

Alpha, Authority, and Algorithmic Power: Leadership Myths and Realities in the Online Manosphere

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Abstract

The explosive growth of digital platforms has allowed for the rise of alternative leadership narratives in online communities, loosely known as the “manosphere.” These spaces were trendy and highly visible proponents of “alpha” leadership based on dominance, self-optimization, and hierarchical masculinity. In response to this, this article explores whether such representations amount to genuine leadership and/or simply reproduce simplified myths made hyper-visible through algorithms. Using interdisciplinary insights from leadership studies, digital sociology, and Critical Theory, the study examines how authority is created, legitimated, and spread in manosphere spaces. Special emphasis is placed on the contribution of algorithmic amplification in favoring emotive, divisive content that promotes performative domination at the expense of relational or ethical forms of leadership practice. Drawing on Foucauldian and Bourdieusian frameworks, the paper theorizes leadership as involving power/knowledge regimes and symbolic capital accumulation within digitally mediated fields. While many authors in the manosphere express opposition to stable models of leadership, these findings suggest that their leaders themselves are less a reflection of those dynamics than a product of platform dynamics which reward visibility, certainty, and identity affirmation. This results in a distorted leadership paradigm where influence comes to be equated with authority and visibility becomes correlated with legitimacy. Digging deeper, the paper advances leadership theory by rethinking authority formation as a socio-technical process situated in algorithmic infrastructures and cultural power dynamics.

Keywords: manosphere; digital leadership; algorithmic power; masculinity; symbolic capital; Andrew Tate; Jordan Peterson; Bourdieu; online influence; identity construction

1. Introduction

Theories of Leadership have evolved considerably over the past few decades. As such, leadership has evolved over the decades from early trait-based models to more recent relational and distributed views, increasingly being recognised as a socially constructed,

context-dependent process rather than an innate individual characteristic. Yet the emergence of digital platforms has created new complexities that strain these established frameworks.

One particularly salient case for considering these transformations has been the emergence of the “manosphere” - a loosely knitted network of online communities dedicated to discussions surrounding masculinity, self-improvement and anti-institutional discourse. In these spaces, leadership is often expressed as the “alpha male,” an archetype of dominance, decisiveness and independence. This characterization is in stark contrast to modern leadership theories that stress collaboration, ethical accountability, and inclusivity.

Yet at the same time, digital platforms are not neutral environments. Audience-targeted Algorithms: Algorithmic systems actively construct visibility, impact and legitimacy by prioritization of items that generate engagement. That raises core questions about what we mean by authority in digital spaces: Does leadership make sense as a function of competence and relational trust, or does it just aggregate visibility and algorithmic elevation?

This paper addresses three central research questions:

1. How is leadership constructed and legitimized within the online manosphere?
2. To what extent do manosphere narratives reflect or distort contemporary leadership theory?
3. How do algorithmic systems and digital infrastructures reshape authority formation?

To answer these questions, the study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating leadership theory with digital sociology and Critical Theory. In particular, the work draws on Michel Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of fields and symbolic capital to analyze leadership as a product of broader socio-cultural and technological dynamics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 From Trait-Based Leadership to Relational and Distributed Models

Beginning with early approaches that attempted to identify universal characteristics associated with effective leaders, leadership theory has evolved into much more nuanced conceptions of leadership as embedded in relational processes. Within the realm of distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006), leadership emerges from dynamic interactions and transformational leadership intervenes with effects based on ethical influence and collaborative motivation (Babin et al., 2006; Roberts et al., 2026).

These views flank vertical, individualistic conceptions of leadership and focus on co-production, fluidity and joint ownership. Every one of these frames builds authority as a necessity - not via the imposition from on high but through trust and legitimacy in social engagement.

But this shift is hardly without contention. The seductiveness of the kind of neat, authoritative models of leadership that promise clarity and mastery in situations beset with uncertainty and complexity are tempting (as I have stated elsewhere on this site).

2.2 Digital Platforms and the Reconfiguration of Authority

Through the avenues it created, authority has been constructed and disseminated in radically new ways, so much so that traditional platforms of social construction have changed their shapes. Dissemination is guided by algorithms using engagement metrics to determine what content is distributed, transforming environments into places of visibility and occupation that serve as a metric of influence (Nambisan et al., 2017; Bocheva et al., 2025).

This transformation creates what amounts to algorithmic authority, one in which visibility supplants expertise as the source of legitimacy. In these spaces, leadership is not just enacted but rather embedded in technological systems that mediate what, precisely, is seen and amplified and normalized.

2.3 Masculinity, Identity, and Leadership in the Manosphere

The manosphere is a subgroup of the confidence economy - an awareness that presents masculinity as constructed through relationships in which men prevail over each other and subjugate people who would otherwise be their peers in exchange for power, independence, control and resistance to an (allegedly) oppressive environment. In these settings, leadership is often framed in terms of personal accomplishment (look what I did with my career), power (climbing the ladder) and rank.

These narratives speak to broader cultural discourses of masculinity, yet intensify through the performance and reception of narrative in digital contexts. Conversely, they can also induce exclusion, a rigid sense of identity and the perpetuation of damaging norms (Champ et al., 2020).

Recent studies that aim to understand the formation of masculinist leadership, for example, within the manosphere as a mode of power based on an authoritative discourse driven by discursive toxic authority further complicates this. In this context, Erbil, Özbilgin and Mergen (2025) introduce the concept of 'Red Pill leadership behaviors' and argue that leadership in these environments is not just alternative but structurally distorted through ideological framing. They identify three interwoven clusters of behavior: exploitative influence and manipulation; the exertion of control and suppression of dissent; and forms of dehumanization that, in turn, lead to adverse outcomes at the organizational- and societal-level. In this ideological framework, neither the quality of a leader's effectiveness nor relational legitimacy matter; all that matters is what can be encompassed and assimilated into an overarching ideological structure that fundamentalizes masculinity as oppositionally hierarchically distinct. This calls into question the idea that to be a digital leader one can adopt their role for just that unique marker and still bring everything else along as per Marshall McLuhan, but instead argues everything must be consciously aligned so it does not serve to reinforce dysfunctional and ethically more damaging ways of being a leader.

In counterpoint to this critical perspective, Scott et al. (2025) present a structured framework for analyzing the manosphere, suggesting that among its core dimensions are leadership alongside ideology, community structure and communication practices. Their work draws attention to the rising visibility of key players like Andrew Tate, Jordan Peterson and other significant actors who are identifiable as symbolic leaders in these networks. Most importantly, they argue that the manosphere is no longer just a marginal subculture, but rather a digital phenomenon in some ways more mainstream than niche. Such a turn is indicative of the fact that manosphere leadership is not accidental but rather systematically constructed through legible figures who embody and project cultural narratives that dominate. But it also calls into the question of symbolic power and the means by which authority is legitimated in decentralized spaces.

These different leadership styles are further contextualised by Copland (2023) who situates the manosphere within a wider anti-feminist and, occasionally, far-right discourse. At the center of this framework is the “Red Pill” ideology, which holds that men are unfairly treated in a “feminized” society and that leadership represents a process of regaining lost authority. As a result, instead of mere coordination within the group, leadership becomes a means to empower individuals to push back against global capitalism in their own lives; often counterposing autobiography against institutional narratives. Echols (2020), in turn, uses a broad definition of “manosphere” that encompasses various online groups and forums to produce nuanced qualitative differences among ideologically-opposed members of the manosphere while simultaneously emphasizing the connections between differing ideology that unites them: “members self-identifying as incels or men's rights activists (MRAs) or MGTOW free-riders all have an ideological commitment to gender hierarchy and social order”. Ultimately, these results indicate that manosphere leadership is not transparently a matter of individual agency; rather, it seems fundamentally embedded in a trans-ideological ecosystem meaning and direction.

The manosphere’s interpretation as a space for leadership is further complicated by its academic critiques. In floating this thesis, Beel (2024) suggests that many participants are swayed by “problematic leaders” who feed narratives of grievance and the need to reinstate male-only dominance. Through this lens, leadership functions as a mobilization technology that redirects frustration toward the creation of collective identity. Conversely, Hawley (2024) provides a more structural critique, arguing instead that the manosphere’s leadership is unstable by nature as it cannot manage discourse and enforce coherent messaging. As a result of the claim that these movements are part of a just cause, extreme voices rise to become leaders, which ultimately creates unsustainable movements with no single person they can trust to lead them. But when these perspectives are taken together, they illuminate a central tension: while manosphere leadership is seen by some scholars as commanding and cohesive, others

characterize it as scattered and self-limiting - important questions for the long-term impact of manosphere in society.

Finally, more critical readings focus on the authoritarian potential of manosphere leadership. Herro (2025) views their leadership through the framework of “agitator” theory, arguing that individuals such as Andrew Tate replicate patterns of authoritarian mobilization observed throughout history, including strongman figures at the top, in-group / out-group divisions and overly simplistic solutions offered contingent on obedience. In a related vein, Bazzano (2023) points to strands of “microfascism” in manosphere discourse - particularly the focus on control, order and the hierarchical organization of social relations. These readings question not just the content of manosphere leadership, but also its systemic fit with forms of power that value domination over relation or ethics. The manosphere, in this view, is thus not just a place of alternative forms of leadership construction but also one where wider political and ideological currents are woven together with digital soft power.

2.4 Critical Theory Perspective: Power, Capital, and Field Dynamics

To fully understand leadership in the manosphere, it is necessary to move beyond descriptive accounts and engage with deeper structures of power.

Foucault: Power/Knowledge and Discursive Authority

Foucault conceptualizes power not as a possession but as a relational and productive force embedded in discourse. Power operates through the production of knowledge, shaping what is considered true, legitimate, and acceptable.

In the manosphere, leadership narratives function as discourses that define masculinity, success, and authority. These discourses are not neutral; they produce subjects who internalize and reproduce specific norms of behavior. Leadership, in this sense, is not merely enacted but constituted through discourse.

Bourdieu: Fields, Habitus, and Symbolic Capital

Bourdieu’s framework complements this perspective by emphasizing the role of social structures and capital in shaping behavior. The manosphere can be understood as a **field** - a structured social space with its own rules, hierarchies, and forms of capital.

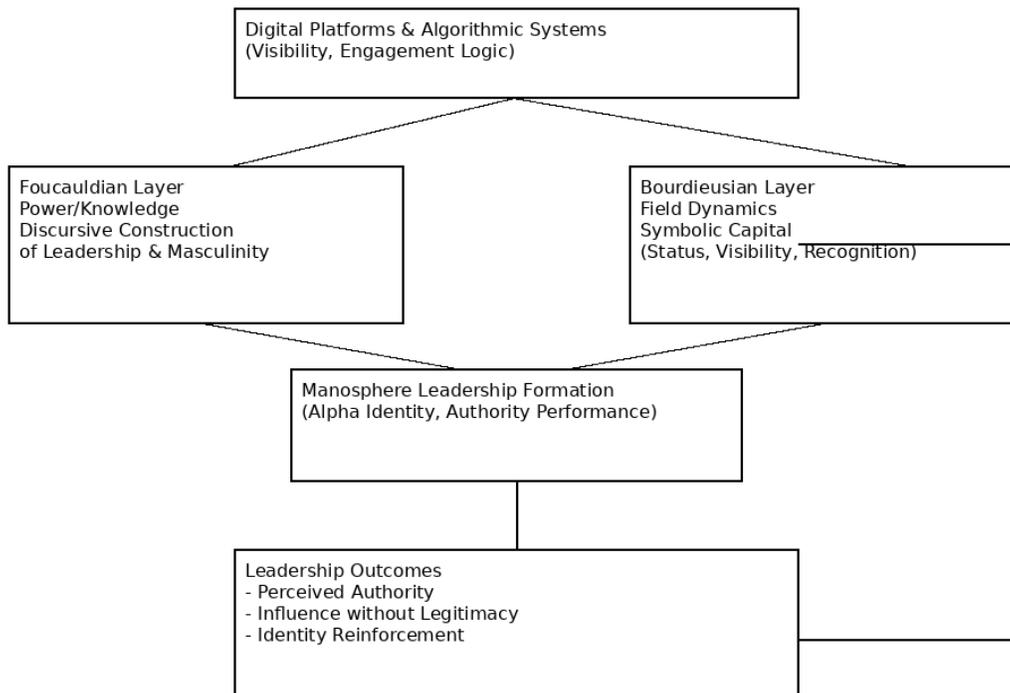
Within this field, individuals accumulate **symbolic capital** through visibility, influence, and alignment with dominant norms. The “alpha” identity functions as a form of capital that signals status and legitimacy. However, this capital is contingent upon recognition within the field, making it inherently unstable and dependent on continuous performance.

2.5 Integrative Perspective

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that leadership in the manosphere is not simply an alternative model but a complex phenomenon shaped by:

- Discursive power (Foucault)
- Symbolic capital and field dynamics (Bourdieu)
- Algorithmic amplification (digital platforms)

This integrative framework provides the basis for analyzing leadership as a socio-technical construct.



Conceptual Framework: Algorithmic Leadership Construction in the Manosphere

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of algorithmic leadership construction in the manosphere.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework underpinning this study. The model illustrates how leadership in the manosphere emerges at the intersection of algorithmic systems and socio-cultural power structures. At the macro level, digital platforms shape visibility through engagement-driven algorithms. At the meso level, leadership is constructed through two complementary theoretical lenses: Foucauldian power/knowledge dynamics, which explain how leadership discourses are produced and normalized, and Bourdieusian

field theory, which conceptualizes leadership as the accumulation of symbolic capital within a competitive social space. These processes converge in the formation of manosphere leadership identities, characterized by performative authority and “alpha” positioning. The model further incorporates a feedback loop, whereby perceived authority reinforces algorithmic visibility, creating a recursive system of influence amplification.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual and interpretive research design, complemented by elements of bibliometric structuring, in order to examine the construction of leadership within the online manosphere. The methodological approach is grounded in a critical realist perspective, which assumes that observable phenomena - such as online influence and perceived authority—are generated by deeper underlying mechanisms, including discursive power, symbolic capital, and algorithmic mediation.

Instead of conducting empirical data collection, the study uses an integrative and theory-driven literature review. In a nutshell, the analysis is abductive in logic; it starts from an empirical puzzle: How does the legitimation of “alpha” leaders in digital settings seem to be at odds with established leadership theory literature that foregrounds relational, ethical and distributed modes of influence? This tension shaped the iterative movement between cases and theories.

A purposive sampling approach of literature selection was combined with a structured search strategy. Sources were selected from major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar using keywords such as “digital leadership,” “algorithmic power,” “manosphere,” “masculinity” and “symbolic capital.” Three main criteria guided the selection process: relevance to aspects of leadership, relevancy to digital environments (the intersectional spaces between society and technology), scholarly soundness (with a preference for peer-reviewed publications), and theoretical contribution to the understanding of authority formation. The resulting corpus represents a point of intersection in-between leadership studies, digital sociology and Critical Theory.

Beyond thematic synthesis, the study provides a mild bibliometric angle which reveals citation patterns and conceptual clustering and co-occurrences of key constructs across selected literature. This not only identifies dominant theoretical currents and emerging intersection points, specifically around leadership theory and digital platform studies. Unlike the quantitative bibliometric analysis, here we do not recover mapped influences and links; rather this is more of a mapping exercise that aids in patterning conceptual links and gaps.

The analysis proceeded through three stages that were related. First, the literature was examined for dominant themes across it such as performative leadership, masculinity narratives, algorithmic amplification, and symbolic capital accumulation. Second, these themes were read through a polytheoretical lens that brought Foucauldian and Bourdieusian perspectives into dialogue. Foucault's idea of power/knowledge was employed to analyze how discourses of leadership are constituted and naturalized, while Bourdieu's notions of field and capital helped us to understand how authority is amassed or validated in social arenas. Third, we integrated these insights into a cohesive conceptual framework (Figure 1) that depicts how

digital infrastructures, cultural narratives and social dynamics interact to generate leadership outcomes.

This combined conceptual–bibliometric approach enhances analytical rigor by linking theoretical interpretation with structured literature mapping. It allows the study to move beyond descriptive review toward explanatory insight, identifying the generative mechanisms underlying leadership construction in digital environments.

While the study does not aim for empirical generalization, its validity rests on theoretical coherence, interdisciplinary integration, and transparency of analytical logic. At the same time, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The manosphere represents a heterogeneous and evolving phenomenon, and the opacity of algorithmic systems limits full analytical precision. Nevertheless, the framework developed here provides a robust foundation for future empirical research, including content analysis, network analysis, and platform-based studies of digital leadership.

4. Results

The analysis suggests that leadership within the online manosphere cannot be adequately understood through traditional frameworks that prioritize relational legitimacy, ethical influence, or institutional recognition. Instead, leadership appears to emerge through a combination of performative identity construction, algorithmically mediated visibility, and symbolic positioning within digitally structured social environments.

First, leadership in the manosphere is at root performative. It is not established by a formal role, validated competence, or relational capital but rather through the ability to present confidence, certainty and congruence with prevailing scripts of masculinity and success. Those who are adept at embodying the “alpha” identity - decisiveness, control, and self-sufficiency - are more likely to be perceived as leaders in these groups. This points to a transition away from leadership as relational, toward leadership as identity performance in which visibility and consistency of self-presentation become central.

Second, this performative aspect is enhanced by the structural logic of digital platforms. Algorithms tend to reward activity and engagement above all, so the more emotionally inflammatory or polarizing someone’s approach to communication is, the better. Leaders’ narratives are thus more likely to be amplified if they promise clarity, dominance, and certainty. This leads to a process of positive feedback in which certain forms of leadership are reinforced, not necessarily on the basis of their intrinsic validity but based on their predictability vis-a-vis platform logics (what is observable and reacts with other content).

Third, the cultivation of influence in the manosphere can be understood using a framework of symbolic capital. Authority has a close relationship to signals such as follower counts, audience engagement and perceived influence that serve in many ways as forms of status within the digital field. Those capitals are accumulated, but only among others as they fight for visibility and acknowledgement. Thus, leadership becomes an accomplishment of position within a system, not an essential quality.

Finally, these processes are situated in larger discursive formulations of masculinity.

Manosphere leadership narratives do not stand on their own; they are informed by and inform broader cultural understandings of gender, power and success. The recurring rhetoric of dominance, control, and individual self-optimization serve as the ground upon which certain models of masculinity grow and thrive - others, based on rhetorical frameworks of collaboration and empathy or inclusivity remain outside these frameworks that dictate who can lead.

Taken together, these findings indicate that leadership in the manosphere is not simply an alternative model, but a complex socio-technical phenomenon shaped by the interaction between identity performance, platform dynamics, and cultural discourse.

5. Discussion

The findings point toward a fundamental reconfiguration of leadership in digitally mediated environments, where authority is no longer anchored primarily in institutional legitimacy or relational trust, but is increasingly shaped by discursive, ideological, and technological forces. While earlier sections highlighted the performative and algorithmic nature of leadership in the manosphere, a deeper engagement with recent scholarship reveals that these dynamics are not merely structural but also profoundly normative and political.

Third, the gradual attainment of influence within the manosphere is well-studied in terms of symbolic capital. Authority is tied to metrics like follower counts, audience interaction, and perceived clout that serve as status symbols in the digital field. These are forms of capital which are both accrued and fought over, with people in competition for visibility from a Foucauldian perspective, manosphere leadership is itself an outcome of various power knowledge regimes whereby what comes to be seen as legitimate authority. So, as Erbil, Özbilgin, and Mergen (2025) theorize via the concept of “Red Pill leadership behaviors,” leadership in these contexts is neither neutral nor devoid of ideologies that make domination, control, and exclusion more salubrious/normal. These discourses function as truth regimes, informing not only the identities of leaders by producing them but also working in the way that audiences recognize them. What we are encountering is not so much the enactment of leadership as the reproduction of a discursively proper model of authority that reinforces hierarchy and stamps out debate. In other words, leadership becomes an ideological mode of reproduction rather than relational coordination.

Also, Bourdieu’s framework enables a more structural analysis of how these discourses are translated into positions of power, influence and accountability. In this sense, the manosphere is yet another social field to which a Bourdieuan understanding of symbolic capital applies: you accumulate capital for being visible, fulfilling dominant narratives and thus having your audience pay attention. However, as Ging (2019) shows, this space is becoming ever more organized around recognizable personalities - Andrew Tate or Jordan Peterson - that function as authoritative touchstones. These actors don’t stop at performing on the field; they create its rules, deciding what constitutes legitimate masculinity and successful leadership. But this concentration of symbolic capital induces instability, with fluid paypasses of leadership dependent on continual performance within a competitive and algorithmically ordered space.. Leadership, in this register, is procedural achievement instantiated through the matrix rather than an endowed property.

In the end, these processes are embedded in larger formations of discourse concerning masculinity. The manosphere is a universe unto itself, of course, yet its leadership narratives are not created in a vacuum; they both influence and are informed by wider cultural constructs about gender-based approaches to power and success. Just as there is one, specific model of masculinity in regard to the compulsive nature of power, domination and self-optimization.

Bourdieu's framework also allows for a more structural picture of how such discourses translate into positions of power, influence and accountability. Thus the manosphere, like so much of sociality today, represents a form of symbolic capital accumulated in exchange for being seen, pleasing dominant narratives and having your work validated by your audience. Fundamentally, this is an expression of ideology and a very legitimate tension arises if one can so easily launch into considering the ideological production underpinning such leadership. According to Copland (2023) and Sugiura (2021), manosphere leaders utilize a more general anti-feminist narrative that characterizes society in the language of having become "feminized" and, thus, men as disenfranchised. Leadership, within this framework, is constructed as a process of reclaiming lost authority, through individualistic and oppositional strategies. This runs counter to conventional leadership theory, which emphasizes community interest, inclusion and ethical accountability. That means that manosphere leadership is not simply an alternative model, but a truly different paradigm; one rooted in rebellion rather than collaboration.

The coherence and sustainability of this paradigm, however, is contested. As Beel (2024) argues, the manosphere leadership operates as a form of mobilization centered around grievances and desires to return to a world where men dominated in gender relations. On the other hand, Hawley (2024) contends that what you have instead is a movement whose leadership by its nature cannot contain rhetoric and consolidate messaging. The digital amplification of extreme voices can not only undermine the credibility of leadership figures, but may also constrain the appeal to a broader coalition for action beyond whatever niche the movement happens to be serving. This divergence points to an interesting paradox: whereas manosphere leaders can achieve high visibility and influence for short time spans, their authority may lack the kind of structural stability we would expect from institutional leadership., as Rollano et al. 2019; 2024; 2026) shows that this field is increasingly coalescing around familiar names - be it Andrew Tate or Jordan Peterson - that serve as authoritative points of reference. These actors don't merely inscribe the playing field; they write its rules by establishing what counts as legitimate masculinity and performance in leadership. Yet this concentration of symbolic capital produces a certain instability wherein hierarchies of leadership are fluid, and continue to rely upon repeated affirmations within a quasi-competitive, algorithmically managed environment.. Leadership, in this sense, is procedural success conditional on the arrangement rather than intrinsic quality.

These processes always take up space within broader discursive formations around masculinity. The manosphere is a world unto itself, of course, but its narratives about leadership don't exist in a vacuum; they help shape and are shaped by broader cultural understandings of how gender figures into power and success. As there is one, archetypal model of masculinity at work in the repetition of power, domination and self-optimization.

Further complicating this picture is the potential alignment between manosphere leadership and authoritarian forms of influence. Herro (2025) draws parallels between prominent manosphere

figures and historical “agitator” leadership models, characterized by strong central figures, emotionally charged rhetoric, and the promise of simple solutions to complex problems. Similarly, Bazzano (2023) identifies elements of “microfascism” in manosphere discourse, emphasizing the desire for control, order, and hierarchical structuring of social relations. These interpretations suggest that manosphere leadership may not only diverge from contemporary leadership theory but also resonate with broader patterns of authoritarianism and ideological control.

The role of algorithmic systems intensifies these dynamics by shaping the conditions under which leadership emerges and is sustained. Algorithms prioritize content that is emotionally engaging, polarizing, and easily consumable, thereby reinforcing leadership narratives that emphasize certainty and dominance. This creates a recursive feedback loop in which discursive power (Foucault), symbolic capital (Bourdieu), and technological mediation interact to produce and stabilize specific forms of authority. Leadership, in this context, is not simply constructed by individuals but co-produced by socio-technical systems.

A particularly significant implication of these findings is the paradox between appeal and depth. Manosphere leadership narratives offer clarity, direction, and a sense of control in uncertain environments, making them highly attractive to certain audiences. However, this appeal is often achieved through simplification, reducing leadership to visible markers of success and dominance while neglecting relational, ethical, and contextual dimensions. This raises important questions about the future of leadership theory: how can it address the growing gap between normative models of leadership and the forms of authority that gain traction in digital environments?

Importantly, these findings do not suggest that manosphere leadership should be dismissed entirely. Rather, its emergence reflects broader socio-cultural conditions, including identity uncertainty, institutional distrust, and the search for meaning in complex environments. However, the integration of critical perspectives reveals that leadership in these spaces is not merely adaptive but also potentially problematic, reproducing forms of power that may be exclusionary, unstable, or ethically questionable.

Taken together, these findings suggest that leadership in the digital age must be understood as a hybrid phenomenon, shaped by the interaction of discourse, social structure, and technological mediation. This has significant implications for leadership research, which must increasingly account for the role of digital infrastructures and cultural dynamics in shaping authority. Rather than treating leadership as a stable or universal construct, future research should focus on how leadership is continuously constructed, contested, and transformed across different contexts and platforms.

Implications for Education and Leadership Development

This study's results are beneficial for leadership education and professional development because digital environments increasingly redefine what it means to hold authority or be successful in careers. Classical leadership development curricula that focus on relational capacity, moral judgement and collaborative decision-making may fall short in confronting the influence of digitally mediated leadership archetypes that celebrate visibility, dominance and

performative identity.

First, we need to teach critical digital literacy in leadership education so that future leaders understand the ways algorithmic systems shape what is visible or recommended and have effects via authority. Instead of viewing digital platforms as neutral communication tools, training programs need to explicitly address how algorithmic amplification can distort leadership signals and incentivize simplistic or divisive behavior.

Second, the analysis implies a need for stronger ethical reflexivity in leadership development. There is dangerous potential for specific leadership patterns, like “Red Pill leadership behaviors” (Erbil et al., 2025) to gain traction and amplify harmful or exclusionary norms even as they cultivate influence. They should, therefore, be competency-based - but they also must include critical engagements with power, ideology and responsibility to draw upon constructs from Critical Theory to investigate the ethical obligations/influence of leaders.

Third, leadership training must engage with the growing gap between normative leadership theory and lived experience of leadership in digital spaces. Despite the fact that many contemporary models of leadership foreground ideas of inclusion and relationality, many people still have better access to alternative models steeped in online narratives valuing dominance and control. To bridge this gap, pedagogical approaches must engage directly with these competing models, encouraging critical comparison rather than dismissal.

Fourth, the results support the need for adaptive identity construction skills. In spaces where the performativity of leadership increases, one must balance between authenticity and visibility. Consequently, leadership education should comprise elements on self-presentation, narrative construction and identity management, while delivering these through an ethical and relational lens.

Finally, these insights suggest that leadership development should be understood as a multi-level process, extending beyond individual capabilities to include awareness of structural and technological conditions. Programs that integrate insights from sociology, media studies, and digital governance may be better equipped to prepare leaders for complex, algorithmically mediated environments.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to examine how leadership is constructed, legitimized, and amplified within the online manosphere, with particular attention to the role of algorithmic systems and ideological narratives. By integrating leadership theory with insights from digital sociology and Critical Theory, the paper provides a multi-layered understanding of leadership as a socio-technical and discursive phenomenon rather than a stable or universally defined construct.

The results challenge prevailing norms of relational legitimacy, ethical responsibility, and institutional authority in leadership theory by revealing that manosphere leaders are not fundamentally legitimate because they serve as role models or occupy positions which prescribe accountability. Rather, it materializes in the dialectic of performative identity-building, algorithmic visibility, and symbolic value-making in a competitive digital terrain. In this sense, the

crisis be differentiated above all and at the same time even more of an image, communication and leadership to be heard dominating story or Narrative one in large while 'today's view'shared meaning.

This dynamic can be explained in-depth by integrating the Foucauldian and Bourdieusian paradigms. From a Foucauldian perspective, leadership is produced through discursive regimes that establish the conditions of possibility for what is authoritative, successful and masculine. These regimes are systems of power/knowledge, conducting the behavior and perception at (collective) level. Thus, leadership in the manosphere is not just performed; it is produced by narratives circulating within these spaces as well as through them that normalize ideas about dominance, control and self-optimization.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, these discursive processes are embedded within a structured field characterized by competition for symbolic capital. Visibility, follower engagement, and perceived influence operate as key forms of capital that determine positional advantage within the field. However, this form of authority remains inherently unstable, as it depends on continuous recognition and is subject to the shifting dynamics of both audience preferences and platform algorithms. Leadership, therefore, becomes a dynamic and contested process of capital accumulation rather than a fixed attribute.

This paper's main contribution is in showing how algorithmic systems are not just passive observers of leadership building, but play an active role as well. Where in traditional contexts, authority is negotiated through social interaction alone, digital platforms impose a mediating layer that defines who or what can be seen and by whom, ensures the amplification of certain narratives while limiting others. This creates a recursive feedback loop whereby algorithmic amplification replicates discursive hegemony, which feeds back into the production of symbolic capital and activated authority. Indeed, we have to understand leadership in the digital age as co-produced by human actors and technological infrastructures.

Its teachings also serve as contributions to ongoing conversations about the ethical and societal matters surrounding new models of leadership. As such, the critical analysis of "Red Pill leadership behaviors" and related ideological constructs suggest that some high-tech social orderings may reproduce exclusionary forms of power or hierarchical / even authoritarian practices. Although they can provide clarity and appeal in uncertain contexts, these models tend to do so at the expense of misrepresenting complex social realities and sidelining other views. This raises important issues concerning the normative bedrock of such a leadership example, and dangers of uncritical application of such models.

At the same time, the findings suggest that the popularity of manosphere leadership cannot be fully understood without considering broader socio-cultural conditions. The appeal of simplified, dominance-based leadership narratives reflects underlying dynamics such as identity uncertainty, perceived loss of status, and declining trust in traditional institutions. In this sense, the manosphere should not be viewed solely as a deviation from normative leadership theory, but also as a symptom of wider transformations in how authority is constructed and experienced in contemporary society.

From a practical lens, the study highlights the need for leadership education and development programs to more directly engage with digital realities. These efforts would include developing critical awareness around how algorithms influence our thinking, enhancing ethical reasoning,

and enabling individuals to cope with competing leadership narratives within digital spaces. In this way, leadership development cannot take place in an organizational silo but rather needs to consider the broader socio-technical ecosystems where we build and challenge authority. Lastly the paper provides few directions for future research. Empirical studies might explore the ways in which audiences read and react to different leadership narratives embedded in digital platforms, or the implications of algorithmic changes that mediate members' access to leadership figures and their stories. Broader research on the manosphere may also examine cross-cultural differences in the dynamics of this community and explore where digital leadership begins to blur into political mobilization. From a methodological perspective, using advanced bibliometric or network analysis in conjunction with conceptual frameworks may yield deeper insights into how leadership discourses are evolving in online spaces.

In conclusion, this study argues that leadership in the digital age cannot be understood without accounting for the complex interaction between discourse, social structure, ideology, and technology. The manosphere, as a highly visible and contested space, offers a critical lens through which these dynamics can be examined. By reconceptualizing leadership as a socio-technical and discursive process, this paper contributes to a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of authority in contemporary society.

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