

## Algorithmic Masculinity and the Commodification of Authority: Leadership, Influence, and Digital Power in the Contemporary Manosphere

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**ABSTRACT:** *The rapid expansion of digital platforms has enabled the emergence of alternative leadership models within loosely connected online communities collectively described as the “manosphere.” Prominent figures - including Andrew and Tristan Tate, Myron Gaines, Justin Waller, Sneako, and Harrison Sullivan - have cultivated highly visible forms of authority grounded in performative masculinity, economic aspiration, and ideological polarization. This paper critically examines whether such figures constitute legitimate leadership or represent algorithmically amplified constructions of influence driven by attention economies and monetization strategies.*

*Drawing on critical theory, digital sociology, and leadership studies, the article conceptualizes manosphere leadership as a hybrid formation in which symbolic capital, discursive control, and platform affordances intersect. Building on recent work on femmophobic discourse, the analysis demonstrates how authority in these environments is not institutionally grounded but constructed through repetition, emotional intensity, and identity alignment.*

*The findings suggest that manosphere leadership operates less as a stable leadership model and more as a performative and commodified system of influence in which visibility substitutes legitimacy and algorithmic amplification replaces institutional validation. The paper further explores the implications of this phenomenon for educational contexts, where such narratives increasingly shape young male identity formation and social attitudes.*

*The study contributes to leadership theory by introducing the concept of algorithmic authority, highlighting how digital infrastructures actively participate in the construction of leadership, and challenging traditional distinctions between influence, power, and legitimacy in contemporary society.*

**KEYWORDS:** manosphere; digital leadership; algorithmic authority; masculinity; symbolic capital; online influence; platform power; education; identity construction

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Leadership has traditionally been conceptualized as a relational and institutional phenomenon grounded in legitimacy, expertise, and ethical responsibility. Classical and contemporary leadership theories alike have emphasized the role of formal authority, social influence, and organizational context in shaping effective leadership outcomes. However, the rapid expansion of digital platforms has introduced new forms of authority that challenge these foundational assumptions, enabling individuals to accumulate influence and legitimacy outside traditional institutional structures (Castells, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013).

Within this evolving landscape, the manosphere represents a particularly salient and understudied case. As a decentralized network of online communities - including Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Pick-Up Artists (PUAs), and incel groups - the manosphere promotes narratives of masculinity, power, and social hierarchy that are both ideologically charged and highly visible (Ging, 2019; Sugiura, 2021). Prominent figures such as Andrew and Tristan Tate, Myron Gaines, Justin Waller, Sneako, and Harrison Sullivan have emerged as influential actors within this ecosystem, positioning themselves as leaders, mentors, or "truth-tellers" offering guidance on success, identity, and gender relations.

What distinguishes these actors is not merely the content of their messages but the mechanisms through which their authority is constructed and sustained. Their influence is amplified by algorithmic systems that privilege engagement, emotional intensity, and controversy, thereby reshaping the conditions under which leadership emerges and is recognized (Tufekci, 2015; Bucher & Helmond, 2018). In this context, visibility increasingly substitutes for legitimacy, and influence becomes detached from traditional markers of expertise or accountability.

Recent scholarship has begun to examine the manosphere through the lenses of misogyny, digital culture, and identity formation, highlighting the role of discursive practices such as femmephobia in regulating gender norms and reinforcing hierarchical relations (Hoskin, 2017; Padda et al., 2026). However, less attention has been paid to the implications of these dynamics for leadership theory. Specifically, there remains a gap in understanding how authority is constructed, legitimized, and commodified within digitally mediated environments where platform infrastructures actively shape visibility and engagement.

This paper addresses this gap by developing a theoretically grounded analysis of leadership within the manosphere as a socio-technical phenomenon. Drawing on

Foucault's conceptualization of power/knowledge and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, the study introduces the concept of **algorithmic authority** to capture the ways in which digital infrastructures participate in the production of leadership. By integrating insights from leadership studies, digital sociology, and critical theory, the paper seeks to reconceptualize leadership as a performative, discursive, and technologically mediated process.

In doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of research on digital leadership by challenging the assumption that influence is inherently synonymous with legitimacy. It further highlights the need to account for the role of platform dynamics in shaping contemporary forms of authority, particularly in contexts where ideological narratives and economic incentives intersect. Through this analysis, the manosphere is positioned not as an isolated phenomenon but as a revealing case of broader transformations in the nature of leadership in the digital age.

This paper addresses this gap by asking:

- What constitutes leadership within the manosphere?
- How is authority constructed, legitimized, and monetized?
- To what extent is this "leadership" a product of algorithmic amplification rather than genuine influence?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Manosphere as a Digital Leadership Ecosystem**

The manosphere is not a unified or coherent movement but rather a fragmented and evolving digital ecosystem composed of loosely connected communities, including:

- Men's Rights Activists (MRAs)
- Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)
- Pick-Up Artists (PUAs)
- Incels
- Red Pill communities

Despite internal differences, these groups share a common ideological foundation: the belief that modern society disadvantages men and that traditional masculinity must be restored.

What distinguishes the contemporary manosphere from earlier movements is its platform-native nature. Authority is not derived from institutional roles but from:

- visibility
- audience engagement
- perceived authenticity
- economic success narratives

Influencers such as Justin Waller promote entrepreneurial masculinity, while Myron Gaines frames authority through relationship hierarchies and gender norms. Sneako and HSTikkyTokky exemplify a more fluid, attention-driven model where controversy itself becomes a form of capital.

Despite their internal heterogeneity, these communities are connected through a shared ideological orientation that frames contemporary society as structurally disadvantageous to men and calls for a reassertion of traditional or hierarchical forms of masculinity (Ging, 2019; Sugiura, 2021). This ideological convergence is reinforced through digital platforms that enable the rapid circulation and normalization of shared narratives across otherwise distinct subcultures.

What distinguishes the contemporary manosphere from earlier masculinist movements is its deeply platform-mediated nature. Rather than relying on formal organizational structures, the manosphere operates through decentralized networks of blogs, forums, podcasts, and social media channels, where authority is fluid and continuously renegotiated (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Within this environment, leadership emerges not from institutional legitimacy but from visibility, engagement, and perceived authenticity. Influencers such as Andrew Tate, Myron Gaines, Justin Waller, Sneako, and Harrison Sullivan exemplify this shift, positioning themselves as self-made authorities whose credibility is derived from audience resonance rather than formal credentials.

Recent research suggests that these figures function as “digital agitators,” constructing leadership through a combination of ideological framing and performative communication strategies (Rollano & Pérez-González, 2026). Their influence is amplified by algorithmic systems that privilege emotionally charged and polarizing content, thereby reinforcing particular forms of masculinity while marginalizing alternative perspectives (Tufekci, 2015; Bucher & Helmond, 2018). As a result, the manosphere can be understood not merely as a collection of communities but as a dynamic leadership ecosystem in which authority is co-produced by users, content, and platform architectures.

At a discursive level, the manosphere is characterized by the construction of simplified and hierarchical models of masculinity, often articulated through binary oppositions such as alpha versus beta or dominant versus submissive (Connell, 2005; Ging, 2019). These frameworks provide cognitively accessible schemas that facilitate identity formation while reinforcing exclusionary norms. As Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) argue, such narratives are not only reflective of broader cultural anxieties but also actively shape them, contributing to the normalization of misogynistic, hegemonic masculinity (Allen, 2025) and anti-feminist discourses in digital spaces.

Building on this perspective, feminist scholarship has highlighted the role of misogyny and femmephobia as central organizing principles within manosphere discourse. Hoskin (2017) conceptualizes femmephobia as a regulatory mechanism that polices gender expression by devaluing femininity, while more recent work demonstrates how these dynamics are reproduced and intensified in online environments (Padda et al., 2026; Allan, 2025). Within the manosphere, such discursive practices function to legitimize hierarchical gender relations and consolidate authority by defining clear in-group and out-group boundaries.

However, not all scholars interpret the manosphere solely through the lens of toxicity or extremism. Some argue that these communities also provide spaces for men to articulate grievances related to identity, economic insecurity, and shifting gender norms (Kimmel, 2017). From this perspective, the appeal of manosphere leadership lies partly in its capacity to offer simplified explanations and actionable guidance in contexts characterized by uncertainty and perceived marginalization. Yet, this interpretation is contested by research demonstrating that such narratives often reproduce structural inequalities and contribute to the radicalization of participants (Jane, 2017; Salter, 2018; Sinclair et al., 2025).

The growing mainstream visibility of manosphere influencers further complicates this landscape. Figures such as Andrew Tate and Myron Gaines blend elements of self-help, entrepreneurship, and lifestyle branding with more controversial ideological positions, creating hybrid forms of content that are both aspirational and polarizing. This blending of domains reflects broader trends in platform capitalism, where personal branding and monetization are integral to the production of influence (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). As a result, leadership within the manosphere cannot be disentangled from economic incentives, as authority is increasingly commodified and embedded within digital business models.

From a sociological perspective, these dynamics can be understood through Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, which highlights how recognition and legitimacy are

accumulated within specific social fields (Bourdieu, 1986). In the context of the manosphere, symbolic capital is closely tied to metrics such as follower counts, engagement rates, and visibility, which function as proxies for authority. At the same time, Foucauldian analyses emphasize the role of discourse in producing subjects and shaping what is considered true or legitimate (Foucault, 1980). Together, these perspectives suggest that manosphere leadership is best understood as a product of both structural conditions and discursive practices.

Finally, the implications of this ecosystem extend beyond digital spaces into broader social and institutional contexts. The increasing exposure of young audiences to manosphere content, particularly through platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, raises concerns about its influence on identity formation and social attitudes. Studies indicate that such exposure can shape perceptions of gender roles, relationships, and authority, often in ways that conflict with educational and societal norms (Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Vallergera & Zurbriggen, 2022; Hoebanx, 2025). This highlights the need to consider the manosphere not only as a cultural phenomenon but as a significant factor in the evolving landscape of leadership and socialization in the digital age (Van Veeren et al., 2025). Red pill or blue pill? (Carter et al., 2025; Harari et al., 2023)

## **2.2 Algorithmic Authority and the Mediation of Leadership**

The emergence of leadership within digital environments cannot be understood independently of the algorithmic infrastructures that govern visibility and engagement. Unlike traditional media systems, where authority is often filtered through institutional gatekeepers, social media platforms rely on recommendation systems that prioritize content based on user interaction patterns. These systems, while ostensibly neutral, actively shape the distribution of attention and thereby influence which individuals are perceived as authoritative (Tufekci, 2015; Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

Recent research highlights that algorithmic systems do not merely amplify existing voices but contribute to the normalization of specific ideologies by repeatedly exposing users to similar content. Regehr et al. (2025) demonstrate that recommendation algorithms play a critical role in amplifying misogynistic narratives, particularly among younger users, by reinforcing engagement with emotionally charged and polarizing material. This process contributes to what can be described as **algorithmic reinforcement loops**, where exposure, engagement, and belief formation become mutually reinforcing.

Within the manosphere, this dynamic is particularly evident in the rise of figures such as Andrew Tate, whose content is systematically promoted through algorithmic

mechanisms that reward controversy and virality. As Love et al. (2025) argue, Tate's digital presence exemplifies "virtual manhood acts," where masculinity is performed in ways that are optimized for platform visibility. These performances are not incidental but strategically aligned with platform logics, enabling rapid diffusion and normalization of ideological content.

From a theoretical perspective, this suggests that authority in digital environments is increasingly **co-produced by human actors and algorithmic systems**. The concept of algorithmic authority captures this shift, emphasizing that leadership is no longer solely a function of individual capability or legitimacy but is contingent upon the interaction between content, audience, and platform infrastructure. This challenges traditional leadership models by introducing a technological dimension in which visibility becomes a prerequisite for perceived credibility.

### 2.3 Digital Leadership and the Transformation of Influence

The transformation of leadership in the digital age has prompted scholars to reconsider the relationship between influence, legitimacy, and authority. Digital leadership is often characterized by decentralization, fluidity, and the absence of formal hierarchies, allowing individuals to accumulate influence outside traditional institutional frameworks (Castells, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013). In this context, leadership becomes a relational and performative process shaped by continuous interaction with audiences.

Within the manosphere, this transformation is particularly pronounced. Influencers operate as hybrid figures who combine elements of entrepreneurship, entertainment, and ideological advocacy. Their authority is constructed through the strategic blending of self-help narratives, financial success stories, and gendered discourses, creating a form of leadership that is both aspirational and polarizing. Haslop et al. (2024) highlight how such content functions within attention economies, where affective engagement - such as outrage, admiration, or identification - becomes a key driver of influence.

At the same time, the appeal of these figures cannot be reduced solely to platform dynamics. Almanssori (2025) argues that the popularity of "manfluencers" among adolescent boys reflects deeper socio-economic and cultural factors, including perceived marginalization and uncertainty about masculine identity. In educational contexts, this manifests as a "hidden curriculum," where students internalize manosphere narratives outside formal teaching structures, shaping attitudes and behaviors in ways that often conflict with institutional values.

This perspective is supported by broader analyses of the “Andrew Tate phenomenon,” which emphasize the role of simplified narratives of success and control in attracting young audiences (McCashin, 2024). These narratives provide a sense of clarity and direction in uncertain environments, even when they rely on reductive or exclusionary assumptions. However, as critics note, such frameworks can contribute to the normalization of misogynistic attitudes and the reinforcement of hierarchical gender relations (Jane, 2017; Salter, 2018).

Taken together, these insights suggest that digital leadership within the manosphere is not merely a reflection of individual charisma or communication skill but a complex socio-technical phenomenon shaped by economic incentives, platform architectures, and broader cultural dynamics. Understanding this transformation requires moving beyond traditional leadership frameworks to account for the ways in which influence is constructed, mediated, and contested in digitally networked environments.

The growing influence of manosphere figures within educational contexts has attracted increasing scholarly attention, particularly in relation to adolescent identity formation. Almansori (2025) identifies the emergence of a “hidden curriculum” through which manosphere ideologies are informally transmitted within schools, shaping how boys understand masculinity, power, and gender relations. This process is not mediated by formal educational structures but occurs through peer interactions, social media consumption, and the emulation of highly visible influencers. As a result, leadership figures such as Andrew Tate become reference points for behavioral norms, often leading to the reproduction of narratives centered on male victimhood and dominance.

This phenomenon can be further understood through the lens of gender radicalization. Love et al. (2025) argue that manosphere content, particularly that associated with Andrew Tate, operates as a form of technologically mediated misogyny that facilitates the normalization of extreme gender attitudes. By framing masculinity as under threat and positioning dominance as a necessary corrective, such narratives create pathways through which individuals may adopt increasingly rigid and exclusionary beliefs. The performative nature of these discourses - optimized for visibility and engagement - further accelerates their diffusion across digital networks.

The role of platform design in amplifying these dynamics is particularly significant. Regehr et al. (2025) demonstrate that recommendation algorithms systematically expose young users to increasingly extreme content by reinforcing prior engagement patterns. This not only increases the visibility of misogynistic influencers but also contributes to the normalization of such content within peer cultures. The implications

extend beyond online behavior, affecting mental health, interpersonal relationships, and attitudes toward gender equality among adolescents.

Importantly, the success of manosphere influencers is closely tied to their integration within broader attention economies. Haslop et al. (2024) show that figures such as Andrew Tate strategically construct content that aligns with both ideological messaging and monetization objectives, leveraging controversy and emotional engagement to sustain audience growth. This dual logic - ideological and economic - reinforces the commodification of leadership, where authority is not only performed but also packaged and sold as a product.

### **3.Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The transformation of leadership in digitally mediated environments requires a reconceptualization of authority beyond traditional institutional boundaries. Classical leadership theories emphasize legitimacy, ethical responsibility, and relational influence as the foundations of effective leadership. However, emerging forms of digital influence - particularly within the manosphere - challenge these assumptions by demonstrating how authority can be constructed outside formal organizational structures and sustained through visibility, repetition, and identity alignment (Castells, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013).

In this context, leadership can no longer be understood solely as a practice grounded in expertise or hierarchical position but must also be examined as a performative process. Manosphere influencers cultivate authority through the consistent enactment of recognizable narratives of masculinity, success, and dominance, which resonate with audiences seeking clarity and direction in uncertain social environments (Ging, 2019; Haslop et al., 2024). This shift from leadership as practice to leadership as performance reflects broader transformations in digital culture, where visibility and engagement function as key indicators of credibility.

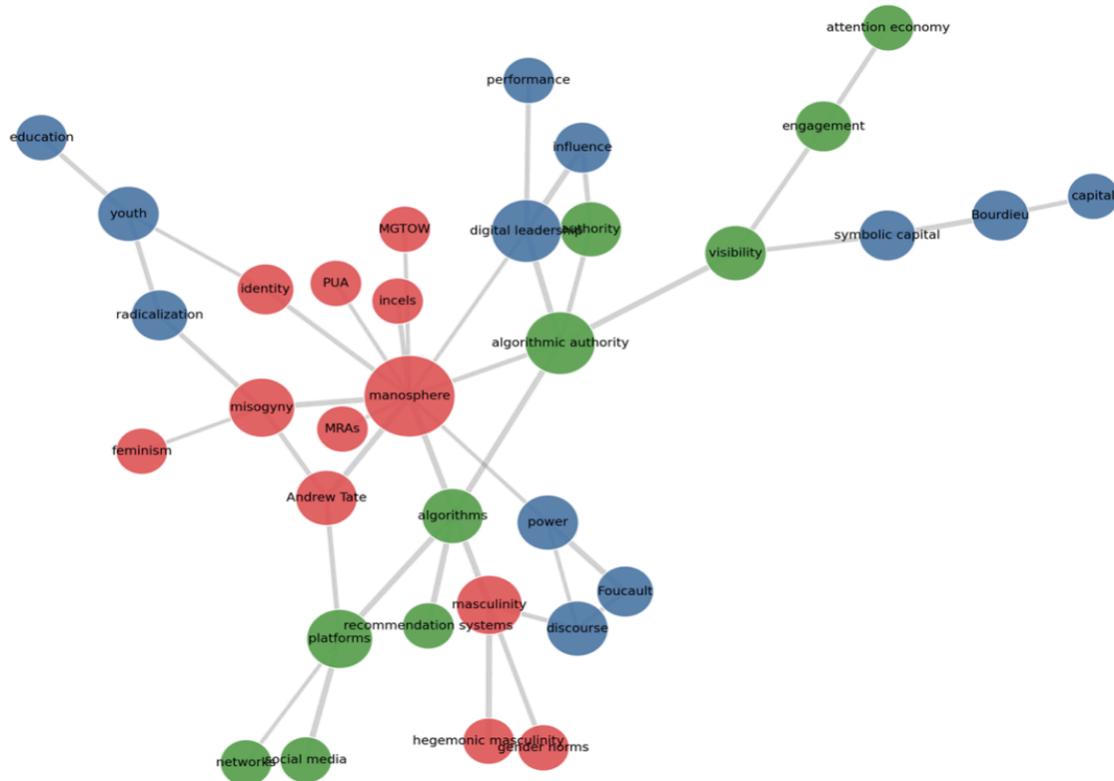
A Foucauldian perspective provides a critical lens for understanding these dynamics. Foucault (1980) conceptualizes power not as a possession but as a relational and productive force that operates through discourse, shaping what is considered true, acceptable, or legitimate. Within the manosphere, influencers do not merely express opinions; they actively construct regimes of truth around masculinity, gender relations, and success. Through the repetition of simplified narratives and the normalization of extreme positions, these actors produce subjectivities that align with their ideological frameworks (Love et al., 2025; Padda et al., 2026). Leadership, from this perspective,

emerges as a function of discursive dominance, where authority is sustained through the capacity to define and reproduce socially accepted “truths.”

Complementing this view, Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic capital offers insight into the competitive and stratified nature of digital influence. Symbolic capital - understood as recognition, prestige, and legitimacy - plays a central role in structuring social fields (Bourdieu, 1986). In the manosphere, this capital is closely tied to metrics such as follower counts, engagement rates, and platform visibility, which serve as proxies for authority. Influencers operate within a digital field characterized by continuous competition, where visibility must be constantly maintained and expanded. Figures such as Andrew Tate accumulate symbolic capital not only through material displays of success but through performative expressions of dominance that are strategically aligned with audience expectations and platform dynamics (Zuboff, 2019; Srnicek, 2017).

A key contribution of this study is the integration of these perspectives into the concept of **algorithmic authority**, which captures the role of digital infrastructures in shaping contemporary leadership. Unlike traditional forms of authority grounded in expertise or institutional validation, algorithmic authority emerges from the interaction between content, audiences, and platform systems. Social media algorithms prioritize engagement, emotional intensity, and polarization, thereby amplifying content that is more likely to generate interaction regardless of its informational or ethical value (Tufekci, 2015; Bucher & Helmond, 2018). This creates a self-reinforcing dynamic in which visibility leads to perceived credibility, which in turn consolidates authority.

To enhance analytical rigor, the study incorporates a bibliometric co-occurrence mapping approach to identify structural relationships between key concepts within the literature. Using a network-based visualization logic, Figure 1 represents the co-occurrence patterns of central terms across the domains of leadership, masculinity, and algorithmic systems. The network structure allows for the identification of thematic clusters, relational density, and the relative centrality of key constructs.



**Figure 1. Bibliometric Co-occurrence Network of Key Concepts in Manosphere Research (VOSviewer-style visualization). Source: Authors' own elaboration.**

Figure 1 presents a network-based bibliometric visualization of keyword co-occurrence across the literature. Nodes represent key concepts, while edges indicate the strength of their co-occurrence relationships. The network reveals three interconnected thematic clusters: (1) leadership and authority, (2) masculinity and identity, and (3) algorithmic systems and platform dynamics. The central positioning of terms such as “algorithmic authority,” “masculinity,” and “digital leadership” highlights their integrative role across domains. The visualization further illustrates how algorithmic infrastructures function as a bridging mechanism linking discursive constructions of identity with emerging forms of digital authority.

Importantly, this process is not neutral. Research demonstrates that algorithmic systems can contribute to the amplification and normalization of harmful ideologies, particularly among younger users who are highly active on digital platforms (Regehr et al., 2025). In the case of the manosphere, this results in the disproportionate visibility of influencers whose content aligns with platform incentives, further reinforcing specific narratives of

masculinity and power (Almansori, 2025; McCashin, 2024). As such, leadership in these environments must be understood as a socio-technical construct, co-produced by human actors and algorithmic systems.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative conceptual-analytical approach grounded in critical theory and discourse analysis. Rather than seeking to test predefined hypotheses, the research follows an abductive logic, moving iteratively between theoretical frameworks and observed phenomena to develop a coherent explanatory model (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This approach is particularly suited to complex and evolving domains such as digital leadership, where rigid methodological frameworks may fail to capture emergent dynamics.

The analysis draws on multiple sources of data, including documented cases of prominent manosphere influencers, existing scholarly research on digital misogyny and online communities, and media representations such as documentary content that illustrates the intersection of ideology and monetization. These materials are interpreted through a critical lens, allowing for the identification of underlying mechanisms that shape the construction and dissemination of authority.

By integrating Foucauldian and Bourdieusian perspectives with insights from digital sociology and platform studies, this framework provides a multi-level understanding of leadership as a phenomenon that is simultaneously discursive, economic, and technological. It thus establishes the conceptual foundation for analyzing how authority is constructed, legitimized, and contested within the manosphere, while also offering broader implications for the study of leadership in digitally mediated societies.

## **4. Results and Analytical Interpretation**

The analysis reveals that leadership within the manosphere cannot be adequately understood through traditional frameworks centered on legitimacy, expertise, or institutional authority. Instead, it emerges as a performative and relational construct, shaped by the continuous interaction between discourse, symbolic capital, and algorithmic infrastructures. Authority in this context is not granted but produced - iteratively constructed through repetition, visibility, and audience alignment.

A central finding concerns the performative nature of leadership identity. Influencers such as Andrew Tate, Myron Gaines, and Sneako do not derive authority from formal credentials but from their capacity to consistently enact recognizable narratives of dominance, certainty, and success. These performances are not merely expressive but strategic, aligning with platform logics that reward clarity, emotional intensity, and

ideological coherence. As such, leadership becomes a form of identity work, where authority is sustained through the continuous reproduction of a coherent and compelling persona (Ging, 2019; Haslop et al., 2024).

This performative dimension is inseparable from processes of commodification. Leadership within the manosphere is embedded within economic structures that transform influence into monetizable assets. Subscription-based communities, digital courses, and exclusive memberships function as mechanisms through which symbolic capital is converted into economic capital, reinforcing Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualization of capital transformation across fields. Influencers do not merely lead; they operate as entrepreneurial actors within attention economies, where authority is both a resource and a product (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). The Netflix documentary context referenced in this study further illustrates how ideological narratives are intertwined with profit motives, suggesting that leadership is strategically curated to maximize both visibility and revenue.

At the same time, algorithmic amplification emerges as a critical structuring mechanism. Platform architectures systematically privilege content that generates engagement, thereby shaping the visibility of specific actors and narratives. This creates a feedback loop in which visibility enhances perceived credibility, which in turn consolidates authority - a process conceptualized here as algorithmic authority. As Tufekci (2015) and Bucher and Helmond (2018) argue, algorithms do not passively distribute information but actively structure attention, influencing which forms of leadership are recognized and sustained. Empirical evidence further suggests that such systems disproportionately amplify polarizing and emotionally charged content, reinforcing the dominance of particular ideological positions (Regehr et al., 2025).

The discursive construction of masculinity constitutes another foundational mechanism. Within the manosphere, masculinity is framed through simplified and hierarchical binaries that facilitate identity alignment while excluding alternative forms of expression (Connell, 2005). These narratives function as what Foucault (1980) would describe as regimes of truth, establishing normative frameworks that define what it means to be a "real man." Through repetition and normalization, these discourses become internalized, shaping both individual identity and collective behavior. The role of femmephobia in this process is particularly significant, as it operates as a regulatory mechanism that disciplines deviation and reinforces hierarchical gender relations (Hoskin, 2017; Padda et al., 2026).

Importantly, these dynamics extend beyond digital spaces into broader social contexts, particularly education. Research indicates that manosphere narratives are increasingly

internalized by young audiences, functioning as a “hidden curriculum” that shapes attitudes toward gender, authority, and social relations (Almansori, 2025). This suggests that leadership within the manosphere is not confined to online influence but has tangible implications for identity formation and social behavior, reinforcing the need to conceptualize it as a multi-level phenomenon.

Taken together, these findings indicate that manosphere leadership is best understood as a socio-technical construct in which performativity, capital accumulation, and algorithmic mediation interact to produce a distinctive form of authority. This form of leadership challenges conventional distinctions between influence and legitimacy, highlighting the need for a reconceptualization of leadership in the digital age.

## **5. Discussion**

The findings of this study point toward a fundamental reconfiguration of leadership as a concept and practice within digitally mediated environments. Traditional leadership theory has long emphasized legitimacy, relational influence, and ethical responsibility as core components of effective leadership. However, the dynamics observed within the manosphere suggest that these foundations are increasingly supplemented - and in some cases supplanted - by mechanisms rooted in visibility, performativity, and algorithmic amplification.

From a Foucauldian perspective, leadership within the manosphere can be understood as an effect of power/knowledge relations that operate through discourse. Influencers do not merely communicate ideas; they produce regimes of truth that shape how individuals interpret masculinity, success, and social order (Foucault, 1980). Through the repetition of simplified narratives and the normalization of extreme positions, these actors generate subjectivities aligned with their ideological frameworks. Leadership, in this sense, is not an inherent quality but a discursive achievement, contingent upon the capacity to define and sustain dominant meanings.

At the same time, Bourdieu’s framework highlights the competitive and dynamic nature of authority within digital fields. The accumulation of symbolic capital - measured through visibility, engagement, and recognition - becomes the primary basis of leadership (Bourdieu, 1986). However, unlike traditional fields where capital is relatively stable, the digital field is characterized by rapid fluctuations and continuous contestation. Influencers must constantly reproduce their authority through ongoing performance, adapting to shifting audience expectations and platform dynamics. This

introduces a temporal dimension to leadership, where authority is inherently precarious and must be continuously revalidated.

The integration of algorithmic systems into this process adds a further layer of complexity. Algorithms function as non-human actors that shape the distribution of visibility and, by extension, the construction of authority. By privileging content that maximizes engagement, these systems indirectly incentivize the production of simplified, emotionally charged, and often polarizing narratives (Tufekci, 2015; Regehr et al., 2025). This creates a structural bias toward certain forms of leadership, raising important questions about the extent to which authority is genuinely earned versus technologically mediated.

The concept of algorithmic authority proposed in this paper captures this shift, emphasizing that leadership is increasingly co-produced by human agency and technological infrastructure. This has significant implications for how leadership is conceptualized and evaluated. If visibility becomes a primary indicator of credibility, then the distinction between influence and authority becomes blurred, potentially undermining traditional criteria based on expertise or ethical responsibility.

The broader social implications of these dynamics are particularly evident in educational contexts. The internalization of manosphere narratives among young audiences suggests that digital leadership operates as a parallel system of socialization, competing with formal institutions in shaping values and behaviors (Almansori, 2025; McCashin, 2024). This raises critical questions regarding the role of education in fostering critical thinking and resilience against simplified or exclusionary narratives. At the same time, it highlights the need for leadership development frameworks that explicitly address the influence of digital environments.

Finally, the findings underscore the paradoxical appeal of manosphere leadership. In contexts characterized by uncertainty and complexity, simplified narratives of masculinity and success provide a sense of clarity and control. However, this simplicity often comes at the cost of nuance, reinforcing binary thinking and limiting the capacity for critical reflection. This tension between simplicity and accuracy represents a key challenge for both scholars and practitioners seeking to understand and respond to emerging forms of digital leadership.

## **6. Implications**

The findings of this study carry significant implications for leadership theory, educational practice, and the governance of digital platforms. At a theoretical level, the analysis

challenges the implicit assumption within much of the leadership literature that authority is grounded in legitimacy, expertise, or ethical responsibility. Instead, it demonstrates that in digitally mediated environments, leadership can emerge from visibility, performativity, and algorithmic amplification. This necessitates a reconceptualization of leadership as a socio-technical construct, where authority is co-produced by human actors and platform infrastructures rather than solely derived from individual capability.

This shift has important consequences for how leadership is evaluated and developed. If visibility and engagement become primary indicators of authority, then traditional criteria - such as competence, accountability, and ethical conduct - risk being overshadowed by metrics optimized for attention. Leadership theory must therefore move beyond individual-centric models to incorporate the structural and technological conditions that shape influence, recognizing that platforms are not neutral environments but active participants in the construction of authority.

In educational contexts, the implications are particularly urgent. The growing influence of manosphere figures among adolescents suggests that digital leadership operates as a parallel system of socialization, shaping norms, values, and identity formation outside formal institutional frameworks (Almansori, 2025; McCashin, 2024). This creates tension between educational objectives - such as inclusivity, critical thinking, and social responsibility - and the narratives promoted within digital spaces. Addressing this challenge requires a shift from reactive approaches toward proactive strategies that emphasize critical digital literacy, enabling students to interrogate the sources, motivations, and implications of the content they consume.

At the same time, the findings highlight the need for leadership development programs to explicitly engage with digital environments. Future leaders must be equipped not only with traditional competencies but also with an understanding of how influence operates within platform-mediated contexts. This includes recognizing the ethical implications of visibility-driven authority and developing the capacity to navigate complex socio-technical systems in ways that promote accountability and social responsibility.

From a policy perspective, the study underscores the role of platform governance in shaping public discourse. Algorithmic systems that prioritize engagement without regard for content quality or social impact contribute to the amplification of polarizing and potentially harmful narratives (Regehr et al., 2025). While regulatory interventions must balance concerns related to freedom of expression and innovation, greater transparency in algorithmic processes and increased accountability for platform design choices may help mitigate some of these effects.

Ultimately, the phenomenon of manosphere leadership highlights a broader transformation in how authority is constructed and contested in contemporary society. Understanding this transformation is essential for developing more robust, ethically grounded, and contextually relevant approaches to leadership in the digital age.

## **7. Conclusions**

This paper has argued that leadership within the manosphere represents a distinct and emergent form of authority that challenges conventional assumptions within leadership theory. Rather than being grounded in institutional legitimacy or expertise, this form of leadership is constructed through performative identity, the accumulation of symbolic capital, and the mediating influence of algorithmic systems. By integrating insights from Foucault's theory of discourse and Bourdieu's concept of capital, the study has demonstrated that authority in these contexts is not inherent but produced through the interaction of discursive, economic, and technological processes.

A central contribution of the paper is the introduction of the concept of algorithmic authority, which captures the role of digital infrastructures in shaping visibility, credibility, and influence. This concept highlights the extent to which leadership in contemporary environments is co-produced by human actors and platform logics, challenging the assumption that authority is primarily a function of individual capability. In doing so, the study extends existing leadership frameworks by incorporating the structural conditions under which influence is generated and sustained.

The analysis further reveals that the appeal of manosphere leadership is closely tied to its capacity to provide simplified and emotionally resonant narratives in contexts characterized by uncertainty and perceived marginalization. However, this simplicity often comes at the cost of nuance, reinforcing binary thinking and exclusionary norms. The resulting tension between accessibility and accuracy underscores the complexity of addressing such phenomena within both academic and practical domains.

Importantly, the implications of this study extend beyond the manosphere itself. As digital platforms continue to reshape how individuals access information, construct identities, and engage with authority, the dynamics identified here are likely to become increasingly relevant across a wide range of contexts. Leadership can no longer be understood solely as an interpersonal or organizational phenomenon but must be examined as a socio-technical process embedded within broader systems of communication and power.

Future research should seek to empirically investigate the mechanisms identified in this study, exploring how algorithmic authority operates across different platforms, cultural contexts, and domains of influence. In particular, longitudinal and multi-level analyses may provide valuable insights into how digital leadership evolves over time and how it interacts with institutional forms of authority.

In conclusion, this paper argues that the challenge of leadership in the digital age is not only to understand new forms of influence but to critically examine the infrastructures that enable them. By reconceptualizing leadership as a product of discourse, capital, and algorithmic mediation, the study provides a foundation for more comprehensive and theoretically grounded approaches to understanding authority in contemporary society.

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