphere-specific expressions provide insights into how and to what extent terminology spreads on the internet and in online subcultures and which groups or actors show a particular linguistic affinity to the manosphere. Through online searches using these previously collected keywords, further actors were included in the database. Terms, phrases and hashtags associated with the manosphere were searched for on different social media pages. The results were analysed and included if the accounts were either recognisably part of manosphere sub-groups or if they repeatedly spread manosphere narratives. Aside from websites and social media accounts of

manosphere actors, forums where manosphere members gather were collected.

In total, over 350 websites, podcasts and social media accounts were collected for the database, including profiles from YouTube, Twitch, Reddit, TikTok, Instagram, Telegram, X, and Facebook, as well as websites and blogs. Additionally, 178 slang words and frequently used slurs were collected and added to the database. The database was created to help answer research questions about central actors and the prevalent manosphere groups. The categorisation of actors into different manosphere groups helped to see how prevalent groups were within the collected dataset. Breaking down the database by platforms also enabled the research team to identify which sub-group preferred which platform in the dataset. The “follower” and “view” metrics were included to compare the reach and impact of individual actors. In addition, the collected accounts served as a basis for the network analysis.

3.3 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A qualitative analysis of central pages and forums provided insights into important groups and actors in the German manosphere. This methodological approach also provides an in-depth understanding of the sub-groups, issues, and foci of the German manosphere. The different groups were analysed based on digital ethnographic research into their content. For this, forums, websites, and social media accounts were studied.

Incels, for whom researchers did not find any German language social media presence in the research of this study, were predominantly analysed through two forums. Further research might be necessary to confirm whether self-identifying German language Incels are active on social media. For other manosphere groups and currents, a summary was produced, and accounts of important actors were analysed as examples to

gender or sex. This consists of any act, including online speech and content, that seeks to exclude, coerce, shame, stigmatise or portray women as inferior based on these protected attributes.

illustrate the central characteristics of their respective groups. Accounts were chosen based on their impact, engagement, and expression of manosphere ideas. The impact and engagement of accounts were measured through the metrics provided by social media platforms, such as likes and subscribers. A second selection criterion was that an explication of viewpoints by actors is contained in the videos. The research was mostly based on YouTube videos by the accounts analysed, given that longer video formats allow creators to lay out their worldviews and ideas in greater detail. Actors' names were anonymised using an abbreviation based on their categorisation and a letter to prevent advertising the actors' content. In addition to these long-form videos, the websites and content produced by the actors on other social media platforms were also included in the analysis. For the individual actors, the analysis did not encompass a predetermined number of videos or other forms of content but followed the logic of theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation, a concept from grounded theory methodology, is reached when "gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories" (Charmaz 2006: 113). In the context of this work, theoretical saturation was reached when the analysed material from an individual actor or website was sufficient to describe and contextualise the central ideas, positions, and characteristics of the respective actor or website. The accounts' central narratives and strategies were analysed through writing and comparative analysis of research memos. Memoing is the practice of writing and comparing short research notes on a subject. This technique can involve interviews, ethnographic observations, texts or audiovisual media that are analysed in social research. As an analytic method, writing memos is closely linked to grounded theory methodologies. In this context, Kathy Charmaz (2006) describes memoing as follows:

Memo-writing provides a space to become actively engaged in your materials, to develop your ideas and to fine-tune your subsequent data-gathering. Through writing memos, you construct analytic notes to explicate and fill out categories. [...] Memos give you a space and place for making comparisons between data and data, data and codes, codes of data and other codes, codes and category, and category and concept and for articulating conjectures about these comparisons (Charmaz 2006: 72f.).

Memos are a key element of driving analytical processes in grounded theory approaches, but they are by no means confined to building the middle-range theories⁶ that these grounded theory methodologies aim to develop. In this study, memos were used to drive analysis of individual actors and sub-groups within the German manosphere. Memos were created following a fixed structure and planned sequence of questions. First, the memo addressed the following categories: "Discusses Account(s), Sub-Groups, Platforms, Narratives or Themes/Other Phenomena", followed by a "summary of data". Next, memos featured "Reflections and interpretations". Where applicable, memos contained "Connections to other memos or data", "next steps", and "open questions". This approach was chosen to understand which groups exist in the German manosphere.

3.4 NETWORK MAPPING

YouTube accounts and websites of the German manosphere (e.g. blogs and personal pages) were examined through a network analysis. This method was chosen to determine if and how members

6 According to Robert K. Merton, who coined this term, "[m]iddle-range theory involves abstractions, [...] but they are close enough to observed data to be incorporated in propositions that permit empirical testing. Middle-range theories deal with delimited aspects of social phenomena, as is indicated by their labels" (Merton 1949: 448). Middle-range theories concern specific social phenomena in a specific temporal or local context, distinct from grand theories in the social sciences.

of different manosphere sub-groups are connected, both within and between sub-groups. Network analysis can show strong and weak links between actors, reveal clusters of affiliated groups or exchange between groups. Network metrics can also show the centrality and significance of individual actors within a network, which is helpful when trying to understand social movement dynamics. Websites were chosen for the analysis because they often have a longer lifespan than individual social media profiles and are the predominant form of online presence in parts of the manosphere. One reason for this is that, in contrast to social media accounts or subreddits, personal websites are more resistant to bans. The starting points for the network analysis were links between websites in the database. A network analysis was also conducted for German manosphere actors on YouTube. YouTube was chosen for this as it is a popular platform for hosting podcasts or collaborative videos alongside other content creators. This analysis established a network by tracing the appearances of manosphere creators on each other's YouTube channels, guest appearances on podcasts, or joint videos. The network analyses were conducted following the steps outlined below. Based on the database collected for this study, YouTube videos by manosphere actors were researched for joint appearances with other manosphere actors in chronological order. The actors chosen for the network analysis had all been active on YouTube since October 2021, three years before data collection started. All videos with corresponding guest appearances were noted along with the corresponding links. The research found 57 links between 28 accounts on YouTube.

The existing database was also used as a basis for the network analysis for websites, and websites from different categories were selected. Then, the blogrolls and link lists were catalogued. Only websites associated with the manosphere and actively maintained within the past two years were included in the database used for the network

analysis. Pages that were offline or linked to spam content were not included. The research found 103 links between 46 accounts. The websites and accounts were anonymised in the database used for the network analysis by an abbreviation of their categorisation and a number to prevent advertising these websites and accounts.

The connections between the accounts were visualised in Gephi as undirected networks using the ForceAtlas2 algorithm (see Jacomy et al. 2014). The visualised networks, as well as key network metrics, were then interpreted to derive findings about central actors and the connections within and between manosphere sub-groups on websites and on YouTube. This approach was chosen to answer questions regarding the network of German manosphere actors.

The methods employed in this study were designed to address its central objectives, focusing on identifying the core sub-groups within the German manosphere, understanding their connections, mapping the platforms and websites they use, and exploring whether actors outside the manosphere milieu convey its messages. By addressing these questions, this preliminary study seeks to provide an initial outline of the character of the German manosphere.

4 FINDINGS FROM EXPERT INTERVIEWS ON THE GERMAN MANOSPHERE

The selected experts, all professionally engaged in researching various facets of the German and international manosphere, represent diverse fields, including political science, social science, communication science, media studies, and psychoanalysis. Among the experts interviewed were Dr Eviane Leidig, Dr Jacob Johannsen, Corinna Dolezalek, and Dr Ann-Kathrin Rothermel.

4.1 ACTORS

The interviewed experts noted both the growth and increasing fragmentation of the manosphere. Rather than structured recruitment efforts, they considered that the manosphere's organic expansion was caused by individuals actively engaging with and reinforcing content independently, often driven initially by already prevalent misogynistic beliefs in society. The experts interviewed emphasised the need to distinguish between large influencers and individual actors who disseminate misogynist content but do not consider themselves part of one particular group and individuals who consider themselves part of one or multiple communities within the manosphere and disseminate content accordingly. Consequently, experts noted that there is no single "Incel community" and that the term "manosphere" can create the false impression of a homogeneous group.

Among the ideological currents described by the experts interviewed were PUAs and MRAs, who were considered to be the main groups initially constituting the manosphere. Other groups considered key to the manosphere today were: Incels, who reject PUA strategies and gained prominence following Elliot Rodger's and Alek Minassian's attacks;⁷ self-optimisation influencers such as Andrew Tate, who reject the fatalistic and pessimistic outlook of Incels and who significantly increased their following during the Covid-19 pandemic; MGTOW; and Redpillers, who further developed the already prevalent narrative of male victimisation under feminism and claim an awakening from ignorance.

The groups named as parts of the manosphere were consistent with those discussed in the literature (see Section 2), showing a broad consensus among experts and suggesting that the makeup of the German manosphere resembles the international misogynist online milieu. This idea of an awakening also connects red pill concepts and rhetoric to far-right and conspiratorial elements. Experts also highlighted neo-Nazi, far-right and alt-right groups, including their online spaces, as areas where misogyny is widespread in combination with racist and anti-feminist views. With a view to the US, two experts also saw manosphere beliefs widespread in the voter base of Donald Trump. This expert assessment is consistent with findings from ISD research showing a massive increase in derogatory and misogynistic language in the manosphere shortly after the presidential election, some specifically targeting Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris or her supporters (Frances-Wright/Ayad 2024).

Experts noted the difficulty of making clear-cut distinctions between these ideologies due to the fragmentation of the manosphere and the overlap between its spheres. A notable example is the recent emergence of the concept of "Sigma Males", who share the neoliberal worldview of PUAs but, as experts noted, do not emphasise the seduction aspect of their ideology, as well as "Green Pillers", who blend aspects of Islamism and the manosphere. The "Green Pill" is here used as a metaphor for an Islamic worldview, and the ideal state of gender relations is described in terms of an idealised Islamic traditional marriage. For further research on the Islamic manosphere, see Hussein Kesvani (2019) and Saad Ghumkor and Hina Mir (2022).

Further, some online gaming communities were highlighted as a space where misogyny and racism were deeply embedded. Experts referenced the Gamergate harassment campaign during 2014 and 2015, which utilised Twitter alongside other

7 Elliot Rodger killed seven people, including himself, in a rampage attack in Isla Vista, California, in 2014. He identified as an Incel and left behind videos and a manifesto in which he blamed women for his loneliness. Rodger inspired Alek Minassian, another self-identified Incel, who carried out a vehicle ramming attack, killing ten people and injuring 15 in Toronto, Canada, in 2018. For further information on Minassian and Rodger, see ISD (2022).

platforms to target women, people of colour, and queer people in the gaming industry, and the theory that the campaign fostered radicalisation among many users who migrated further into the manosphere due to the campaign (see also Filipovic 2007). They further highlighted the continued backlash against diversification in gaming and video productions and theorised that this was often caused by an over-identification with film and gaming, which causes changes such as an increase in Black lead actresses in movies or the incorporation of pronoun options into character builders to be perceived as a personal attack. It was emphasised that subcultures acted as mirrors for broader trends in society and that the image of subcultures is shaped by those representatives who are particularly loud.

In addition, experts described female-supported misogyny among far-right – and, increasingly, mainstream conservative – influencer spheres, which was characterised by idealised concepts such as the “trad wife” (traditional wife), among others. The impact of female influencers seems to vary by platform. According to one expert, they were especially active on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. On these audiovisual media platforms, they cater their content to what the expert assumes to be a predominantly male follower base. In terms of ideology, female misogynist influencers were considered to be more in alignment with men’s rights and father’s rights movements than with PUAs or MGTOW. In addition, researchers also acknowledged “femcels” who, like Incels, were characterised by sexual frustration but were found to exhibit less support for aggression and violence (for more information on femcels, see Evans/Lankford 2024).

Finally, experts noted that misogyny is often normalised and less frequently challenged in conservative political circles. According to them, misogynistic ideas can more easily spread in politically conservative pockets, providing a fertile ground

for recruitment into the manosphere. They further highlighted that misogyny is not confined to any one subculture but is widespread in society at large, particularly in patriarchal societies, which enables the continued perpetuation of misogyny in various forms, both offline and online.

Most interview partners had not researched the German-language manosphere in detail and were therefore reserved in making an assessment regarding the relevance of specific actors. Generally, experts emphasised transnational phenomena such as the rise in self-improvement, fitness, and lifestyle content published by so-called “Manfluencers” and right-wing members of the bodybuilding community. The following groups were described to be particularly widespread and relevant within the manosphere in German-speaking countries:

- Popular influencers with large followings who disseminate subtle yet harmful sexist content.
- Finance coaches who combine a commercial incentive with ideological convictions by blending misogyny with “hustling” and “grindset” ideologies.
- Dating and lifestyle coaches similar to Andrew Tate, who offer misogynistic and dehumanising life and dating advice on platforms like TikTok and Instagram.
- Key figures of the German Men’s Rights movement and Fathers’ Rights activists.
- The Incel community, comprising international networks that include German-speaking users active on Twitter and other forums. The German-language Incel community grew after the 2019 terrorist attack in Halle.⁸

⁸ On 9 October 2019, a far-right extremist tried to enter the synagogue in Halle, where the Jewish community held a Yom Kippur service, to commit a mass shooting. After he was unable to enter, he shot two people on the street. The attacker was suspected to be an Incel by some commenters, even though no substantial evidence was presented for this. These speculations nonetheless increased interest in Incels as a group. Regarding the Halle attack, see BBC (2020).

- Political figures who are not explicitly part of the manosphere but promote misogynistic views that resonate with online communities, for example, the AfD and their corresponding youth organisation “Junge Alternative”, as well as high-profile politicians who are identified with misogynist positions.
- Newly formed neo-Nazi groups who mobilise against pride events in German cities.
- Right-wing, far-right extremists and other individuals who disseminate misogynistic and queerphobic content online (e.g. the Honigwabe Podcast).
- Gaming communities, such as the “Heimatjams” or far-right Gaming-related Discord servers;
- Tradwife influencers.
- Remnants of the Identitarian Movement.

In addition, German extremist and conspiracy movements are expected to overlap with the manosphere, and key figures in spreading misogynistic views within the anglosphere were theorised to impact German-language discourse due to their reach and influence. Indeed, empirical findings from this study confirm this expert assessment. Manosphere actors echoed Covid denial narratives, conspiracy narratives involving media organisations, or racist and anti-semitic narratives like the great replacement theory (for further information on this conspiracy narrative, see ISD 2022c). Several actors positively referenced Andrew Tate and other international manosphere influencers.

4.2 PLATFORMS

The interviewed experts listed a large variety of platforms used by actors within the manosphere, ranging from mainstream, alternative, and gaming platforms to traditional online forums. They noted that actors tend to favour different platforms depending on the type of content, audience, and goals that motivate them. In addition,

the interviewed experts highlighted that most actors within the manosphere often quickly adapt to changes in their online environment, for example, increases in content moderation. The significant differences in affordances across platforms and their impact on the different uses of each platform were also noted. Further, they outlined the interplay between online and offline spheres as a continuum.

TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube were found to be favoured by PUA, Redpillers, and masculinist influencers (e.g. BronzeAgePervert and SloBrah), as they often seek a larger audience. Experts emphasised their role in translating extreme far-right and misogynist talking points to the mainstream. TikTok specifically was found to host a considerable amount of content resembling Andrew Tate’s misogynistic rhetoric, with influencers promoting similar ideas about male dominance and women’s subjugation. In general, mainstream platforms allow masculinist influencers to maximise their reach and viral potential by sharing quick, engaging content, such as motivational videos, self-improvement, and personal transformation stories, including “looksmxxing” content, which refers to men discussing ways to improve their physical appearance to meet ideals of masculinity, often combining body image issues with misogynistic views about women’s attractiveness.

Imageboards, 4chan, Kohlchan, and the Honigwabe Forum (in English, Honeycomb forum) were referred to as preferred platforms for Incels who seek more private, isolated spaces to openly share their extreme views. Reddit was mentioned as a former key platform for Incel and MGTOW spaces, which changed when the platform adopted a stricter moderation policy and banned specific subreddits such as r/Incel, r/braincels and r/mgtow. However, experts highlighted the continued availability of the r/NoFap subreddit, a subreddit by a community that rejects masturbation and that also features members of manosphere

groups, as well as the vast amounts of misogynistic porn on the platform.

Facebook was considered particularly relevant for Fathers' Rights activists, which was theorised to be related to the older demographic both in this sub-group and among the users most active on Facebook. Experts saw a notable increase in misogynistic content on X following the acquisition of the platform by Elon Musk and the subsequent reduction in content moderation – and trust and safety teams. As a result, X has become a key platform for misogynistic and far-right ideas. YouTube is widely used for long-form videos, through which actors can build substantial audiences. Telegram and Discord were both referred to as more closed-off, less moderated spaces for constant user engagement and community-building. While not explicitly mentioned by most interviewees, one expert pointed out that Snapchat might be overlooked as a platform for younger users to engage in misogynistic content.

Podcasts were highlighted as a key tool for sharing ideas and discussing social issues at length. In general, it was noted that mainstream social media platforms and podcasts tend to host more subtle yet harmful content, with users moving between these spaces and more closed-off spaces where more transgressive content is found. For example, Incel forums and Discord servers were found to function as in-group spaces where misogyny is validated and normalised, which often reinforces narcissistic self-aggrandisement and strengthens the belief that women and queer people are the enemy. This migration was found to be encouraged through dynamics like invite links in actors' profile descriptions on mainstream platforms, such as advertisements for closed Telegram groups on YouTube.

4.3 TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

The interviewed experts outlined a variety of ways in which misogyny is expressed and spread in digital spaces, from subtle, low-level interactions to more aggressive and harmful campaigns. Tactics include:

- Using memes and low-barrier content for quick engagement, especially with young users.
- Employing memetic warfare as a tool for harassment and means of community building.
- Publishing high volumes of content to find out what resonates with their audience.
- Using coded language and euphemisms to avoid content moderation whilst fostering their in-group belonging.
- Platform jumping as a way to maintain reach in response to regulatory changes and variations in Terms of Service enforcement.
- Promoting a mix of personal development and self-help narratives with a misogynistic underpinning.
- Using affective tactics that build on feelings such as outrage, frustration, and fear to create emotional engagement and further build a sense of belonging.

Dating coaches, in particular, were seen as using straightforward, manipulative content to cultivate a sense of dependency among followers, encouraging them to keep engaging with the content for validation and guidance.

Many actors were found to generate visibility and attention through political commentary and reactions to current events, particularly those concerning feminism and transphobia, by framing these issues as part of a broader cultural crisis to radicalise their audience. Experts also noted an increase in systematic attacks against the advancement of feminism and LGBTQ+ rights, especially against transgender people among far-right groups, noting that anti-migrant and anti-Muslim

hate remain core concepts simultaneously. Here, selected mainstream media that actors feel validate their views and emotions were also found to play a significant role in mainstreaming misogynistic viewpoints.

Misogynistic actors were also found to employ “evidence-based misogyny” (see also Rothermel 2023). This tactic involves presenting their interpretations of scientific studies, statistics, or other sources to make their views seem fact-based. Some actors were found to create circular reference networks to build credibility and create fake knowledge platforms or amend self-referential content on platforms like Wikipedia to support their viewpoints.

Experts also saw a growing trend of romanticised and idealised traditional gender roles alongside anti-feminist ideologies embedded into lifestyle content. According to their assessment, this lifestyle content, which places women’s subjugation to male dominance in a positive light, often using concepts such as “traditional masculinity” or “trad wives”, plays a crucial role in reinforcing radical views among viewers. Further, young men in their formative years who struggle with emotions and loneliness were considered particularly at risk for radicalisation through self-help and self-improvement content geared towards them. The role of economic and societal crises, which have created insecurity for individuals, as well as the prevalence of misogyny and other ideologies of inequality, were also emphasised as contextual factors promoting radicalisation. One expert related an example from their own empirical research, in which respondents blamed feminism for economic crises. Such attitudes, according to the interview partner, would be present beyond the manosphere.

The debasement and dehumanisation of women were found to be at the core of manosphere tactics and strategies. Overt examples included the

non-consensual dissemination of intimate images or AI pornography, coordinated hate campaigns against specific targets as seen in the cases of Amber Heard (for further detail, see Nelson 2024) or Pia Scholz (see Bovermann 2024), the use of dehumanising terminology like “femoid” or “foid”⁹ to describe women within the Incel community, and violent fantasies such as those outlined in Elliot Rodger’s manifesto, who suggested concentration camps for women as well as gender relations resembling those seen in Margaret Atwood’s book “The Handmaid’s Tale”. However, experts noted that the underlying concept of debasing and dehumanising women and others is not only prevalent among Incels and terrorists but also throughout the entirety of the manosphere.

5 THE GERMAN MANOSPHERE: DISPERSION ACROSS PLATFORMS, ACTORS, NARRATIVES, AND STRATEGIES

Based on the accounts and websites collected for the database of this study, initial findings about the spread of the German manosphere across platforms can be formulated. While the database is not final or comprehensive, the five-week data collection period involving multiple researchers allows for some conclusions to be drawn about the makeup of the database and the distribution of manosphere sub-groups between platforms it reflects.

Actors within the German manosphere, as identified in the database created for this study, maintained a presence across multiple platforms, with some holding accounts on several of them simultaneously. The PUA accounts collected in the dataset were widely distributed on different platforms. Among them, nine were active on Websites,

⁹ The term femoid is used as a dehumanising term for women (see ISD 2022). “Foid”, the short form, is also used due to its close resemblance with “void” (See Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft “Gegen Hass im Netz” 2024: 26; 48).

four on Facebook, 37 on YouTube, 22 on TikTok, and 23 on Instagram. The MGTOW accounts collected in the database for this study were present on YouTube, Facebook, and websites. Aside from one Incel-adjacent website, Incel spaces in the database encompassed two forums. Redpill accounts were predominantly active on audiovisual platforms, with 17 on YouTube, eleven on Instagram, and five on TikTok. MRA accounts collected in the database for this study were primarily present on websites (82), with an additional single-digit number of accounts each on YouTube (4), TikTok (7), Instagram (2), and Facebook (2). The database also included two MRA forums and an MRA account on X.

Finally, a group of manosphere influencers that could broadly be described as “masculinity coaches” was present on multiple platforms. These coaches promise to help men in different aspects of their lives by strengthening their masculinity in different ways. While masculinity coaches, similar to PUAs, thematise dating, their approach to coaching is more holistic and focused on a broader set of issues. However, similar to other manosphere groups, accounts classified as masculinity coaches spread misogynist narratives. Like PUAs, accounts belonging to this group in the database were predominantly present on audiovisual platforms like YouTube (19), TikTok (14), and Instagram (22), with some actors also present on Facebook (3) and websites (6).

While the number and distribution of the accounts might be partly explained by the limitations of this study, the distribution also reflects characteristics of the manosphere sub-groups researched. PUAs, Redpill, and masculinity coaches often try to monetise their services, necessitating the creation of websites as well as a social media presence. Audiovisual platforms allow users to create short clips or longer videos where creators can directly address their audience. Through this, they can create a sense of relatability and authenticity (see Lewis 2020). Ideals of microcelebrity might not only be coherent with these creators’ political beliefs but also beneficial for the business models of PUAs and other coaches.

The relative isolation of German Incel spaces in the database is not necessarily coherent with other research that shows Incel activity on different social media platforms (see Baele et al. 2024). Further investigation is needed to determine whether Incels also identify as such on German social media platforms.

MGTOW in the study tend to use YouTube more often than other platforms; however, the sample size for this study was too small to make far-reaching assessments. MRAs within the studied database showed a strong preference for websites. A large percentage of MRA actors contribute to institutional websites or individual blogs to

Table 1: Distribution of manosphere accounts in this study’s database across platforms.

	PUA	MGTOW	Incels	MRA	Redpill	Masculinity Coaches
YouTube	37	✓	-	4	17	19
TikTok	22	-	-	7	5	14
Instagram	23	-	-	2	11	22
X	-	-	-	1	-	-
Facebook	4	✓	-	2	-	3
Forums		-	2	2	-	-
Websites	9	✓	1	82	-	6

explain their view of the world, formulate political demands, or share personal stories.

The following sections provide an overview of actors from five manosphere sub-groups in Germany, comprised of an analysis of their common strategies and tactics, central issues and narratives, political or commercial motivations, interconnections within the manosphere, and the relevance of select accounts to the German-speaking context. The classification of an actor as a significant figure within a particular sub-group depends on the frequency and intentionality with which they promote defining narratives and issues.

In addition to creators from the manosphere sub-groups analysed in this chapter, many content creators and influencers, who may not explicitly be identified as part of the manosphere, incorporate misogynistic rhetoric into their agendas. For example, MontanaBlack, who is one of Germany's most well-known streamers and has more than three million followers, compared women to dogs and claimed that he could not listen to women for more than ten minutes while at the same time stating that he did not have discriminatory intent in saying this (Lydia 2023). The prevalence of such rhetoric in online spaces often serves as a gateway to manosphere-related themes, as was also mentioned in the expert interviews. Although most key figures in the German manosphere are cisgender heterosexual men, women also play an active role in the manosphere. The participation of female actors in propagating misogynistic beliefs will be briefly explored at the conclusion of this chapter.

5.1 AN ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE OF PUAS IN THE RESEARCHED DATASET

Actor_PUA_A is a German PUA presenting his experiences using Pick-Up strategies on women. On YouTube, he publishes example videos of women he approached and “seduced” with manipulative

strategies. These videos are filmed by a hidden camera, which follows the creator. For example, one video shows him assertively approaching a woman who clearly signals no interest in him initially but later agrees to physical contact. This framing suggests to viewers that a “No” does not always mean “No” and can be turned into consent if men apply the “right” strategies. This and other similar “infield” videos provide instances of disregarding female sexual rejection, overstepping boundaries, sexual harassment, and belittling consent, which is common among PUAs (Scotto di Carlo 2023). The “infield” videos also show how PUAs operate both online and offline. Actor_PUA_A argues that becoming a PUA is hard work and requires improving social skills and a personality characterised by dominance – qualities he says can be acquired through paid individual coaching, which he is offering. In exchange, on his TikTok channel, he promises his customers “one date per week”. This example underscores a prevalent commercial motivation among Pick-Up Artists.

Another prevalent theme is the “game” tactic that summarises activities and rules PUAs teach their followers to become better at the “game” (Kray 2017), which is the game of dating. According to PUAs, men have to win this game and can win it through expressions of dominance, while women are framed as subordinate and passive objects (Scotto di Carlo 2023). Actor_PUA_A uses the game or business metaphor in videos offering advice on texting with women (the so-called “textgame”) or suggests economic methods for calculating the value of investing in women. In his book, the creator uses game-related metaphors to lay out a set of behavioural rules for men seducing women and identifies these with the principles that “players” must adhere to. While his content on YouTube is lengthy, focusing on teaching seduction performance and strategies, he publishes shorter material on Instagram and TikTok in which he suggests men should take off unknown women's clothes

with their eyes in public. Many women experience this as sexual objectification (Hollett et al. 2022). He also encourages men who are looking for sex to approach women they consider to be dressed “slutty”, suggesting they can be seen as “easy”, available sex objects, and harassed based on appearance and clothing. Actor_PUA_A is connected to other actors in the manosphere, with whom he produces joint videos and podcast episodes, as well as recommending other channels that offer advice on sex and lifestyle-related themes.

Actor_PUA_B is a Pick-Up Artist and masculinity coach who discusses male archetypes and stereotypes common in the manosphere, offering biological explanations for masculine and feminine traits and viewing masculinity as a “god-given” tool for success. He suggests a societal acceptance of female infidelity and “cuckoldry” (a fetish broadly discussed in alt-right and manosphere circles). Pointing to epigenetic explanations, he adopts a Nietzschean narrative prevalent in these spaces: that the strong are morally manipulated by the weak.

He equates the “nice guy” to a “weak man”, which, according to him, is an undesirable male trait that needs to be overcome (King 2017). Actor_PUA_B elaborates on gender roles, emphasising what he considers their natural harmony, contrasted with societal “perversions”. He links masculine and feminine traits to testosterone and estrogen, expressing concern over men consuming excess estrogen through the drinking water and becoming more effeminate, thus “enslaved by the system”, a theme common in the manosphere (McGlashan/Krendel 2023). He reinforces male dominance ideals, asserting it is bad if a wife must work, aligning with traditional male provider narratives. Routines are important to improve one’s masculinity, argues Actor_PUA_B, showing his routines in the gym and other parts of life. He criticises capitalism, in the vein of other manosphere influencers such as Andrew Tate, but offers no systemic

solutions – only individualistic escapes which are similar to Andrew Tate’s vision of “escaping the Matrix”.

Unlike those in the manosphere who blame women in general or specific individual women, this PUA primarily focuses on abstract societal forces while also critiquing women. He advocates a return to 1950s gender roles. He admires Andrew Tate and claims billion-dollar industries use the LGBTQ+ community to create division, citing corporate diversity support as evidence of a conspiracy. While claiming to have no issue with homosexuals, he labels gender fluidity a “psyop”, attributing non-traditional roles to conspiratorial manipulation. He also vaguely blames the “media” for societal ills, further feeding into a conspiratorial outlook. Actor_PUA_B’s thoughts and content strongly overlap with other manosphere sub-groups and contain narratives that are also spread by actors from the anglophone manosphere.

Actor_PUA_C identifies himself as a representative of men and denies being a misogynist, claiming instead to be “on the same side as women”. He argues that feminism harms women by promoting a societal treatment that he believes infantilises them, such as initiatives like women’s empowerment events in STEM fields. He views such efforts as “special treatment” that portray women as mentally and physically incapable. Regarding the Rammstein case in Germany (NDR 2023b), he has called for discussions about women’s behaviour and clothing choices around powerful men, perpetuating victim-blaming narratives.

While Actor_PUA_C denies objectifying women, his videos often include comments about their appearance, clothing, and behaviour that align with typical PUA language, framing women as sexual objects in a “game” of seduction, thereby clearly objectifying women. He criticises what he terms “female victimhood”, arguing

Table 2: Social media presence of Actor_PUA_1, Actor_PUA_2, and Actor_PUA_3

	Website	Podcast	YouTube (subscribers)	Instagram (Followers)	TikTok (Followers / Likes)	X (Followers)	Facebook page (Likes)
Actor_PUA_A	✓	✓	61'300	1'188	8'378 / 120'000	50	1'754
Actor_PUA_B	-	✓	61'200	102'000	58'500 / 891'100	-	12'705
Actor_PUA_C	✓	✓	93'800	5'500	2'173 / 109'700	4'442	-

that women historically had better lives than men, as they were not subjected to the hardships of war and military service. While scholars often describe PUA tactics as manipulative and dismissive of consent, Actor_PUA_C counters by portraying women as the true manipulators. He is aware of the criticism directed at the PUA community and uses his platforms to actively refute it, often by intimidating critics.

On his YouTube channel, Actor_PUA_C posts political commentary, frequently expressing anti-migrant sentiments. However, on his other social media platforms, he shares PUA-related material, including dating and seduction tips. This suggests a deliberate strategy to adapt his content to different platforms while maintaining his audience.

5.2 AN ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE OF MGTOW ACTORS IN THE RESEARCHED DATASET

In the material researched for this study, MGTOW were present on different platforms. However, the number of MGTOW actors was comparatively small, which is why the two actors illustrating the central ideas of German MGTOW will be discussed together.

Actor_MGTOW_A discusses MGTOW in the context of different philosophies and red pill ideas. He understands traditional relationships between men and women as completely transactional and

describes women seeking such relationships as parasites. The creator claims that women would exploit men without regret, using sexuality to control men and taking advantage of men's emotional attachment. He believes that women only enter relationships for an immediate material benefit and explains this with reference to biological programming. The MGTOW also see society as stacked against men. He speaks of the systematic oppression of men and cites examples like the lack of resources for male victims of intimate partner violence. As is typical for members of the manosphere, Actor_MGTOW_A subscribes to concepts like "hypergamy" and "gynocentrism" as explanations for female behaviour. Like many MGTOW, the creator subscribes to libertarian ideas and understands himself as a rationalist.

Actor_MGTOW_B also understands MGTOW as an individual and individualist philosophy, which he contrasts with philosophies of collectivism. He connects discussions of MGTOW issues with reports of personal experiences. The creator does not believe that MGTOW need to abstain from relationships in general but sees relationships as a potential threat to individual autonomy because other persons might influence one's emotional state.

Actor_MGTOW_B puts a strong emphasis on controlling emotions and identifies being part of MGTOW with mastering one's emotions.

Relationships, for him, carry with them the danger of outside manipulation. MGTOW also have a political dimension for the creator. In general, he seems to have libertarian tendencies. He rejects men's rights activism as inconsequential on the political stage and instead claims to fight "gynocentrism" at an individual level through his MGTOW existence.

The YouTube creator researched also believes schools promote a culture of guilt around German history and create a sense of victim morality. Like many in the manosphere, he believes that welfare and child support make single motherhood an attractive choice for some women. This viewpoint seems closely related to the manosphere concept of the "Betabux": a male provider of lower status that – according to red pill ideology – is sought out by women while or after they search for or have affairs with higher status men. Relying on "Betabux" is part of the hypergamous sexual strategies manosphere members assign to women. Some in the manosphere argue that the state sometimes aids hypergamy by providing welfare to single mothers and through court rulings on child support. In this way, taxpayers are collectively made into "Betabux".

In general, MGTOW in Germany seem to be strongly influenced by international MGTOW and manosphere discourse. Creators researched in the dataset broadly shared manosphere viewpoints and did not show any significant regional distinctions. Research for this study found a small German-language MGTOW milieu. Further research is required to understand the extent of the MGTOW online milieu in German-speaking countries.

5.3 AN ANALYSIS OF TWO INCEL AND LOOKSMAXXING ONLINE SPACES IN THE DATASET

In the material researched for this study, German language Incels were predominantly active on

two forums, a sub-board of an Incel forum targeting foreign language speakers and a German language board of a looksmaxxing forum. Some Incels use strategies, hoping to find sexual partners. They refer to these strategies as "deIncelisation". Among these strategies is "looksmaxxing", a range of approaches to improve one's physical attractiveness. While some of these approaches are harmless, like improving one's personal hygiene or workout routines, other methods can be harmful to the individual's health. For example, some of these actors advocate taking supplements or using methods that can cause serious injuries (e.g. attempting to break bones to strengthen facial features) or undergoing surgery. Different aspects and forms are discussed on a looksmaxxing forum that was researched for this study. While some of the users report their successful "ascension", meaning that they (temporarily) overcame "Incelism" through finding sexual partners, others bemoan their lack of success and ongoing search for partners.

While most users in the researched looksmax forum are exchanging "looksmax" strategies and seem to plan to use these to find sexual partners, individual forum users declare that they are "blackpilled" and have given up dating. On the German forum, users exchange tips on cosmetic surgeons and supplements, as well as dating guidelines. Some forum users express sympathies for the far right, especially for the German AfD. Individual users also openly praise Hitler and share anti-semitic slogans and memes. Furthermore, racism can be found in threads discussing the dating success (or lack of success), for example, of Asian or Turkish men. The researched looksmax forum is filled with sexist terminology, with many terms originating in Incel spaces, like "stacy" or "foid". On the board that was analysed for this study, users also discuss suicide (rope-maxxing) and whether deadly attacks in the style of Elliot Rodger (Going ER) could happen in Germany. Individual users also argue in justification

of femicides. Some posts containing news stories about the murder or torture of women are labelled as “just fucking lol” or as “lifefuel” (uplifting messages).

While Inceldom is coupled with a certain resignation regarding dating options, looksmaxxers are trying to find ways to succeed in dating, much like Pick-Up Artists do. Users on the German-language board of the researched looksmaxxing forum, too, use individualised strategies for betterment to increase their dating success. Aside from physical enhancement, they turn to strategies not unlike the “peacocking” strategy advertised by PUAs that suggests wearing extraordinary clothes or using other methods to stand out from the crowd. While the analysed looksmaxxing forum is also home to some “blackpilled” Incels, many forum users seem to have a more positive outlook on life and take a more proactive approach to dating. Looksmaxxers might not be seen as “truecels” by other Incels due to their dating success. They do, however, share the same pseudoscientific and bio-deterministic theories of human attraction, and despite their dating success, they are often as misogynistic as their “truecel” counterparts.

The researched Incel forum is one of the central online spaces for Incels. It is connected to the “Incel Wiki” and comprises a multitude of topical boards. It also has a sub-section for non-English language boards called “Incel International”. In these sub-sections, Spanish and Turkish language boards are represented as distinct boards; additionally, there is a board for “other languages”. In this board, one can find several German-language threads. In the threads analysed during the research period, only around 40 people revealed themselves as German-speaking. The topics of discussion include political topics like the draft, which Incels reject, and migration, to which they are hostile. While some Incels openly praise Hitler and Nazi Germany, others criticise the Nazis on the grounds that their loss laid the foundation for

current German society. Discussions in the board are frequently racist and connect sexism and racism. Another recurring theme is anti-semitism.

In contrast to users on the looksmaxxing forum, users on the researched Incel forum seem more resigned and bitter. The levels of misogyny in the researched material are similar, as is the presence of racist and anti-semitic attitudes. The forum seems to have a rather small number of discernibly German-language posters compared to the total number of users on the forum. What is noteworthy with regard to both the researched Incel forum and the looksmaxxing forum is that the board structure seems to influence the style of posting. On both boards, posters use violent language and fascist memes that are less frequently used on social media. The users post this content in full awareness of the fact that they might be observed by researchers or law enforcement, with posters sometimes joking about “Feds” reading their posts. The boards’ anonymity and lax moderation rules seem to make these spaces safe havens for extremist content. While German-speaking Incels use the imageboard 4chan and the German imageboard “Kohlchan” (see Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft “Gegen Hass im Netz” 2024: 39), no activity of German-speaking users referring to themselves as Incels or using Incel terminology was found on these boards during the research period for this study.

As found in earlier studies, the Incel online subculture in Germany is comparatively small. For this study, only a few hundred posts from the German board of the researched looksmaxxing forum and the “other languages” board of the researched Incel forum were analysed. The posts analysed were written by 40 members of the researched Incel forum and 50 members of the looksmaxxing forum. The comparatively small number of German-speaking Incels active online stands in contrast to the media attention German Incels have received and continue to receive. This

attention is likely based on the extreme and violent misogyny advocated by parts of this online milieu, which differentiates them from less overtly extreme parts of the manosphere. However, by strongly focusing on Incels and portraying them as a unique threat, researchers risk overlooking misogyny throughout the manosphere and in society more broadly by projecting its most extreme expressions onto a group portrayed as a strange other instead of understanding its prevalence.

5.4 AN ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE OF MRAS AND FRAS IN THE RESEARCHED DATASET

Actor_MRA_A is an active blogger and self-described member of the “anti-sexist men’s rights movement”. On his blog, he asserts that one must simultaneously be a feminist and a masculinist to truly understand the world. His key themes are domestic violence against men and an alleged feminist manipulation of society. He claims that “feminist war troops” suppress studies about domestic violence committed by women. He alleges that this suppression is evident in the manipulation of relevant Wikipedia entries by feminists. The MRA has made controversial statements, such as comparing female journalists to prostitutes, dismissing the concept of patriarchy as “nonsense”, and labelling feminist women as hypocrites. He also defines masculinity as the ability to endure difficulties without complaining, a notion he attributes – falsely and out of context – to former US President Barack Obama.

Another blog entry authored by Actor_MRA_A features a collection of so-called “anti-masculinist myths”, which he seeks to debunk. These include arguments against the idea that war is inherently a masculine desire or the claim that society lacks empathy towards men in general. Despite presenting himself as a legitimate MRA and sometimes criticising more radical MRAs, the researched actor frequently publishes or links to content from other, more extreme anti-feminists.

His distancing from such positions is inconsistent, often indirectly legitimising radical anti-feminist rhetoric.

Forum_MRA_B is an open anti-feminist online forum with over 120’000 entries and nearly 300 registered users. The forum’s content is rife with misogynistic narratives, as well as homophobic, xenophobic, anti-semitic, and racist statements. It is dominated by hate speech and emotionally charged arguments, often drawing references from German MRA statements from blogs and the English-speaking far-right or misogynistic figures.

Women are frequently referred to in derogatory terms, such as “stupid” and “ugly broads”. Female politicians are subjected to fat-shaming and labelled as “cheap whores”, while a female journalist is called a “bitch”. One user claims that women consistently underperform compared to men in fields like academia, the economy, sports, the military, and the police.

Another user expresses a desire to deport a Black feminist artist and journalist to Africa, wishing her a “blackout”. This statement implicitly references violence against women as well as the intersection with racism and “misogynoir”, a form of misogyny directed at black women (on the role of anti-black misogyny in online harassment, see Madden et al. 2018).

Other content on the board includes a claim, linked to another anti-feminist blog, that feminism aims to control women and regulate female fertility, particularly targeting women opposed to feminism. Another user promotes and links to the Swiss right-wing extremist group Junge Tat.

One self-proclaimed “expert on women” argues that feminism has led to the mental degeneration of Western women, using a harmful slur to describe them. Public and private media are dismissed as the “lying press” (“Lügenpresse”).

Among masculinist and men’s rights activist groups, this platform is regarded as one of the most extreme and aggressive. Forum_MRA_B is a node point for different German-speaking manosphere actors, especially MRAs. The blog belonging to the forum is hosted abroad (Drüeke/Klaus 2014).

One prominent German-speaking association, Website_MRA_C, describes itself as a lobbying organisation for children, claiming to promote the wellbeing of children through stronger parent-child relationships. The group asserts that children of divorced parents suffer when societal norms emphasise the mother-child relationship at the expense of the father-child bond. To support its claims, the organisation frequently cites the German constitution.

Parental alienation is a recurring theme in FRA discourse, where blame is often placed on mothers – and, at times, implicitly on children – for strained father-child relationships. Emphasis is put on a biological argumentation, such as mother and father – those who conceived the child – are the parents, denying other forms of parenthood and family, such as queer families, blended families and families with adopted children. Another prominent theme is “father deprivation”, a term used to convey more aggressive resentment toward female ex-partners and mothers who are accused of intentionally withholding children from their fathers. Additional grievances include claims that society marginalises fathers in favour of mothers, prioritises maternal rights, and

exploits fathers by obligating them to pay child support while denying them access to their children. FRAs often portray single mothers as selfish and allege that divorced or separated fathers are stigmatised by society.

A notable strategy employed by FRAs, including Website_MRA_C, is “political mimicry”. This strategy involves presenting their objectives as neutral and child-centred while concealing underlying intentions. Such intentions may include reinforcing patriarchal norms, downplaying male-perpetrated domestic violence, or asserting male dominance through the father role. For example, while the researched website emphasises children’s rights and highlights child rights conventions in its articles, these discussions often serve as a façade for advancing these underlying agendas (Trilsbeek/Hartleb 2024).

Website_MRA_C also features a closed members’ area, which was not accessible for this research.

5.5 AN ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE OF REDPILLERS IN THE RESEARCHED DATASET

Actor_RP_A is mainly active on YouTube, where he ridicules the impact of toxic masculinity and engages in debates on evolutionary psychology. In one video, the Redpiller explicitly claims that “women are the real capitalists” and “parasitic”, describing women as greedy and indicating an observed intrinsic unfairness in male-female relationships, where men take (and should take – according to him) provider roles while women

Table 4: Social media presence of Actor_MRA_A

	Website	Podcast	YouTube (subscribers)	Instagram (Followers)	TikTok (Followers / Likes)	X (Followers)	Facebook page (Likes or Follower)	Obsv.
Actor_MRA_A	✓ + blogs	-	-	-	-	1’376	-	

“complain about not being seen”. His stance on male domination in partnership is not only something he desires but something he sees as natural. Therefore, it is important that this hierarchy be protected: true relationships – other than partnerships, a concept he denies because it suggests democratic equality among partners – would only work well when the male takes over a leading role. The actor expresses gender essentialism through claims that women want to be guided or “dominated”. He legitimises his statements through claims from scientific publications, which he references through links in his content. Furthermore, the Redpillers’ positions include anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-Islamic statements.

Actor_RP_A offers individual coaching for men, promising to make them part of a male elite. His coaching combines dating and relationship aspects, personality development and business development. According to the creator, these goals are to be reached through the improvement of the “male essence”. He describes his activities at “war” with blue-pillers and feminists, using common rhetoric in the manosphere – especially in the Incel discourse – of portraying manosphere actors as rebels against women or feminism. Actor_RP_A is well connected with other manosphere actors, especially with PUAs, with whom he occasionally produces joint content. The common red pill tactics of interweaving economic discourses with seduction strategies (Van Valkenburgh 2018) become apparent on his website, where he offers coaching services to men that aim to develop dominance both in business as well as in relationships with women. This contributes to a common manosphere vision, where becoming financially dominant goes hand in hand with becoming dominant towards women (Haslop et al. 2024).

Actor_RP_B publishes videos on evolutionary psychology, sociobiology, and gender essentialism. He aims to institutionalise red pill ideology, which he refers to as “enlightened gender discourse”,

and seeks greater societal acceptance for it. In his view, the red pill is not political but can be used to achieve gender equality for “both genders”. He describes the red pill as a proto-science – an undeveloped field of study based on empirical facts that has yet to be fully established. In one video, where Actor_RP_B is joined by Actor_RP_A, he discusses anti-feminist concepts such as “female opportunism” or “strategic pluralism”, which they claim are common practices. Both argue that female hypergamy and female opportunism are not necessarily biologically determined but are socially and politically influenced. However, they assert that men should always assume women to be opportunistic and, therefore, instrumentalists in male-female relationships.

Actor_RP_B rejects the concept of sexual self-termination, suggesting that a woman’s lack of interest in a man stems from uncertainty about his status. He further argues that a woman’s decision to leave a partner is driven by an intrinsic desire to pursue the highest-value man available at any given time. These views question women’s autonomy and freedom of choice in navigating their sexual and romantic lives, instead suggesting a degree of compulsiveness.

In one video, the researched actor criticises what he perceives as hypocrisy among women, claiming they are allowed to explore their sexuality freely, while men who do the same are labelled as “assholes”. This framing simultaneously positions men as victims of prudish mores and denies the moral denigration that women seen as promiscuous face in society. Additionally, he often presents pseudo-scientific claims, such as the assertion that women reject men in 80% of cases, without offering credible evidence to support these figures.

Actor_RP_B also criticises reports on the gender pay gap, arguing that men face higher expenses for activities such as club visits and dating. He

controversially suggests including what he calls an “exorbitant male mental load in dating” in these calculations. He calls for financial support for men who are dating, framing this as compensation for these alleged burdens. The researched actor’s videos represent a well-connected network of German-speaking red pill advocates, as he frequently collaborates with other prominent figures in this manosphere group.

Actor_RP_C is the channel of a community of men aiming to achieve success in their lives. Their website and social media platforms provide advice and strategies for self-improvement, with topics such as “don’t care what other people say”, “how to be a better person”, “how to not be a pussy”, and “how to be rich”. The channel’s primary content creators, who live outside Europe, have documented ties to Andrew Tate, as evidenced by social media posts showing them together.

On TikTok, they often use demeaning language, referring to women as “little girls” and claiming that modern society no longer promotes masculinity. They argue they do not believe men are “made weak” but instead blame societal trends and the pursuit of “clicks” for diminishing the demand for “strong men”. This rhetoric heavily relies

on victimisation storytelling (Han/Yin 2022) to explain the perceived societal rejection of men.

Statements praising inequality appear frequently in their content, such as: “It wouldn’t be good if everyone is educated well because I want someone that makes my sandwich” and “If everyone is the elite, there’s no elite anymore”. Actor_RP_C promises followers business advice through exclusive paid content, though some of this advice is also shared publicly. For instance, one piece of shared advice tells followers “don’t get legal before you get rich”, suggesting that proper legal business conduct is secondary to financial success.

On Instagram, they showcase their ideal of masculinity with photos from exclusive member gatherings. These images portray men with a martial, almost militaristic appearance, often posing in boxing rings or gyms, as well as enjoying luxurious vacations. The sense of solidarity among these men is central to the group, forming “allies” (Han/Yin 2022) united by hyper-masculinity and anti-feminist narratives. These kinds of exclusive in-group gatherings are also the place – a so-called “homosocial room” (Frick 2023) – where hegemonic masculinity is formed in distinction to women and other types of men.

Table 3: Social media presence of Actor_RP_A, Actor_RP_B, and Actor_RP_C

	Website	Podcast	YouTube (subscribers)	Instagram (Followers)	TikTok (Followers / Likes)	X (Followers)	Facebook page (Likes or Follower)	Obsv.
Actor_RP_A	✓	✓	28'700	4'984	-	16	-	
Actor_RP_B	-	✓	699	164	-	account created recently, no assessment possible yet	-	
Actor_RP_C	✓	✓	2'520 / 20'000*	6'398	1'687 / 26'700	1'347* / 3'536*	574	

* Number of Followers of the main figures behind Actor_RP_C

5.6 FEMALE MANOSPHERE ACTORS

The attitudes of the manosphere are also shared by some women who support a variety of anti-feminist views. In 2016, in a study by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Women, Senior Citizens, and Youth, 15.2% of women stated that they approved of individual masculinist statements, while 1.4% identified as Men's Rights Activists (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend 2016). Some female content creators also directly support the manosphere by labelling male manosphere actors as positive references, offering them a stage, making them known among female followers, creating joint content with them, or commenting benevolently and approvingly on their posts.

Actor_female_A has around 163'000 followers on YouTube, almost 17'000 followers on Instagram, and over 35'000 followers on X. She discusses male-female dynamics in relationships and female hypergamy, employing manosphere language such as "alpha type" and "sigma man". Actor_female_B, with 2'250 followers on YouTube, frequently invites well-known manosphere actors onto her channel, such as Actor_PUA_B and Actor_PUA_C. She expresses admiration for Actor_PUA_B's content and his ideas on gender dynamics. She also praises Actor_PUA_C for his honesty and disregard for political correctness.

Further research is required to understand and map the role, narratives, and impact of female actors in the German manosphere, such as female masculinists, female FRAs, female PUAs and others. The research indicates that these female actors seem to predominantly serve to normalise manosphere discourse.

5.7 SUMMARY

The tactics, strategies, themes, and key issues of various sub-groups and actors within the German

manosphere exhibit significant heterogeneity, encompassing a spectrum that ranges from moderate to radical orientations yet remains unified by a shared foundation of misogyny. While some constitute a countermovement in reaction to feminism, others employ a more personal masculinist discourse. Philosophical and religious approaches emphasising traditional values coexist with pragmatic, results-driven discussions around dating, fitness, and financial success. This diversity is further reflected in its social dynamics, with some groups fostering close-knit male support circles while others promote individualised action and self-reliance. This heterogeneity mirrors earlier findings by Ging (2019: 653).

Parts of the German manosphere are rather moderate and advocate for equity, but this online milieu also harbours radical elements endorsing male supremacy. These narratives often blend pseudo-scientific arguments with anecdotal commentary, appealing to their audiences' varied preferences. The misogyny of the manosphere frequently overlaps with other dimensions of discrimination, including social Darwinism, racism, anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric, anti-semitism, and right-wing extremism, often manifesting in anti-democratic or anti-establishment sentiment. Financially, it is sustained through monetisation strategies like exclusive paid content, merchandise, and crowdfunding, while content creation spans AI-generated media, podcasts, live streams, and traditional social media posts. Platforms shape its accessibility, ranging from open forums to exclusive communities, with creators tailoring content to the unique algorithms and user bases of each platform. This multifaceted network remains dynamic and influential, amplifying its impact through innovative and adaptive strategies. One feature that is persistent in all the researched groups is that the narratives they spread mirror those of the anglophone manosphere.

In some cases, talking points from English-speaking manosphere influencers were “borrowed”, including the English syntax, leading to a mix of English and German grammar. GerManosphere influencers might discuss current events in Germany, but the concepts and ideas they use to make sense of these events are firmly rooted in the English-speaking world. This might be owed to the fact that most sub-groups of the manosphere have historically originated in English-speaking countries, which becomes evident looking at the names of these groups like MGTOW or Incels. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy how little national character the GerManosphere has so far been able to develop. One could have expected more peculiarities in the GerManosphere in connection with the differences in gender relations, history, economic models, and politics between Germany and, for example, the US. However, central narratives seem to be very similar. In contrast to other Internet subcultures or platforms (see Gibbs et al. 2014), the actors and forums researched for this study have not (yet) developed their own vernacular or narratives. The dominance of English concepts in the GerManosphere underscores the success of the Internet as a medium for the international propagation of ideas and ideologies.

6 THE GERMAN MANOSPHERE: NETWORK

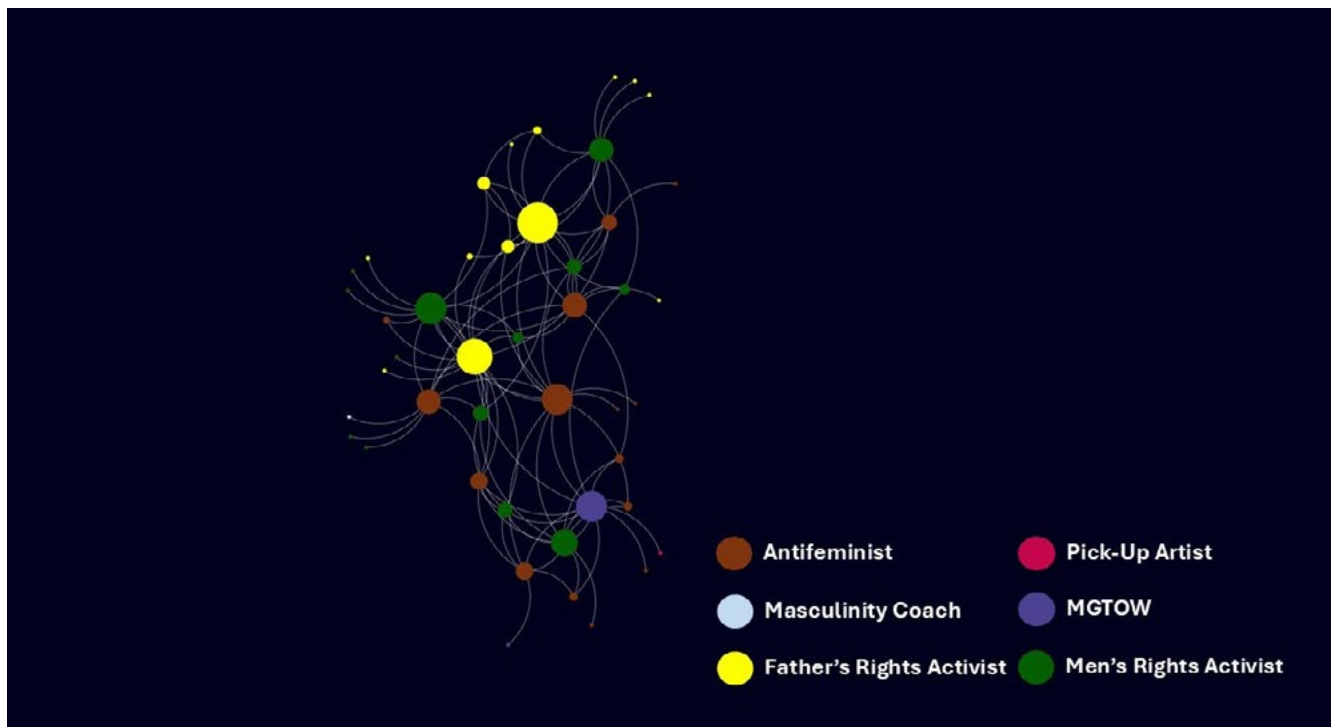
Research for this study found that German manosphere actors are active on a range of platforms, including Instagram, X, Facebook, Twitch, TikTok, YouTube, Reddit, forums, and individual websites and blogs. In addition, some actors produce their own podcasts and distribute them on different platforms such as Spotify or Podcast.de. To better understand how actors in the German manosphere are connected, two platforms – Websites and YouTube – were chosen to visualise the manosphere’s networks, and maps of central actors on these platforms were created. These maps do not represent comprehensive networks but

result from a preliminary, exploratory study into connections between important actors across sub-groups in the German manosphere.

While these networks of German manosphere actors on manosphere websites and on YouTube are not comprehensive, they do nonetheless reveal broader insights about the nature of the manosphere and its sub-groups. The websites researched contained many broken links, as well as links to blogs and other websites that no longer publish new content. This suggests that many link sections or blogrolls are not regularly updated. It also shows that some actors leave the website and blog networks of the manosphere. Both on YouTube and manosphere websites in the dataset, there were types of accounts that did not link to other pages. On YouTube, a range of “dating advice” accounts that spread manosphere narratives and that used AI-generated voiceovers and graphics did not have links to videos by other creators. Among websites in the dataset, those set up by Pick-Up Artists did not link to other manosphere actors but were predominantly used to promote the PUA’s own paid services.

The network of manosphere websites derived from the database created for this study shows a strong prevalence of generally anti-feminist actors, Men’s Rights Activists as well as Fathers’ Rights Activists in the dataset. The network only features one MGTOW and one Pick-Up Artist. The absence of some manosphere sub-groups from the network and the presence of others might be explained by their respective use of websites and their ideologies. Pick-Up Artists, as mentioned, use their websites commercially to advertise their services or distribute e-books. They are predominantly active on social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. They network on audiovisual Platforms like YouTube and, instead, use their websites predominantly as business websites and rarely as spaces for networking. MGTOW, described by some researchers as an offshoot of

Figure 1: Network of 46 German manosphere websites connected through hyperlinks.



the Men's Rights Movement, follow a more individualist approach and mostly reject political activism. The absence of Incels can be explained by the Incel spaces found in the research of this study being mostly confined to forums.

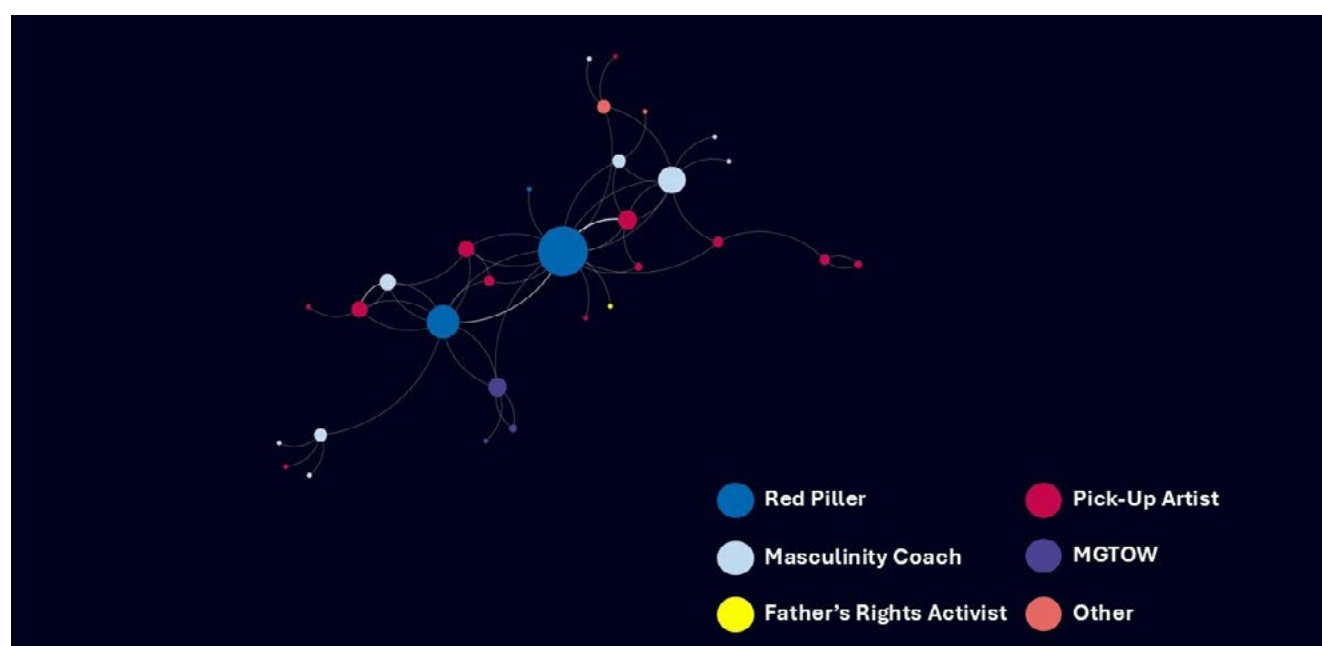
The presence of more politically oriented subgroups in the manosphere and their networking likewise follow these sub-group characteristics. Men's Rights Activists, Fathers' Rights Activists and anti-feminist actors want to influence political discourse and further their political positions. MRAs, FRAs and anti-feminists,¹⁰ in contrast to other groups in the manosphere like Incels, are political movements that have established themselves online, not online political movements. They have similar positions on a range of political issues; therefore, linking to each other's content is politically useful. This general agreement explains both the links between anti-feminist actors, Men's

Rights Activists and Fathers' Rights Activists and the links between websites within the respective categories, such as the Fathers' Rights Activist cluster in the upper centre of the graph.

The importance of these groups also becomes clear when analysing the metrics for "betweenness centrality", "closeness centrality", and the number of links (both in-degrees and out-degrees) for the individual sites. In network theory, betweenness centrality measures how central an actor is to their network by how often others rely on said actor for a connection. Closeness centrality measures how short the path of one actor is to other actors. For example, the smaller the number of website links one would have to click to get to a page in a network of websites, the higher the closeness centrality. Betweenness centrality "for a node in a graph measures how many times this node acts as a bridge along the shortest path between two other nodes [...] a node with high closeness centrality has short path length, on average, to every other node and therefore

10 For a definition of anti-feminism, see Section 2.4 of this report or Höcker, Pickel and Decker (2020), page 255.

Figure 2: Network of 28 German manosphere actors on YouTube connected through joint videos and guest appearances.



can spread information fast. Therefore, a node with high betweenness centrality acts as a gate keeper, whereas a node with high closeness centrality acts as a hub in a social network” (Allaho/ Lee 2015: 69).

Table 5: Table of the Metrics of the Top Five Ranked Websites in the Researched Network.

Label	closenesscentrality	betweennesscentrality
AF_07	0.55	204.615909
FR_01	0.556962	201.178791
FR_02	0.536585	172.688031
MR_05	0.52381	169.127953
MGTOW_01	0.488889	145.837057

Five central actors in the network ranked by betweenness centrality include one anti-feminist, two Fathers’ Rights Activists, one Men’s Rights Activist and one MGTOW. The ranking is the same by degree (number of incoming and outgoing links) and closeness centrality metrics. With the outlier of one MGTOW in the dataset, the link network analysed for this study reflects the networking efforts of the manosphere’s more politically

oriented groups. The central position of an anti-feminist website illustrates that anti-feminism is the central ideological bracket, encompassing and binding together German manosphere sub-groups in the analysed sample. Websites from different sub-groups of the manosphere linked to the anti-feminist website. At the same time, the anti-feminist website linked to websites from different sub-groups of the manosphere. The high ranking of Fathers’ Rights Activists and Men’s Rights Activists reflects both these movements’ close connections and affinity and their extensive presence on websites. The high ranking of the MGTOW website can be explained by the website’s activity and extensive link network.

The YouTube network, which was created based on connections through video collaboration between manosphere creators, spans different sub-groups. The collaborative videos between Pick-Up Artists likely serve a dual function as formats for exchange and a mechanism for cross-promotion. The links between different groups like Redpillers, Pick-Up Artists, and masculinity coaches can be interpreted in a similar way. Indeed,

the boundaries between the categories “Pick-Up Artist”, “Redpill”, and “Masculinity Coach” were somewhat porous, with PUAs referencing red pill ideas and offering coaching beyond the scope of dating. Similarly, masculinity coaches offered dating advice as part of their coaching, and Redpillers offered masculinity coaching. In some cases, creators from these categories also collaborated offline. Thus, the joint videos of members of different sub-groups can not only be interpreted as a sign of a lively exchange between manosphere groups but also as an indication that parts of the German manosphere are converging and becoming more homogenous.

The manosphere on YouTube seems to be equal parts social and political philosophy, self-optimisation inspiration, and business model. This interpretation is not to claim that the manosphere influencers researched are inauthentic or do not believe in their message. On the contrary, the amalgamation of business ventures and ideological convictions as personal brands both follows the influencer logic of YouTube creators and shows how central the masculinity issues of manosphere influencers have become to their personalities. The network map shows a small MGTOW cluster and a Pick-Up Artist cluster. What becomes apparent from the network visualisation is the central role of a few prominent accounts that network across spectra.

Table 6: Table of the metrics of the Top five ranked YouTube actors in the researched network.

Label	closenesscentrality	betweennesscentrality
RP_YT_01	0.58	275
RP_YT_02	0.491525	158
MC_YT_07	0.358025	81
MC_YT_01	0.446154	68.5
O_YT_01	0.408451	55
MGTOW_YT_01	0.439394	55

One Redpill is the central actor in the network and is part of 20 of the 57 links in the network. This actor also has the highest betweenness centrality score, followed by another Redpill, two Masculinity Coaches and, in joint fifth place, one account classified as “other”, who frequently hosts manosphere guests on his show, and one MGTOW account.

The central actors identified in the network frequently exchange with other creators from the manosphere and can act as gatekeepers that promote other accounts. Most of them have ideological as well as commercial motivations for their work, which can help to explain their networking activities. Some actors in the researched network were also guests on podcasts that host guests from the manosphere but are not monothematically focused on manosphere topics.

One noticeable factor is the absence of MRA accounts and the presence of only one FRA account. Further research is necessary to detect whether networks between such channels exist on YouTube and other platforms and how extensive these networks are. Such research could also explore if and how manosphere creators on YouTube build networks using weaker ties like links in contrast to stronger ties like video collaborations.

7 CONCLUSION

This study examines the German-speaking manosphere and aims to answer different research questions using various methodologies. First, platforms and websites used by the German manosphere were identified by collecting manosphere accounts from different platforms and compiling them into a database. These accounts were then categorised, using both deductive and inductive codes, to identify the central sub-groups of the manosphere in Germany. Next, a qualitative analysis of German manosphere sub-groups

was conducted based on research memos to explore their central narratives and strategies. An exploratory mapping of manosphere networks on YouTube and websites was also conducted to generate findings about network dynamics and learn more about their interconnections. While this was a preliminary and limited mapping, it revealed starting points for further research. Finally, guided semi-structured interviews were conducted with five experts to identify actors outside the manosphere milieu who convey their messages and learn how online gender-based violence can be countered.

Research for this study showed that the manosphere sub-groups, Men's Rights Activists, Pick-Up Artists, Redpillers, Incels, and MGTOW, can all be found in German online spaces. These sub-groups are present on a range of online platforms, such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Telegram, X, Facebook, Reddit, Twitch, and on forums and websites. While some show clear platform preferences, others are active across platforms. Exploratory research into manosphere networks on YouTube and between websites has revealed that the more politically oriented groups within the manosphere tend to link to each other more on websites. Connections between actors on YouTube, measured by joint videos, were more often found among manosphere groups with an ideological and individualistic orientation. The YouTube network also illustrated the differentiation in the manosphere, which features actors that combine characteristics from different sub-groups.

Central findings regarding the research questions include:

- German manosphere narratives closely mirror international discourse. Central concepts like evolutionary psychological explanations of human behaviour, the concept of “red pill-ing” as ideological awakening and stereotypical thinking in different hierarchical archetypes

seem to be borrowed from international manosphere discourse. This speaks to the internationalisation of anti-feminist networks and the spread of misogynist ideas and argumentative strategies.

- The structure of the German manosphere and its sub-groups reflects the groups in the international manosphere more broadly. Like the English-speaking manosphere, the German-language manosphere consists of MRAs, PUAs, Incels, MGTOW, and Redpillers. The German manosphere encompasses masculinity coaches who promise to help clients by strengthening their masculinity, combining aspects of the red pill and PUA ideologies.
- In the researched dataset, PUA, Redpillers, and masculinity coaches predominantly use audiovisual platforms. These sub-groups combine ideological messaging and commercial services and use video platforms to promote themselves and their content. MRA are found more commonly on websites, which are used for political campaigns and sharing personal stories in the form of blogs.
- Anti-feminists, MRA, and FRA are connected via a network of website links.
- A network on YouTube connects PUA, Redpillers, and masculinity coaches through joint videos. These video collaborations can be explained both as cross-promotion and as expressions of political-ideological affinity and exchange.
- Only a small number of MGTOW could be identified in the dataset. However, those identified were actively involved in manosphere networks, interacting with Redpillers, MRAs, and anti-feminist actors. A small number of German-speaking Incels were identified on forums. These individuals largely echoed talking points of international Incel discourse, including extreme misogyny, anti-semitism, and racism.

Based on the preliminary research on the German manosphere, some provisional recommendations can be made regarding the regulation of misogynist online content. These recommendations are consistent with the recommendations of the experts interviewed.

- Some sub-groups of the German manosphere use forums to spread oftentimes illegal misogynist, racist, anti-semitic, and anti-LGBTQ+-content. Rules regarding the moderation of illegal content laid down in the Digitale-Dienste-Gesetz (DDG) – the German law implementing the Digital Services Act (DSA) – and which are in the competency of the national DSC – could prevent the dissemination of such content. Further research is needed to quantify the extent of illegal content on forums.
- A notable number of manosphere influencers are active on audiovisual platforms like YouTube and TikTok or use Instagram Reels to reach young men with their content. Educational content that debunks the claims of these influencers or that is aimed at inoculating potential audiences should be similarly tailored to these influencers' target audiences and platforms.
- Educational content should be created and distributed on social media to inform people about the manipulative tactics used by Pick-Up Artists and the dangers of sexual exploitation promoted by some actors in the manosphere. This content can help people spot early warning signs.
- The extent of toxicity and violent talk within the German manosphere could be investigated through quantitative research into German manosphere communities. Such research could illuminate the threat to democratic processes and individual safety that arise from the manosphere.
- Given the cross-platform nature of the German manosphere and the disparate nature of the online community, platforms that are part of

- this ecosystem should invest in cross-platform coordination. In addition, platforms should develop online interventions that aim to disrupt this ecosystem. They should establish and maintain communication channels between relevant teams, including content moderation units, to proactively share information on misogynistic actors and tactics within the manosphere. This approach can help map the scale and scope of such activities and enable coordinated, informed responses across platforms.
- Tech companies and regulators should invest in understanding how platform affordances such as algorithmic amplification play a role in amplifying the manosphere, driving traffic to this community, and spreading harmful content. Existing regulations such as the Digital Services Act, the Disinformation Code of Practice, and the Directive of Combating Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic Abuse should be utilised to address the harms and features perpetuated by the manosphere. Policy measures that adopt a risk-based approach or a duty-of-care framework could help mitigate the amplification of borderline content while safeguarding freedom of speech and expression.
 - Tech companies should invest in content moderation in non-English languages, such as German, to ensure that manosphere content is addressed when it goes against a platform's Terms of Service. Platforms should ensure that this accounts for all languages, not just English.

The analysis of different groups within the manosphere generally showed a great heterogeneity, with misogyny as an ideological bracket between and within groups. The different expressions of misogyny reached from implicit claims to violent fantasies. It has also shown the ideological affinity of some manosphere actors to the far right. To better comprehend the German manosphere, further research is required. With regard to networks, future analyses of YouTube networks could

also scrutinise the role of MRAs and FRAs, which were mostly absent from the YouTube network researched. Such an analysis could also incorporate links in YouTube video descriptions to illustrate networks with weaker ties. A more comprehensive network analysis could also expand the network to include cross-platform links and networks on other platforms, including directed links. Analyses here could include cross-platform strategies and potential migration between platforms. Other avenues for future research into the German manosphere are a cross-platform comparison of narratives, tactics, and strategies of manosphere actors, as well as research into the monetisation of actors. The role of female actors within the German manosphere also deserves more scrutiny. Further research should also be conducted in other geographic and linguistic manosphere-context, to see how these communities relate. Through further analyses of the manosphere, the influence of this milieu can be better understood, and strategies can be devised to counter the online misogyny originating from manosphere groups.

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