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RECEIVED 02 June 2025

ACCEPTED 17 October 2025

PUBLISHED 07 November 2025

CITATION

Brandariz Portela T, del Pino-Díaz D,
Ortega-Fernández E and Padilla-Castillo G
(2025) Antifeminist opinion leaders on
YouTube: analysis of discourse and its
influence on the perception of violence
among young Spanish audiences.
Front. Hum. Dyn. 7:1639391.
doi: 10.3389/fhumd.2025.1639391

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Antifeminist opinion leaders on YouTube: analysis of discourse and its influence on the perception of violence among young Spanish audiences

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The present study examines the role of anti-feminist discourse on YouTube within the context of the rise of the feminist movement and the anti-feminist response on social media. It explores how such discourse may influence young people's perceptions of gender-based violence. The main aim was to analyze anti-feminist content created by influential opinion leaders on YouTube over a 6-month period by identifying discursive frameworks, examining audience interactions, and evaluating potential impacts on perceptions of gender-based violence. A mixed research design combining quantitative and qualitative analyses was employed. Fanpage Karma and Audiense Insights tools were used to examine engagement metrics and audience characteristics for 500 posts from five influential Spanish YouTubers. Findings revealed that, while criticism of feminism remains central to this discourse, the narratives have become more complex, often intertwining with far-right ideologies. The trivialization of violence against women was observed, with a predominantly young audience (25–34 years old) being mostly exposed to such content. Anti-feminist discourse on YouTube represents a multifaceted phenomenon that perpetuates misogynistic attitudes and serves as a gateway to broader radical-right ideologies. The growing reach and influence of these channels underscore the urgent need to develop educational strategies to counter such narratives among young audiences.

KEYWORDS

social networks, influencers, opinion leaders, anti-feminism, manosphere, gender-based violence, young audiences, social perceptions

1 Introduction

Violence suffered by women and girls continues to be one of the most widespread and generalized violations of human rights throughout the world (ONU, 2024). In accordance with official figures, in 2023, close to 51,100 women and girls, globally, died at the hands of their partners or relatives. This means that a woman is killed every 10 min (ONU, 2024). In Spain, gender violence has killed 1,291 victims since official records began on the 1st of January 2003 (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2024). Official figures indicate that, in 2024 alone, as of the 18th of December, 46 women were killed, in Spain, due to gender violence (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2024). These data exemplify a social issue that shows no sign of abating. However, it is important to

note that official femicide figures in Spain likely underestimate the true scale of the problem, as cases involving migrant women, informal or unregistered relationships, or those lacking sufficient legal evidence, often remain unrecorded in official statistics.

In recent years, buoyed by the emergence of the fourth wave of feminism (Cobo, 2019), 25N celebrations and 8M marches have become spaces for political debate. This coincided, in Spain, with the sentence dictated in the well-known case of La Manada de Pamplona [the Pamplona Wolf-Pack] (STS, 4th of July 2019) which took place in July 2016 (Brandariz Portela, 2021). Following this crime and subsequent judicial failings, inflammatory discourse emerged, which is politically grounded in emergence of the far-right party, Vox (Ferreira, 2019). This party believes that 25N celebrations and 8M marches undermine the ability of men and women to coexist by instigating a war of the sexes that serves to pull apart the fabric of current society (Europa Press, 2024).

The case of Vox in Spain is similar to that of other far-right parties around the world, with all sharing at their heart a turn toward genderphobia (Fassin, 2020). Amongst the many anti-gender movements to have emerged in recent years (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Verloo and Paternotte, 2018), anti-feminist YouTubers take up prime position, given that they are the agents who most incite and popularize discourse produced in the bowels of the manosphere (García-Mingo and Díaz Fernández, 2022b). For this study, content was classified as anti-feminist when it explicitly contested, trivialized or denied the principles and claims of feminist theory, or propagated beliefs framing gender-based violence or gender equality policies as exaggerated or divisive. We distinguished these from reactionary or misogynist content that, while potentially overlapping, does not principally target feminist ideology. Borderline cases were reviewed by the research team; for example, channels like “The Wild Project”, despite their significant audience, were excluded from our core sample as their content, though occasionally controversial, does not consistently align with the definition of explicit anti-feminist discourse adopted here.

Leading antifeminist YouTubers in Spain who stand out due to their impact and influence on young people include Roma Gallardo (1.97M subscribers and 312M views), Un Tío Blanco Hetero [Hetero White Guy] (535K subscribers and 143M views), Wall Street Wolverine (829K subscribers and 151M views), Infovlogger (414K subscribers and 47M views) and Begoña Gerpe (534K subscribers and 166M views). This selection is supported by recent studies (Ging, 2017; Hosseinmardi et al., 2021) and YouTube metrics that demonstrate the central role of YouTube creators in disseminating manosphere ideas, often surpassing traditional forums in visibility, engagement, and influence among young, digitally native audiences.

The present research examines content shared by these five leaders of antifeminist opinion on YouTube during the 6-month period between the 26th of September 2024 and the 21st of January 2025. This streaming platform is currently second place worldwide when it comes to information searches being beaten, only, by Facebook (Statista, 2024a). At the time of writing, YouTube has more than 2,500 million registered users, globally, with each spending an average of 20 min a day consuming content on the platform (McLachlan, 2023). This is particularly relevant given that, according to Statista (2024b), YouTube and TikTok are the two

main platforms accessed by young people. In this way, the former has become a political socialization agent for young generations, given that the individuals who most engage with this tool fall into the between 18 and 24 years, and between 25 and 34 years age groups (Statista, 2024a).

In agreement with that reported by some well-known research (Antony and Thomas, 2010; Leung and Lee, 2014), YouTube is a platform for the production and circulation of political discourse. It is a direct sharing space occupied by both content creators and audiences with this factor making it an important stomping ground for political influencers who can directly present themselves to their followers (Riedl et al., 2023). YouTube’s affordances, such as algorithmic recommendation, direct creator-audience interaction, and comment culture, facilitate the rapid circulation and amplification of political messages (Antony and Thomas, 2010; Riedl et al., 2023). This makes YouTube a unique and dynamic space where both influencers and audiences actively participate in shaping, contesting and disseminating narratives, including those related to gender, politics, and social identity.

Throughout this work, we use key terms such as “manosphere”, referring to online communities that promote antifeminist and often masculinist ideologies (Jane, 2017; Banet-Weiser, 2018), “incel community”—involuntary celibates who frequently express misogynistic views (Bates, 2021)—and “woke culture”, a term used colloquially to describe progressive social justice movements, often disparaged by antifeminist commentators (Camargo Fernández, 2024). These concepts will be used with quotation marks and accompanied by detailed explanations to ensure comprehensibility for both academic and non-specialist audiences.

The present analysis strives to examine the role played in the present day by discourse that trivializes or denies the violence suffered by women, especially on platforms such as YouTube, by shining a spotlight on opinion leaders. Present research takes the standpoint that political influencers play a key role when it comes to understanding the influence of such discourse on young people and the way in which it conditions the way in which they perceive reality. For this reason, the research seeks to identify the role played by discourse inciting hate toward women through content created by antifeminist opinion leaders within the YouTube ecosystem in Spain.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 YouTube and the proliferation of hate speech against women

YouTube was not previously, or traditionally, considered to be a main source of news and political content (Hosseinmardi et al., 2021). This standpoint is reflected by the limited attention given to studies on the impact of social networks, which have mainly focused on X (formerly Twitter) and, to a lesser extent, Facebook (Lewis and Molyneus, 2018). Nonetheless, behavioral changes within the target population mean that YouTube is becoming increasingly relevant to researchers (Newman et al., 2023).

Features of the streaming platform have served as a major pull for opinion leaders or political influencers, micro-celebrities

and other content creators (Lewis, 2018; Munger and Phillips, 2020; Riedl et al., 2023). Until now, features available on YouTube have mainly been capitalized on by opinion leaders through discourse regarding extreme right-wing political parties. In the North American context, Munger and Phillips (2020) define YouTube as the leading platform for conservative and far-right opinion leaders.

According to some researchers, YouTube has turned into a platform that radicalizes society, highlighting the way in which its algorithms direct users toward increasingly extreme content. In this sense, it serves to introduce the concept conceived by Lewis (2018) of the Alternative Influence Network (AIN). This describes the way in which a connected online group of academics, commentators and celebrities present themselves as an alternative source of news and political commentary with their main tool for disseminating extreme discourse being YouTube.

Another detail that should be highlighted is that a substantial gender gap exists on YouTube. Studies such as that conducted by Wotanis and McMillan (2014) have revealed underrepresentation of female content creators, with only 8% of highly-subscribed-to channels belonging to women. The male dominated AIN reflects this gap, with many opinion leaders promoting values that have males at their core, whilst, at the same time, trivializing violence toward women (Lewis, 2018).

A study conducted by Papadamou et al. (2020) on the incel community on YouTube, demonstrates the rapid growth of this group on this platform. On the other hand, Mamié et al. (2021) explored that way in which antifeminist communities on this network act as gateways to far-right ideologies, especially amongst younger populations, given that they constitute the main audience to view such content. In line with Eurostat (2021) and Instituto de la Juventud (INJUVE) (2023) recommendations, this study defines “youth” as individuals aged 18–24, whereas “young adults” refers to those between 25 and 34. Although the introduction references youth in a broad sense, our empirical data—reflecting YouTube analytics (Pew Research Center, 2023)—shows that the 25–34 age group forms the predominant audience for the selected anti-feminist content. This apparent discrepancy is due to platform demographics; consequently, the study focuses its analytical depth on this segment while retaining a broader theoretical framing of youth engagement.

With regards to the proliferation of antifeminist discourse, the AIN analyzed by Lewis (2018) is best known for the concept of the manosphere. This concept outlines a set of digital spaces, blogs, platforms and YouTube channels that disseminate hate speech toward women, trivialize sexual violence and sympathize with male resentment (Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019; Cockerill, 2019; Ging, 2017; Ging and Siapera, 2019; Jones et al., 2020; Nagle, 2017).

According to Bates (2021), opinion leaders who disseminate discourse that trivializes or denies the violence suffered by women play a central role within the manosphere, due to the fact that they are responsible for making hate speech accessible and popular. At the time of writing, not enough research has been conducted in Spain to enable examination of the impact of antifeminist opinion leaders on the propagation of hate toward women, although work conducted by García-Mingo and Díaz Fernández (2022a,b), Medina-Vicent (2022), and Pibernat Vila (2021) has sought to fill

this gap. Nonetheless, it is vital to understand the evolution of the feminist movement in order to examine the context developed in the digital space, focusing, in this case, on content that seeks to detract.

2.2 Boom of the feminist movement

The boom in the feminist movement in the digital era, known as cyberfeminism, was driven by the fourth wave of feminism, characterized by the use of social networks for mobilization and activism. Nevertheless, this growth has also faced substantial adverse responses.

Cyberfeminism, a theoretical standpoint that goes hand in hand with the development of new technologies, goes back to the 1990s with its roots stemming from publication of the *Cyborg Manifest* by Donna Haraway, in the United States. According to García Manso (2007), this essay represents an attempt at the resurgence of socialist feminism that is oriented toward fighting that which Haraway denominated as the “informatics of domination”. This concept refers to a technological setting that is characterized by ambiguity, fluidity and contradictions, in which referents and identities are blurred, although not all people are affected in the same way (García Manso, 2007). Since this conceptualization and up until the present day, digital platforms have been crucial for feminist activism, enabling the creation of movements such as #MeToo, which have increased the visibility of issues such as gender inequality and sexual harassment. These movements have promoted gender solidarity; however, they have also had to face cyber harassment and trivialization of the experiences shared through them (Morales-i-Gras et al., 2021).

(Asensi-Rodríguez and Martínez Rolan, 2024) propose that, whilst social networks have played a key role in giving visibility to and empowering feminist movements, these same platforms have also become spaces in which misogynistic messages are disseminated and the manosphere operates. This double-edged sword demonstrates the way in which feminist activism online challenges traditional patriarchal structures and manages to achieve meaningful advances in terms of reach and representation. This setting, at the same time, faces growing polarization and a rise in digital violence, all of which limits female participation in digital spaces. Thus, the need is highlighted to implement inclusive digital policies that mitigate algorithmic oppression and tackle online gender violence (Asensi-Rodríguez and Martínez Rolan, 2024).

To further enrich the theoretical framework, a more sustained engagement with contemporary feminist media criticism is necessary, especially in relation to how digital spaces mediate and transform anti- and postfeminist discourse. Theorizations of postfeminist sensibilities, as outlined by Gill (2017) and McRobbie (2009), highlight the paradoxical conditions in which feminist language and achievements are appropriated, dismissed, or reframed in online environments. Postfeminism, as these authors argue, is not simply a temporal phase after the “end” of feminism, but a set of logics and affective strategies through which feminism is simultaneously invoked and undermined. On YouTube and similar platforms, this often manifests via rhetorical devices that

trivialize gender-based violence, portray feminists as irrational or aggressive, and recast gender equality as already achieved—therefore positioning feminist activism as unnecessary or divisive.

In parallel, the literature on digital misogyny (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Jane, 2017) demonstrates that online platforms have created fertile ground for new forms of backlash, harassment, and anti-feminist mobilization. Banet-Weiser (2018) conceptualizes popular misogyny as deeply entangled with popular feminism, arguing that algorithmic visibility, meme culture, and the dynamics of virality allow antifeminist messages to both contest and feed off feminist visibility. Jane (2017) details how mechanisms such as trolling, coordinated harassment, and irony-laden humor act not only as modes of exclusion but also as catalysts for the formation of highly engaged, emotionally driven online communities.

Crucially, these dynamics are profoundly shaped by the infrastructural and platform-specific affordances of YouTube and other social media. Gillespie (2018) and Van Dijck (2013) underscore how recommendation algorithms, monetization systems, and the formal policies governing user content directly influence what is seen, who is heard, and how authority is established and challenged. The concept of “affective publics” (Papacharissi, 2015) further expands this framework, illustrating how shared emotions—such as outrage, irony, or resentment—are circulated and made visible, reinforcing certain ideological positions while connecting influencers with their audiences. Caplan and Boyd (2018) contribute an analysis of the political economy underlying social media, arguing that engagement-driven architectures often privilege polarizing, sensationalist, or emotionally charged content, thus amplifying the reach and perceived authenticity of antifeminist opinion leaders.

In Spain, important studies have been published on antifeminist literature and the discursive reactions they provoke (Medina-Vicent, 2022), together with analyses of the aforementioned dynamics on platforms such as X (Duránte-Stolle et al., 2023), TikTok (Gómez De Travesedo-Rojas et al., 2023) and YouTube (Pibernat Vila, 2021). These studies constitute a foundational corpus that reveals the persistence and adaptation of antifeminist narratives across diverse digital environments within the Spanish sociopolitical context. Medina-Vicent (2022) offers a comprehensive examination of the antifeminist discourse that challenges feminist mobilizations in Spain, highlighting the rhetorical strategies, thematic frames, and counter-movement responses that unfold in both traditional and digital media spaces.

Extending this foundation, research on specific platforms has shed light on how antifeminist discourses evolve and manifest according to the particular affordances and user cultures of each medium. For instance, Duránte-Stolle et al. (2023) provide an insightful analysis of “gender trolling” within Twitter’s revamped ecosystem (X), revealing how the platform’s conversational immediacy and structural features facilitate the rapid dissemination of hostile, often misogynistic, reactions toward feminist activism. Similarly, Gómez De Travesedo-Rojas et al. (2023) focus on TikTok, identifying how short-form videos, audio-visual symbolism, and youth vernacular serve both as vectors for and battlegrounds against antifeminist ideologies, with creators leveraging cultural codes to engage predominantly young, digitally native audiences.

Adding to these multidisciplinary approaches, recent contributions further enrich the scholarly discourse by addressing intersections of gender, digital media, and representation with special attention to regional and cultural specificities in Spain. For example, Castro-Souto Laura et al. (2025) the digitalization of sexual exploitation in provincial Spain, with a focus on how local advertisement platforms reproduce and disseminate harmful gendered narratives, making feminist interventions in these digital spaces more complex and urgent. In another study, Rodríguez-Alegre and Padilla-Castillo (2025) interrogate contemporary Spanish audiovisual fiction, specifically the series *Sky Rojo*, as a cultural site where feminist representation is at once embraced, contested, and reshaped. This analysis brings critical visibility to the tensions among neoliberal feminism, antifeminist backlash, and the commodification of gender struggles in Spanish popular media.

For young people who spend long hours consuming content, opinion leaders exist who have consolidated themselves through their form of communication, use of language and, above all, use of social networks to establish their presence and interact with diverse niches that are linked to them through the interests they share in these spaces.

2.3 Antifeminist opinion leaders

Influencers have become leading figures on social networks and occupy a prominent position in diverse topical fields. Although some studies have conducted in-depth examinations of the authenticity of their success and their booming emergence within an industry undergoing constant growth, a lack of knowledge remains regarding the outcomes of when YouTubers turn their hands to politics (Riedl et al., 2023). Specifically, there remains a lot to understand about the way in which they use their digital reach to get behind political or social causes, consequently transforming themselves into agents of political influence (Ortega Fernández, 2024). Below, five antifeminist YouTubers will be highlighted due to their impact when it comes to creating influence.

Roma Gallardo (1.97M subscribers and 312M views). A 34 year-old young adult from Asturias who is known as being one of the most highly viewed content producers and critics of feminism in the Spanish digital setting. They opened their YouTube account on the 27th of January 2015 and most of their activity is targeted toward criticizing current politics whilst taking a heavy focus toward feminism. In recent years, they have gone beyond the platform and participated on television programs such as *La sexta noche*, *Más vale tarde*, *Cuarto milenio* and *Cuatro al día* (Del Pino Díaz, 2023).

Un Tío Blanco Hetero [Hetero White Guy] (535K subscribers and 143M views). Their real name is Sergio Candanedo and they are 36 years old. Their channel was started in February 2018 and their first video discusses the effects of the #MeToo movement. This YouTuber appears wearing a white lycra mask, gloves and sunglasses as a representation of the typical White heterosexual male, who, according to Un Tío Blanco Hetero, assumes a disproportionate amount of blame at the hands of feminism. Their videos criticize well-known feminist figures in the name of freedom of expression, whilst opposing that which they denominate as political correction. According to Obst (2020), it is possible that

they were inspired by the psychologist Jordan Peterson, whose conspiracies propose a supposed outburst against masculinity.

Wall Street Wolverine (829K subscribers and 151M views). This influencer, whose real name is Víctor Domínguez, was born in Madrid and is 29 years old. Their channel was initiated in 2015, with a focus on fitness. In 2016, they began to focus on content pertaining to topics such as economic liberalism, independence of the Media and antifeminism (Carcavilla Puey et al., 2024).

InfoVlogger (414K subscribers and 47M views). The alias of Isaac Parejo, a Spanish YouTuber known for posting political content aligned with the far right and, especially, Vox. They are the self-denominated “first YouTuber for the Spanish far-right”, opting for an inflammatory and aggressive style in their messages with the stated aim of antagonizing the left (Alías, 2022).

Begoña Gerpe (534K subscribers and 166M views). She is a lawyer by professional who was born in A Coruña, is now 41 years old, and started their YouTube channel in 2016 in order to share content associated with legal topics. Currently, she is most notable for her critical stance toward feminism and gender policy adopted in Spain (Nadal, 2024).

3 Objectives

This study specifically focuses on anti-feminist discourse, understood as content that directly challenges, trivializes, or opposes feminist principles and gender equality policies on YouTube. While anti-feminist discourse can overlap with hate speech—particularly when it incites hostility or promotes harmful stereotypes—not all anti-feminist content meets the threshold of hate speech as defined by international frameworks (Council of Europe, 1997). Accordingly, the analysis distinguishes between these categories: the core focus remains anti-feminist narratives, with instances of hate speech highlighted when they emerge as a consequence of or within anti-feminist content. On this basis, the present research addresses the following objectives:

Main aim: The main objective of this study is to analyse anti-feminist discourse produced by Spanish opinion leaders on YouTube, identifying its discursive frameworks, characterizing the audience that interacts with this content, and evaluating its impact on young people's perceptions of gender-based violence. The research also aims to provide a nuanced examination of how these discourses intersect with misogynistic narratives and, where present, with hate speech or anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric.

OBJ.1: Examine discourse from five main opinion leaders who deny violence against women on YouTube over the course of the last 6 months.

OBJ.2: Identify the main frameworks, recurring topics and type of language employed by these five opinion leaders in relation to violence against women and outlines the main concerns expressed by these five opinions leaders through the content they create.

OBJ.3: Analyze how the discourse propagated by antifeminist opinion leaders on YouTube, and the specific video content they produce, influence young people's perceptions of gender violence, their views on feminism, and their interaction with narratives that trivialize or deny violence against women, as well as the resulting impact on their perceptions of women and the structural violence they experience.

Although this study primarily addresses anti-feminist discourses and their reception, it recognizes that such narratives frequently intersect with anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric. While the analysis includes references to these intersections when detected in the data, a comprehensive exploration of anti-LGBTIQ+ discourse exceeds the scope of the present research and is suggested as a line for future studies.

The present research proposes four working hypotheses, which are formulated to guide the analysis of anti-feminist discourse on YouTube, its thematic patterns, and its influence on young audiences' perceptions of gender-based violence. These hypotheses aim to address the relationship between discourse production, audience engagement, the intertwining of antifeminist narratives with far-right ideology, and the reception of these messages among different demographic groups:

H1 – (Related with OBJ.1): Antifeminist opinion leaders employ language that trivializes and plays down gender violence, whilst also applying a set of discursive frameworks that present feminism as a social movement that seeks to stigmatize men.

H2 – (Related with OBJ.2): Antifeminist opinion leaders contextualize and interrelate their hate speech against women with core topics on the manifestoes of present-day far-right political parties, including anti-immigration, economic liberalism and punitive populism.

H3 – (Related with OBJ.2 & OBJ.3): Discourse that trivializes or denies hate and violence toward women on YouTube, disseminated by main antifeminist opinion leaders, normalizes misogynistic attitudes amongst young people and is connected with the far-right agenda against progressive social justice movements.

H4 – (Related with OBJ.3): Exposure to repeated discourse that denies the existence of structural violence against women on YouTube promotes a distorted view of feminism amongst young people, which leads them to instantly reject its relevance as a present-day social movement.

This research addresses a timely and socially relevant issue, focusing on an under-explored but urgent topic: the role of antifeminist discourse on YouTube as a vector not only for contesting feminist claims but also as an entry point into broader far-right ideologies. By integrating established theoretical concepts such as the manosphere, Antifeminist Internet Networks (AIN), and cyberfeminism, the study offers an important contribution to understanding how digital platforms mediate political and ideological socialization. The combination of quantitative data from Fanpage Karma and Audiense Insights with qualitative thematic analysis provides a multi-level perspective on discursive production and audience engagement within the Spanish YouTube ecosystem.

4 Methodology

The study examines five prominent Spanish YouTube creators (Roma Gallardo, Un Tío Blanco Hetero, Wall Street Wolverine, InfoVlogger, and Begoña Gerpe) each contributing unique perspectives and communicative approaches within contemporary debates around gender and feminism. Roma Gallardo primarily utilizes direct commentary to discuss gender equality policies, particularly those addressing gender-based violence, often

employing personal narratives to engage his viewers. Un Tío Blanco Hetero adopts a satirical and analytical style, blending humor and irony in critiques of feminist positions. Wall Street Wolverine frequently integrates cultural analysis with discussions on identity and freedom. InfoVlogger presents social and political content informed by discussions prevalent in online men's communities (manosphere), foregrounding debate and offering critical examinations of contemporary sociopolitical issues. Begoña Gerpe, as a notable female legal professional within this sample, introduces additional complexity to gender dynamics by addressing men's rights issues and offering legal analyses. Collectively, these five channels illustrate a diverse and multifaceted segment of the Spanish YouTube landscape, enhancing international readers' understanding of the range of discourses, rhetorical strategies, and social relevance present in this digital environment.

The present study employed a mixed methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This approach allows trends in content and YouTuber engagement to be quantified and enables in-depth understanding of certain nuances in discourse. Five YouTubers were selected whose influence spreads into the political setting, according to criteria such as number of followers, publication frequency and relevance of content. This sampling approach ensured a representative sample.

For data collection, the Fanpage Karma tool (Del Pino Díaz, 2024) was employed to extract quantitative data from posts. This tool gathers data on metrics pertaining to engagement, posting frequency and growth in followers. Selection of data for analysis was also guided by the "Top 5,000 summary", which retrieved a total of 781 posts. Of these preliminary posts, 500 were ultimately selected for in-depth analysis. Proportional stratified sampling was employed as a means of ensuring balanced representation of each YouTuber and of different types of content.

The study period focused on the prior 6 months, from the 26th of September 2024 to the 21st of January 2025, in this way capturing a full cycle of political activity, with periods of high and low intensity. Concretely, posts published by the opinion leaders Begoña Gerpe, Infovlogger, Roma Gallardo, Un Tío Blanco Hetero and Wall Street Wolverine were analyzed, according to inductive analysis, observing data without pre-defined categories or themes (Morales, 2003). The main aim was to examine the evolution of YouTubers from the manosphere in order to detect the presence of feminism at the heart of their communication strategies. Further, a success matrix was developed in order to detect the growth of profiles and their relationship with engagement. In this way, it can be concluded whether posts are having a greater pull on audiences.

With the aim of analyzing which audiences are being won by opinion leaders, Audiense Insights was used, which is a social analytics tool based on the application of audience intelligent algorithms (Donofrio et al., 2023). At the second stage of analysis, this enables more in-depth information to be garnered on the sociodemographic and psychographic characteristics of audiences. In this way, the names of the YouTubers are searched together with the concept of "feminism", with the search being limited to the geographic region of Spain. This tool produces an exhaustive definition of the population groups engaged in debate around topics discussed by these YouTubers. Data were

then analyzed to create detailed profiles of audiences, including demographic characteristics, interests and online behaviors. Thus, it was examined, in line with the study aims, whether or not a key audience pertains to young people, such as millennials and centennials.

The analysis is based on a sample of 500 posts collected from five prominent Spanish YouTube channels during the period from September 2024 to January 2025. The posts were selected through stratified random sampling that ensured proportional representation across channels and content types, considering both posting frequency and audience engagement to enhance representativeness.

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. This involved familiarization with the data, coding, theme identification, and refinement. NVivo 12 software was used to facilitate systematic coding and retrieving of relevant themes. This method enabled an in-depth identification of discursive patterns among antifeminist opinion leaders.

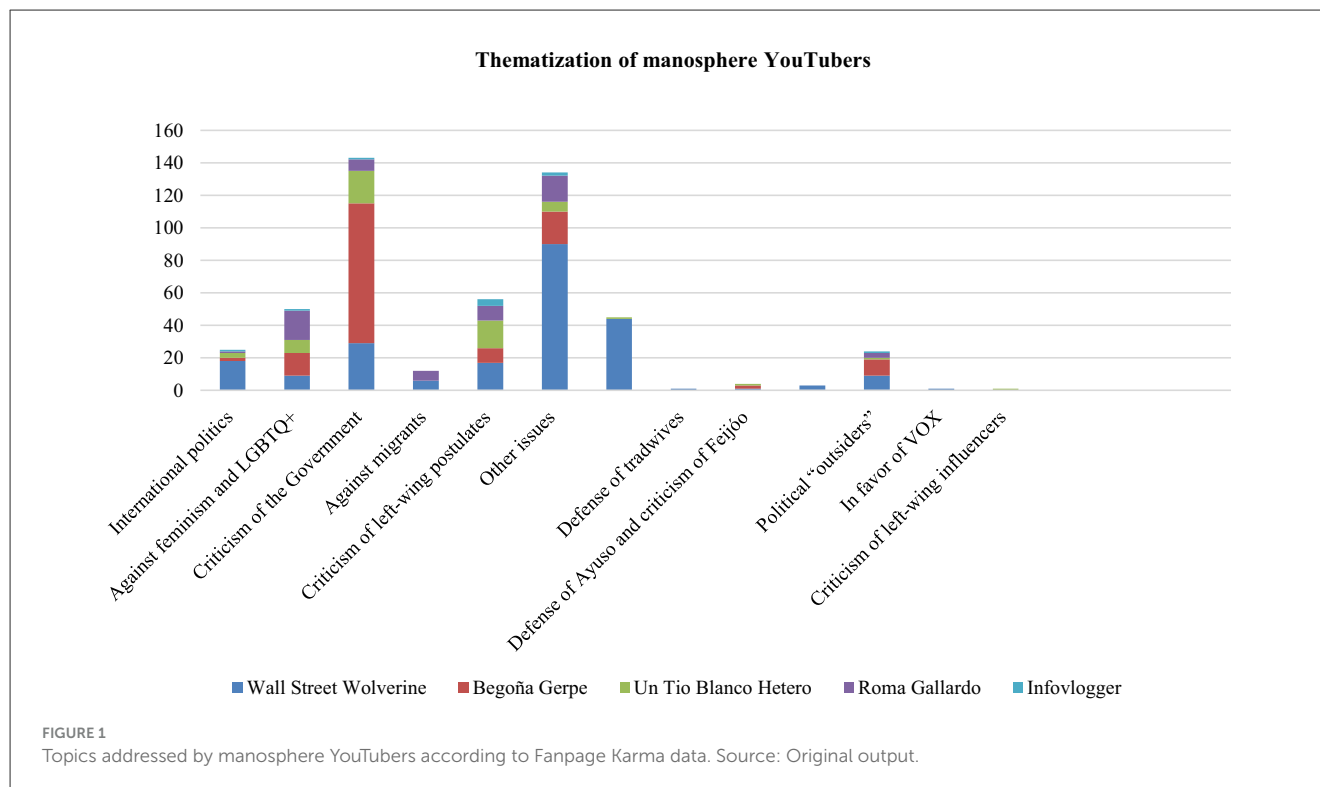
Qualitative coding was conducted by a team of three trained coders who began with a pilot phase aimed at developing and calibrating a detailed codebook. This coding framework combined deductive categories grounded in feminist media theory with inductively derived themes emerging from initial open coding. To assess intercoder reliability, Krippendorff's alpha was calculated, yielding a coefficient of 0.82, indicating a high degree of agreement. Discrepancies in coding were resolved collectively through consensus meetings, which also served to refine coding categories and improve consistency. Throughout the coding process, saturation was evaluated via iterative analysis to ensure thematic completeness and rigor. This approach provides validity and reproducibility to the qualitative content analysis, supporting robust insights into the discursive strategies present in the antifeminist YouTube ecosystem studied.

The entire data collection process, adhered to strict ethical principles pertinent to data collection and analysis. The privacy of users was respected at all times and only publicly available information was used.

5 Results

Thematic analysis of discourse from manosphere YouTubers reveals a complex and nuanced narrative. Criticism toward feminism remains at the heart of discourse from the five opinion leaders analyzed, taking on particular relevance in discourse from Begoña Gerpe and Roma Gallardo. The first aspect of note pertains to repeated discourse that presents progressive social justice movements, such as feminism and LGBTIQ+ rights, in a critical light, referring to them as "decadent feminism" or similar pejorative terms. Next, data were analyzed with outcomes being reflected in Figure 1.

In the same way, repeated criticism is identified toward specific figures and laws, such as Irene Montero and the Spanish Trans Law, alongside frequent mention of the Juana Rivas case. In this context, repeated patriarchal dichotomies are sustained, such as the incompatibility between feminism and intelligence in women, insistence regarding the problem of false reporting, associating



feminism with unhappiness and the idea that weak men are contributing to Western decline. In some cases, even, a discursive relationship is established between feminism and Jihadism.

With regards to the socioeconomic stance, especially in discourse shared by Wall Street Wolverine and Begoña Gerpe, a definition of Spain is observed that aligns with libertarian postulates. The need is urged for a centralized state structure with it being argued that the current wellbeing model squanders resources and generates waste. Within this interpretive framework, the idea is promoted that, in Spain, a “poverty mindset” prevails, which is demonstrated through normalization of 2,000 euros a month as the benchmark of a privileged salary, alongside existence of a “middle class” that is resigned to preserving their status without ever aspiring to further growth. This argument peppers repeated calls for unrestricted economic expansion.

On the other hand, emphasis is made regarding the instability faced by today’s youth and their lack of opportunities with this being linked to discourse about potential resurgence of the “Spanish Empire” and perceived low awareness of the “entrepreneurial cost” associated with job hiring. In addition, the need is urged to no use public funds to finance sectors such as culture. In the religious setting, a defensive stance is taken regarding Christianity in opposition to Islam, with the present situation being interpreted as a constant threat to Christianity. Occasionally, reflections are also made about the Pope as a political tool.

As a counterpart to the construction of such discourse, an antagonist is articulated, namely, the left, represented mainly by PSOE and, in more specific terms, the Spanish Government. In this sense, the most active YouTubers are Wall Street Wolverine and Un Tío Blanco Hetero.

Throughout such discourse, the left is related with communism and systematically labeled as “radical”. In this way, a dichotomous opposite is constructed in relation to which antifeminist influencers caution against the supposed demonization of capitalism in favor of the non-critical idealization of socialism. Further, reference is made to the “end of Agenda 2030” and socialism is associated with irrationality and, even, insanity.

In terms of criticisms directed toward the Government, insistence regarding “attacks on entrepreneurs” stands out alongside government oversight of RTVE (Spanish national broadcasting services). Likewise, democratic memory policy is questioned. To this end, the Spanish Prime Minister Feijóo is criticized as a leftist politician and Díaz Ayuso, president of the Community of Madrid, is described as the true opposition to government. This standpoint enables, on a few occasions, organizations such as Hazte Oír to be defended with the concept of the “traditional family” being proffered as an argument and, even, the political party Vox being heralded and held in high esteem (in the case of Wall Street Wolverine).

In line with this confrontational strategy, an “other” is intimated, immigrants in this case, especially Moroccans and North Africans, in order to reaffirm “us”. Here, the most active YouTubers are Wall Street Wolverine and Roma Gallardo.

Space is also made for international politics, which focuses on criticizing Joe Biden and defending Elon Musk, with the latter invoking the promise of the end of censorship, alongside President Trump. A nod can also be observed toward Latin American countries governed by the left, highlighting, for example, Mexico and their contentious petition for Spain to apologize for historical abuses. Repeated criticism of the European Union can be seen,

together with the reiterated defending of Israel. Once again, the most active YouTuber in this realm is Wall Street Wolverine.

With regards to the way in which YouTubers define themselves, they commonly present themselves as not subscribing to the discourse of any political party, above all in the cases of Wall Street Wolverine and Begoña Gerpe. Nevertheless, their ideology resonates with far-right postulates, with them alluding to Spain's "political indignity" and the "frustration" of political power, whilst, at the same time, scapegoating the mass media (La Sexta) and defending influencers such as Xocas and the media personality Fran Cuesta. Sporadically, discourse is constructed that is critical of leftist YouTubers.

The present research reserved a place for the consideration of "other issues" which are not encapsulated by any strictly political variable but are deemed to be important for understanding these YouTubers in their entirety. Emerging discursive trends highlight recurring reflections on artificial intelligence, bitcoin and electronic music (by Wall Street Wolverine).

With regards to growth and its relationship with engagement, the account belonging to Wall Street Wolverine is gaining the most followers. Nonetheless, the account exhibited the most growth and generating the most engagement is that which belongs to Begoña Gerpe (Figure 2).

The analysis of audience growth and engagement revealed notable trends among Spanish antifeminist YouTubers. Wall Street Wolverine experienced the highest increase in followers during the observed period, highlighting the appeal and resonance of his content with young audiences. However, Begoña Gerpe's channel not only demonstrated significant follower growth but also recorded the highest levels of engagement, surpassing her peers in the rate and intensity of audience interaction with her antifeminist posts.

These findings underscore that engagement does not always correlate directly with subscriber numbers; rather, the effectiveness of discourse and audience targeting plays a crucial role. The data suggest that channels that blend criticism of feminism with broader social and political commentary—particularly those tapping into far-right sentiment—are more likely to generate substantial community interaction. This trend emphasizes the dynamic nature of antifeminist influence on YouTube, with certain creators proving especially adept at mobilizing and sustaining engaged digital communities.

Following analysis of pertinent audiences via Audiense Insights, it can be seen that the population group that is most consuming content posted by the analyzed YouTubers on topics related with feminism corresponds to young adults aged between 25 and 34 years (Figure 3).

Figure 3 provides a detailed visualization of audience engagement and interaction patterns across the five selected antifeminist YouTube channels during the study period. The data reveal a pronounced concentration of active interaction among users aged 25–34—identified herein as "young adults"—particularly men, who consistently represent the most engaged demographic. Notably, Begoña Gerpe's channel shows higher relative engagement rates compared to her male counterparts, underlining the distinct modalities of influence exercised by female opinion leaders within the manosphere. These patterns suggest

that the reception and amplification of antifeminist discourses on YouTube are not only a function of content but are also shaped by the age and gender composition of the engaged audience. This empirical evidence highlights the need for targeted counter-narratives and interventions specifically adapted to the digital behaviors of young adults most exposed to these narratives.

6 Discussion and conclusions

Present findings reveal significant patterns in the discourse used by opinion leaders on YouTube, thus confirming and expanding previous findings regarding the manosphere and its influence on young audiences. In line with that proposed by Lewis (2018), examined leaders were observed to form part of an Alternative Influence Network, which promotes extreme dialogue and is largely dominated by men. This is specifically reflected by the sample distribution, with four of the five examined influencers being males. This reinforces the gender gap identified by Wotanis and McMillan (2014).

Beyond outlining general discursive patterns, it is crucial to unpack the rhetorical, emotional, and visual strategies employed by influencers within the antifeminist discourse. The presence of female influencers, such as Begoña Gerpe, exemplifies complex dynamics of postfeminist backlash, where neoliberal complicity and legalistic rhetoric are combined to undermine feminist advocacy (Gill, 2017; Banet-Weiser, 2018). Male influencers commonly adopt performative victimhood, positioning themselves as rational commentators against progressive social justice movements. They employ irony, humor, and emotional appeals to build in-group cohesion and to deflect accountability. These strategies align with theoretical understandings of digital masculinities and affective politics within the manosphere, where shared outrage and grievance function as currencies that sustain engagement and community identity (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Papacharissi, 2015).

Thematic analysis reveals that, whilst criticism of feminism remains central to discourse, dialogue is much more complex, linking up with other narratives regarding, for instance, economic liberalism and anti-immigration. This is in accordance with Mamié et al. (2021) who argue that antifeminist communities may serve as gateways to far-right ideologies.

In another sense, findings around the trivialization of gender violence and upholding of patriarchal dichotomies support observations made by Bates (2021) regarding the role of opinion leaders when it comes to the popularization of misogynistic messages. Further, the inter-relationship between these aforementioned topics and issues such as the criticism against progressive social justice movements and defense of traditional values reflects the convergence of different currents within the manosphere (Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019). However, the invocation of broader political themes such as economic issues or defense of specific political figures, while present, was peripheral to the antifeminist discourse and should be contextualized as supporting rather than central elements of the narratives analyzed.

The growth and engagement exhibited by these channels, especially the channel belonging to Begoña Gerpe, speaks to the concerns expressed by Asensi-Rodríguez and Martínez Rolan

Follower growth and engagement

The further to the right a profile is, the higher its post-interaction. The further up, the faster the profile goes. The most successful profiles can be found at the top right.

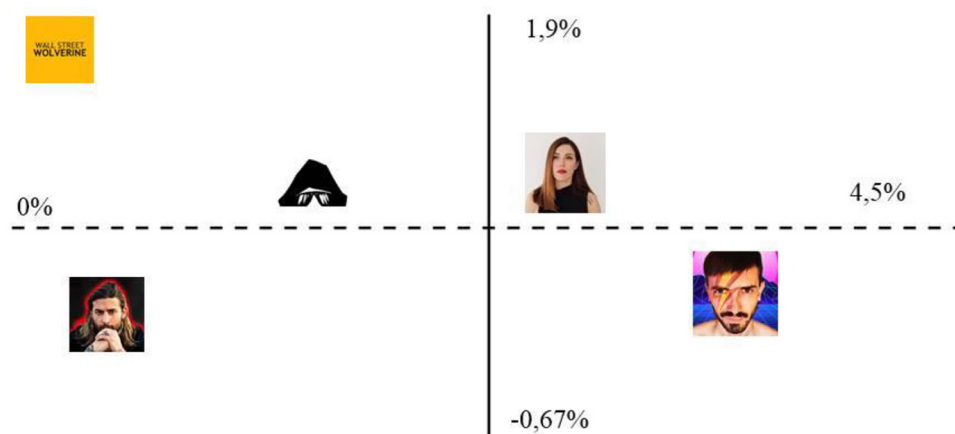


FIGURE 2

Growth and engagement of manosphere leaders according to data collected from Fanpage Karma. The dashed line represents the interaction rate of the posts, while the solid line represents the percentage growth of followers. Source: Original output.

Age

This graph shows the distribution by age and its difference versus to the baseline (range and %).

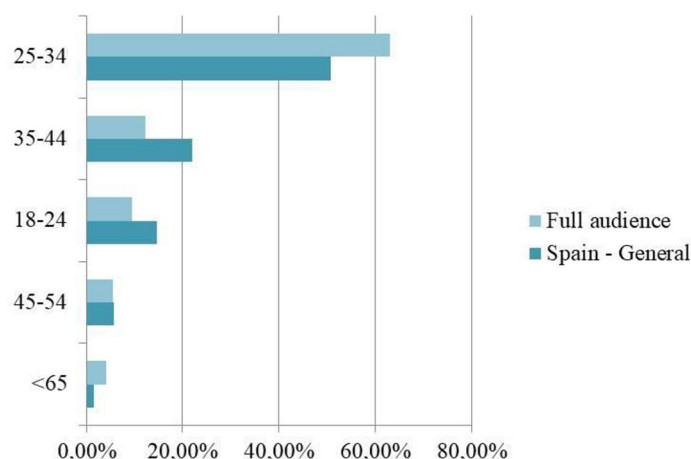


FIGURE 3

Population groups talking about the examined YouTubers and feminism. Source: Audiense Insights.

(2024) regarding the way in which the same platforms that have promoted feminist activism have turned into organizational spaces for the manosphere. Predominance of a young audience (25–34 years) validates concerns expressed by García-Mingo and Díaz Fernández (2022b) regarding the influence of such discourse on young people's perceptions of gender violence. This poses

significant challenges to counteracting these narratives (Pibernat Vila, 2021; Medina-Vicent, 2022). It is important to note that the study's audience data primarily reflects the 25–34 age group, herein conceptualized as “young adults” to distinguish from the broader category of “youth.” This clarification aids in understanding the demographic most engaged with antifeminist content.

In light of the outcomes produced, it can be concluded that antifeminist discourse on YouTube represents a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon. It perpetuates misogynistic attitudes and serves as a gateway to broader far-right ideologies. Its complexity, in the sense that it intertwines criticism of feminism with anti-immigration and libertarian narratives, betrays a sophisticated strategy for attracting and retaining young audiences. The predominance of male voices in this digital space reinforces, at the same time, the patriarchal structures promoted by this discourse, which leads to a vicious cycle that normalizes hostile attitudes toward equality. This being said, the presence of female figures in this setting, such as Begoña Gerpe, adds an additional layer of complexity and points to the need to conduct a more nuanced and intersectional analysis of gender dynamics that considers differential discursive strategies and audience reception across genders.

Although of equal concern, the growth and engagement enjoyed by these channels, especially amongst young audiences, emphasizes the urgent need to develop effective educational and communication strategies in order to counteract these narratives. Digital literacy and critical thinking emerge as crucial tools for equipping young generations to combat the disinformation and extremist discourse that is disseminated online.

The findings demonstrate that antifeminist YouTube discourse in Spain frequently intertwines economic libertarianism, anti-immigration sentiments, and critiques of feminist and LGBTIQ+ rights agenda, reinforcing the notion that these narratives function as gateways into broader far-right ideological frameworks. Although these intersections were identified in discourse, empirical evidence of direct psychological or behavioral impacts on young audiences remains beyond the scope of this study and is inferred rather than directly measured. Future research, employing audience reception approaches or longitudinal studies, would be instrumental in substantiating these effects.

Furthermore, enriching the discussion with more direct illustrative examples from the analyzed posts and incorporating intersectional perspectives—considering how gender intersects with class, race, or age in these narratives—would deepen the analytical complexity. This approach would better capture the multifaceted nature of antifeminist discourse and its socio-political implications.

Given the pervasive and complex nature of antifeminist discourse on YouTube, this study highlights the urgent need to develop comprehensive media literacy initiatives targeting young audiences. Such initiatives should not only address classic gender stereotypes but also the affective and algorithmic mechanisms that facilitate the proliferation of misogynistic content. Moreover, digital platforms such as YouTube must enhance transparency regarding their recommendation algorithms and strengthen content moderation efforts following internationally recognized best practices in platform governance (Gillespie, 2018; Caplan and Boyd, 2018). Finally, fostering collaborative initiatives among educators, feminist content creators, and youth can empower digital citizenship and build resilience against anti-gender narratives, positively influencing societal perceptions of gender-based violence.

7 Limitations and research perspectives

It is important to recognize that the present research on antifeminist discourse on YouTube, although valuable, presents certain limitations that should drive future work in this area. Firstly, the study is based on a small number of YouTubers, which provides a fair representation of the phenomenon; however, expanding the sample could better capture its overall diversity. Future research could broaden the sample to include a wider range of creators varying in reach, style, and ideological nuance to better capture the diversity of antifeminist discourses.

Secondly, the time-period for analysis was restricted to 6 months, which likely fails to capture long-term trends or seasonal variations in such discourse. Due to constraints in time and resources, it was not possible to include a longitudinal dimension that could unveil evolving narratives or shifts correlated with social or political events over a longer timeframe. Incorporating an extended temporal scope in future work would provide valuable insights into the stability or transformation of antifeminist narratives and engagement patterns.

Finally, the geographical scope of the study is limited to the Spanish context, which may restrict the generalization of its findings to other countries. Additionally, by focusing exclusively on YouTube, this study did not analyze how antifeminist discourse manifests or diverges across other social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram or Twitter. As previously noted, conducting a comparative cross-platform study was not feasible on this occasion. Future research adopting a multi-platform comparative approach is essential to grasp the broader digital ecology of antifeminist discourse.

Additionally, the research relies in part on proprietary analytical tools—Fanpage Karma and Audiense Insights—the internal workings of which are not fully transparent. This inherent opacity may limit data accuracy and replicability. Platform-provided metrics could carry algorithmic biases that researchers cannot directly control. Therefore, audience estimates and engagement figures should be interpreted with caution and ideally complemented by in-depth qualitative data, as attempted in this study.

While this research reveals how antifeminist discourses on YouTube intertwine economic libertarianism, anti-immigration views, and critiques of so-called “woke” culture—highlighting potential gateways to broader far-right ideologies—it is important to note that direct psychological or behavioral impacts on young audiences are not empirically established in this study. Such effects are inferred from the discursive environment and audience demographics but remain to be substantiated through empirical audience-focused inquiry. Future studies incorporating longitudinal or reception methodologies could provide more direct insights into the influences of these narratives on youth attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, the current analysis primarily adopts a discursive approach, focusing on the production and circulation of messages

by key influencers, and does not directly assess how these discourses are received, interpreted, or potentially resisted by diverse audience segments. Complementary reception studies, employing interviews, focus groups, or survey data with young viewers, would greatly deepen our understanding of both the persuasive reach and possible limitations of antifeminist online content. Such qualitative insights would be invaluable for grasping audience interpretations and resistance dynamics.

The limitations discussed above hold the key to some interesting perspectives for future research. Notably, comparative studies analyzing antifeminist discourse across multiple platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Twitter) are needed to contextualize YouTube's particular role within digital socialization processes. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted to examine the evolution of such discourse over time and in response to significant social and political events.

In addition, future research could employ mixed-method or cross-cultural designs that encompass multiple national settings, thereby facilitating a more global understanding of variations in antifeminist narratives and their social impacts. Incorporating quantitative data from surveys or experimental methods, alongside collaborations with international research teams, would add robustness and greater depth to our knowledge base.

In parallel with this, effective strategies could be explored for counteracting the influence of antifeminist messages on young audiences. From a broader perspective, intersectional analyses investigating how antifeminist discourses intersect with other forms of oppression such as racism and xenophobia would enrich theoretical and practical understandings.

Finally, exploring collaborations with educators, platform designers, and policy-makers to design interventions—such as digital literacy programmes, content moderation initiatives, or algorithmic transparency measures—could represent a significant step toward mitigating the impact of antifeminist and discriminatory content on vulnerable audiences.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human data in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was not required, for either participation in the study or for the publication of potentially/indirectly identifying information, in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The social media data was accessed and analyzed in accordance with the platform's terms of use and all relevant institutional/national regulations.

Author contributions

TB: Investigation, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft. DP-D: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. EO-F: Investigation, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft. GP-C: Funding acquisition, Investigation, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article. The present publication received support from the R&D Project «Knowledge Generation Projects». Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. Title: “La Manosfera en las Redes Sociales. Prodsage cultural para revertir los estigmas de género y la cultura del odio [The Manosphere on Social Networks. Cultural Prodsage to Reverse Gender Stigma and the Culture of Hate]”. Reference number: PID2022-141877NB-I00. 2023-2027. Stipend of 84,000 euros. Project run time: 01/09/2023 to 31/08/2027.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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