

# The Italian Manosphere: Composition, Structure, and Functions of a Digital Network

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## Abstract

The digital sphere is pivotal in shaping social norms, and the Italian “manosphere” is a key player in this process. This study examines the composition and structure of the Italian manosphere, an intricate online ecosystem characterised by antifeminist and often misogynistic ideologies. Through a comprehensive analysis of Facebook networks and blog presentations from various groups, we mapped and classified the main actors within this ecosystem, shedding light on their connections and functions. The analysis focuses on two main aspects by employing natural language processing techniques and social network analysis. First, we investigated the functions of different groups within the network—Men’s Rights Activists, Men Going Their Own Way, Involuntary Celibates, and Pick-Up Artists—identifying their roles, how they interconnect and their ties to the international manosphere. Second, we analysed the blog presentations of members to explore the motivations driving individuals to join these communities, revealing the key themes emerging from their narratives. Our findings highlight the manosphere as a complex and interconnected phenomenon that not only reflects global neosexist trends but also integrates unique socio-cultural elements specific to the Italian context. This study underscores the significance of understanding the manosphere’s influence on public discourse and its far-reaching implications for the socio-political landscape in Italy, particularly concerning gender relations.

## Keywords

digital sphere; Incels; misogyny; men’s rights activists; men going their own way; natural language processing; pick-up artists; sexism; social movements

## 1. Introduction

The growing proliferation of digital technologies has dramatically reshaped the public sphere, turning the internet into a fertile ground for the spread of both established and emerging ideologies, the shaping of social norms, and the polarisation of public opinion (Arora et al., 2022; Bernholz et al., 2021). Within this framework, the manosphere emerges as an online subculture that connects diverse social groups around a traditionalist gender ideology, one that is often characterised by sexism and anti-feminism, and advocating a form of hegemonic masculinity (Kennedy-Kollar, 2024). It has become a significant force in contemporary discourse on gender relations. The manosphere has been the focus of numerous studies exploring online misogyny (for a comprehensive review see Fontanella et al., 2024; O’Hanlon et al., 2024).

The manosphere is not monolithic but can be represented as a diverse archipelago (Ging, 2019) comprising various groups with differing perspectives and levels of violence, often linked to far-right, homophobic, and racist ideologies (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022). Despite their differences, all groups share the belief that feminism is inherently discriminatory and poses a threat to men (Farci & Righetti, 2019). Specifically, the manosphere upholds the concept of a “gynocentric order” and the Red Pill ideology, a metaphor from the film *The Matrix* that awakens the protagonist to reality upon taking the “red pill.” This metaphor not only reflects but also amplifies the ideological dynamics of the manosphere, becoming a powerful rhetorical tool that transcends the boundaries of individual groups to permeate broader cultural discourse (Nurminen, 2022). While these groups hold distinct beliefs, many employ the concept of “misandry,” a term denoting hatred of men, which serves ideological and community-building purposes. It reinforces a misogynistic worldview that frames feminism as a movement hostile to men and boys (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). The concept of misandry resonates across extremist misogynistic subcultures as well as more moderate men’s-rights groups. It allows these groups to co-opt the language of identity politics, positioning men as victims of “reverse discrimination” in political, economic, and social life, thereby justifying their sense of entitlement (Farci & Righetti, 2019). Discursive strategies are employed by the manosphere to position men as victims, portray women as monstrous others, and reassert traditional gender hierarchies, often with continuous references to rape in their rhetoric (Hopton & Langer, 2022).

The manosphere uses the internet not only as a content repository but also as a means to recruit and politically and socially mobilise its members, thereby directly influencing social and political dynamics (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015; Hawley, 2017). Some scholars perceive the diverse realm of the manosphere as akin to a fully-fledged organised political movement capable of influencing public discourse and political elections (Nagle, 2017), whereas others emphasise the network’s dynamics characteristic of online communities of practice, where individuals congregate to exchange experiences and strategies rather than pursue explicit political objectives.

In English-speaking nations, specific segments of the manosphere overlap with far-right movements, such as the alt-right, leading to the significant politicisation and radicalisation of public discourse regarding gender issues (Hawley, 2017). This is especially apparent in the United States and the United Kingdom, where anti-feminist discourse frequently intersects with nationalist and xenophobic ideologies (Nagle, 2017).

In Europe, interest in these movements has emerged more recently, and, while a comparative, cross-cultural analysis of the aforementioned groups is intricate, it is possible to identify distinctions in their themes,

objectives and functions. The German manosphere, akin to its US and UK equivalents, seems more closely associated with far-right movements and nationalism, merging anti-feminist discourse with anti-immigration and xenophobic ideologies. In Germany, manospheric groups exhibit greater politicisation and are closely associated with populist movements (Ebner, 2017). In France, these groups appear to concentrate on the power dynamics within male–female relationships, emphasising the culture of seduction and the preservation of national cultural identity. French organisations recontextualise the prevailing masculinity in reaction to feminism (Gourarier & Benveniste, 2017). The discourse in Spain seems to centre on a robust critique of gender-equality policies in support of traditional family values. Spanish manospheric factions openly challenge legislation addressing gender-based violence and other governmental efforts to foster equal opportunities in a regime of male victimhood (García-Mingo et al., 2022; García-Mingo & Diaz-Fernandez, 2023; Núñez Puente et al., 2021). In Italy, the manosphere has discovered an atmosphere characterised by the emergence of groups and digital platforms that advocate narratives centred around the crisis of masculinity and an alleged feminist hegemony that threatens the conventional social structure (Vingelli, 2019).

Within this framework, this article presents research findings based on the following questions: What are the primary groups in the Italian manosphere that are active in the digital realm? What is the network’s structure, and what defines the connections among the different groups within this archipelago? What are the ideologically predominant groups? What is the demographic profile of their adherents? What themes are prevalent in the Italian manosphere? Ultimately, what functions do these groups serve: are they genuinely organised political pressure entities, or should they be regarded as online communities of practice that arise and develop in response to social discontent?

The following research activities were carried out to address these inquiries: (a) ethnographic observation of the online manosphere, with a particular focus on blogs, forums, and social-media platforms; (b) selection, classification, and analysis of the network arising from Facebook pages; (c) examination of the network structure and characteristics of the emerging groups; (d) typological analysis of participants in forums and blogs; and (e) identification of themes emerging from participant self-presentations in these blogs and forums.

The article is structured as follows. Sections 2 and 3 present definitions, concepts, and the context of the manosphere at both international and Italian levels. This is followed by a discussion of the materials and methodology used for the analysis of the network and profiles of members across the different subgroups. Next, the research findings are discussed, focusing on the roles played by the various groups and the emerging themes. Finally, the conclusions offer reflections on the social and cultural implications of the phenomenon. Graphical representations of the main findings are available in the online Supplementary Material.

## 2. The Manosphere Archipelago

Structurally, the manosphere can be categorised into four primary groups: Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Involuntary Celibates (Incels), and Pick-Up Artists (PUAs).

MRAs champion men’s rights, asserting that feminism has resulted in systemic discrimination against men, especially in child custody, divorce, and workplace policies. MRAs use a personal action framework to create

a credible, albeit fictitious, narrative of male subjugation (Carian, 2022). Central themes of this narrative encompass the disparagement of women, the trivialisation or rejection of rape allegations, characterising #MeToo as a feminist conspiracy, representing men as victims, and promoting the reinstatement of patriarchal values (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022). This ideological project normalises, trivialises, and legitimises diverse manifestations of sexual violence against women (García-Mingo et al., 2022). MRAs' rhetoric regarding sexual violence contests gendered viewpoints on rape and sexual assault, alleging that feminists overlook male victimisation and characterising the feminist notion of rape culture as a moral panic (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). The MRA depiction of rape culture exemplifies a collective application of D.A.R.V.O. (deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender), a strategy that negates the issue, assails its proponents, and inverts the roles of victims and offenders (Scotto di Carlo, 2024).

“Incels” are men who perceive themselves as incapable of forming romantic or sexual relationships, blaming this predicament on a societal preference for attractive or high-status males. The term was first introduced in 1997 by “Alana,” the creator of a website aimed at single people of all genders and sexual orientations (Taylor, 2018). Two decades later, however, it was co-opted by a community of heterosexual men who self-identify as unattractive and who attribute their involuntary celibacy to women through dark humour, victimisation (Capelos et al., 2024), and the glorification of violence (Hopton & Langer, 2022; Scotto di Carlo, 2023). The group is notorious in the United States for its violent and misogynistic rhetoric, often devolving into hate speech directed at women (Nagle, 2017; Pilla & Dolce, 2019). While most Incels do not advocate violence, those who hold more extreme misogynistic beliefs are more likely to endorse violent actions as a way to gain attention, seek revenge, or achieve political change (O'Donnell & Shor, 2022). Participation in Incel forums tends to intensify their misogynistic views (Speckhard et al., 2021). The term “femoid” in Incel discourse exemplifies the dehumanisation of women, depicting them as monstrous entities, thus rationalising violence against them (Chang, 2020). Incels believe in a hetero-patriarchal racial hierarchy and justify their lack of sexual activity in ideas rooted in biological determinism and victimisation by women and feminism (Lindsay, 2022). “Femmephobia” reinforces this heteropatriarchal view of femininity and what Incels see as societal forces that push them into celibacy (Menzie, 2022). Their hierarchical view of men places attractive males at the top, excluding women from similar hierarchies and often judging them negatively (Heritage & Koller, 2020). Incel discourse employs symbolic, gendered actors (Menzie, 2022), such as “Stacy” for a highly attractive woman, “Becky” for a moderately attractive woman, and “Chad” for a dominant alpha male. Incels describe a sexual deficit affecting most men, criticise hyper-feminine women like “Stacy” for not meeting heteropatriarchal standards, and express jealousy and resentment towards more sexually successful men like “Chad.” Interestingly, Incels portray themselves in a self-deprecating manner, deviating from the typical “us vs them” dynamic (van Dijk, 1998), which fosters a cycle of self-pity and self-contempt that reinforces a sense of brotherhood within the community. Their perceived subordinate status is used to justify their misogyny and legitimise their degradation of women (Halpin, 2022).

MGTOW promote a separatist, anti-feminist agenda focused on self-sufficiency and individual empowerment, distancing themselves from women (Lin, 2017). The attitudes within this subculture are diverse, spanning from a total repudiation of sexual or romantic relationships with women to a commitment to monogamy as a safeguard against possible allegations of sexual misconduct. MGTOW perceive marriage and relationships as instruments of female subjugation of men (De Gasperis, 2021). Ricci and Farci (2021) assert that this group embodies a radical response to modernity and women's liberation. A faction of MGTOW adheres rigidly to the “Pence Principle,” a notion ascribed to former US Vice President Mike Pence by Randall Bentwick in his

2018 bestseller, *The Pence Principle: Lessons All Men Must Learn from Ford-Kavanaugh* (Lacalle et al., 2023). This principle encompasses directives, such as refraining from meeting a woman one-on-one and abstaining from consuming alcohol at social events without the presence of one's spouse. The MGTOW ideology is associated with hegemonic and heteronormative toxic masculinity, and its rhetoric spreads and legitimises misogynistic beliefs through online harassment. While the misogyny and violence endorsed by MGTOW are not overtly extreme, their appeals to rationality make these views appear commonsensical (Jones et al., 2020). Hunte (2019) identifies the key traits of MGTOW, including the use of linguistic practices that foster a shared identity and community, a narrative of victimisation, and the exchange of commonly held beliefs. The internal dynamics of MGTOW forums demonstrate that, while their discourse is highly misogynistic, it also promotes a strong sense of community, strengthening group bonds and participation (Wright et al., 2020). MGTOW discussions predominantly revolve around two themes: women—often in a deeply misogynistic context—and defining MGTOW, both as a collective identity and a personal journey (Wright et al., 2020).

PUAs consider sexual relationships a conquest game (Scotto di Carlo, 2023). This community disseminates techniques to assist men in attracting multiple women at their discretion. It has faced academic examination due to its ostensibly complex group-building lexicon and use of neurolinguistic programming theories (Hopton & Langer, 2022). PUAs concentrate on methods for enticing women, frequently using contentious tactics to augment their perceived appeal and emphasising the notion of “game,” aimed at enhancing male attractiveness. These factions are notably active on YouTube and other video-sharing platforms, providing “guidance” on how to coerce women into sexual relationships (Kennedy-Kollar, 2024). Men's online PUA advice platforms and forums depict casual sex with numerous women as a crucial element of enhancing social status and esteem. In their analysis of online PUA content, Cosma and Gurevich (2020) identify three primary interpretive frameworks. “Embattled masculinity” employs themes of defensiveness and conflict to protect male privilege through the covert pursuit and sexual dominance of women. “Feminine commodities” views women's bodies as symbols of masculine achievement. “Pressured pursuit and consent as control” portrays men as authorities in sexual affairs, possessing the responsibility and power to navigate and surmount female consent as a hindrance. The quest for sexual gratification is paramount, yet allusions to the intrinsic worth of women are conspicuously lacking or entirely disregarded.

### 3. The Manosphere in Italy

The manosphere in Italy is a recent phenomenon that has rapidly expanded over the past decade, primarily due to the emergence of online and social-media platforms that enable the creation and consolidation of virtual communities (Cannito et al., 2021). Recent studies indicate that the Italian manosphere is interconnected with global trends while simultaneously exhibiting distinct characteristics influenced by the local sociocultural context (Ricci & Farci, 2021; Vingelli, 2021). The expansion of the manosphere in Italy originated in the early 2010s, characterised by the rise of blogs, forums, and Facebook groups advocating anti-feminist and traditionalist ideologies. The Italian manosphere groups mirror significant communities initially established in North America (the US and Canada), each possessing a distinct agenda yet interconnected, all unified by a pervasive anti-feminist and sexist ideology. Though these four groups serve different functions within the manosphere, they are united by the philosophy of the Red Pill, sharing the belief that women are manipulative and that men must “dominate” them to succeed in relationships (Longo, 2020).

Research on Italian MRAs suggests that these groups maintain a robust online presence, advocating a narrative of “male oppression” that often deteriorates into misogyny (Vingelli, 2021). Farci and Righetti (2019), in their examination of the Italian MRA network on Facebook, determined that, although men’s-rights groups comprise a variety of organisations, two predominant trends prevail within the network. The first trend pertains to pages dedicated to topics like violence against men and the rights of fathers and children, primarily appealing to those who have undergone separation and divorce. These groups typically promote conservative ideologies and exhibit a more militant form of antifeminism, frequently directing reactionary and antagonistic rhetoric towards women. The second trend encompasses antisexist platforms that highlight the challenges of masculinity, primarily attracting younger men who perceive themselves as disempowered by recent changes in gender dynamics. These groups exhibit a seemingly progressive position, directing their antifeminism primarily towards feminists rather than women in general. Cannito and Mercuri (2022) conducted an exploratory content analysis of an Italian non-resident fathers’ online forum’s Facebook group and page, revealing that fatherhood operates as an “empty box” wherein fathers’ rights are strategically utilised to bolster hegemonic masculinity, rationalise gender-based violence and disseminate antifeminist and anti-women ideologies. Moreover, these organisations employ the notion of fathers’ rights as a mechanism for political advocacy, frequently aligning with right-wing parties.

Dordoni and Magaraggia (2021), in their examination of the interactions, representations, and discourses concerning gender identities and masculinity paradigms within the Italian incel community, discerned two interrelated themes: (a) aesthetics, frustration, and a narrative of self-victimization and (b) the objectification of, the dehumanisation of, and violence perpetrated against women. Their findings indicate that violence is fundamentally embedded in the language and imagery of this virtual community, constituting a core element of the new masculinity models that this manosphere group establishes and sustains. Cannito and Ferrero Camoletto (2022) analysed the fundamental principles of the Red Pill and LMS (look, money, status) theories as presented in Italian Incel forums, demonstrating that these theories are intrinsically contradictory. They endeavour to integrate socio-economic and biological explanations for sexual relations while maintaining a rigid interpretation of gender rooted in alleged natural inclinations. Furthermore, their findings suggest that these theories propagate misogynistic narratives, attributing men’s dissatisfaction to women while simultaneously revealing intragender dynamics. This engenders tensions within the manosphere, as these theories establish hierarchies of masculinities and provoke enquiries regarding the possibility for individuals to go beyond the biological determinism linked to the Incel identity.

Within the Italian context, MGTOW and PUAs have garnered relatively limited scholarly focus. The manosphere is frequently analysed alongside the more notable factions of MRAs and Incels, yet the ideologies and practices of MGTOW and PUAs merit additional scrutiny. Understanding MGTOW and PUAs is crucial for acquiring a thorough perspective of the intricate and varied landscape of the manosphere in Italy.

## 4. Methods and Materials

### 4.1. Digital Ethnography

The reconstruction of the digital landscape of the manosphere in Italy initially uses observational techniques within the framework of digital ethnography. Digital observation facilitates the systematic and structured

monitoring and analysis of interactions and behaviours within digital environments, including social media, online forums, and virtual communities. This methodology enables the acquisition of qualitative data regarding the relational, cultural, and social dynamics that arise online by immersing oneself in digital environments (Hine, 2015). In contrast to conventional observation, digital ethnography requires the capacity to examine texts, images, and various forms of technology-mediated communication (Kozinets, 2010; Postill & Pink, 2012).

#### **4.2. Reconstructing the Italian Manosphere Networks on Facebook**

We focused on Facebook pages because the “like” mechanism enables the reconstruction of interaction networks among pages. Furthermore, the public nature of Facebook pages often makes their content accessible for content analysis.

The research employed a snowball sampling strategy to systematically identify and map Facebook pages within the manosphere community. This approach allowed for the gradual expansion of the network by starting with a set of seed pages and identifying additional related pages through interactions between them. The process began with the selection of an initial collection of public Facebook pages (seed nodes), determined by their relevance to the study and their established connections to manosphere communities. We meticulously selected initial seed nodes from established manosphere communities, focusing on prominent Facebook pages that represented MRAs, PUAs, Incels, and MGTOW. The sampling grew by recursively identifying additional connected pages from these seeds, which we accomplished by monitoring interactions, such as likes, comments, mentions, and page follows, which facilitated the mapping of the extensive network of associated pages. We repeatedly conducted the iterative process until the network’s expansion reached a state of equilibrium. This recursive identification facilitated the network’s organic expansion, uncovering broader connections within the manosphere. The collection process was carried out in August 2024.

Upon the establishment of the network, the Facebook pages were categorised into the four groups that make up the manosphere. The categorisation process involved a detailed review of each page’s content to ensure their accurate alignment with specific manosphere groups. This review included examining page descriptions, posts, discussions, and community guidelines. If a page’s description and the tone or themes of its posts and discussions were consistent with the beliefs or rhetoric typical of a specific group, it was categorised accordingly. Any pages that could not be reliably assigned to a specific category using these criteria were grouped under the “other” category to preserve the clarity and coherence of the classification. Additionally, pages related to equally shared parenting (ESP) movements were clustered into a separate group to distinguish their unique focus within the broader categorisation framework.

We generated a graph to illustrate the connections and relationships among the Facebook pages. This visual depiction elucidated the interactions among pages, illustrating the links between different groups of the manosphere and offering a comprehensive overview of the structure and relationships within the manosphere on Facebook.

To analyse the structure of the manosphere network on Facebook, various centrality metrics were calculated that assessed the significance and influence of each page. *Indegree centrality* measures the number of incoming connections a page has, indicating its authority within the network. Pages with high indegree are

often referenced or followed by others, signifying their importance. *Outdegree centrality* measures outgoing connections, reflecting a page's activity or engagement with others. Pages with high outdegree serve as hubs, facilitating the flow of information. PageRank is a more comprehensive metric that considers both the quantity and quality of incoming links, identifying pages with significant influence by their connection to other influential pages. These metrics help identify key actors, content disseminators, and authorities within the manosphere community.

### 4.3. Profiling Members of Manosphere Forums

We conducted an analysis of the profiles of members from four distinct manosphere forums linked to MRAs, MGTOW, Incels, and PUAs. The textual content was manually extracted in August 2024. Specifically, we gathered all self-presentations that were present on the forums and blogs at that time, regardless of when they were originally produced. This analysis focused on the characteristics expressed in the members' self-presentations, such as personal background, motivations for joining the forum, and views on gender relations. Additionally, we identified key thematic patterns by examining the characteristic words and phrases commonly used in these self-descriptions. This approach allowed us to capture both the individual traits of the members and the linguistic markers that distinguish each subgroup within the manosphere. The study of linguistic features used keyness analysis (Gabrielatos, 2018), a statistical method designed to identify words or phrases, referred to as "keywords," that appear significantly more often in one sub-corpus compared to the other sub-corpora. A keyness score was determined through the chi-square test. This score evaluates whether the actual frequency of a word in the target corpus significantly deviates from the expected frequency derived from the reference corpus. We used a statistical significance threshold ( $p$ -value for the chi-square test below 0.01) to identify significantly over-represented words in each subgroup, thereby elucidating distinct linguistic patterns within forum members' presentations.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Digital Ethnography Findings

The ethnographic investigation across various social-media platforms (Facebook pages, blogs, forums and YouTube channels, TikTok, Discord, and Instagram) revealed that the manosphere is present on all major social networks. Facebook, however, despite being a platform with a predominantly older user base, is particularly well suited for network reconstruction due to the presence of public pages and more extensive narrative discussions. Moreover, Facebook's structural design makes it easier to trace connections between pages, allowing for a more comprehensive mapping of relationships within the manosphere. The structure of the network is highly interconnected, with a significant degree of cross-posting and hyperlinking between the different nodes, which strengthens the digital ecosystem of the manosphere. From this phase of ethnographic observation, the Italian manosphere network was reconstructed through snowball sampling.

From the observation and annotation of posts and comments found particularly on blogs, forums, and Facebook, we can confirm what has already emerged from several studies conducted at the national level (De Gasperis, 2021; Pilla & Dolce, 2019; Ricci & Farci, 2021; Semenzin & Bainotti, 2020), which highlight the main themes characterising this phenomenon. Among these, the following stand out: anti-feminism, the "crisis of masculinity," men's rights, sexism, gender-based violence, and male victimhood—all elements that



reflect the central concerns of the various groups, serving as an ideological background. Anti-feminism is a prevalent theme and manifests as a violent reaction against the progress of the feminist movement, which is perceived as a direct threat to men's position in society (Pilla & Dolce, 2019). The narrative of the "crisis of masculinity" (Ciccione, 2017) accompanies this theme, portraying men as victims of a "feminisation" process that diminishes traditionally masculine qualities. Sexism and gender-based violence are equally central, with groups like Incels and MGTOW portraying women as manipulative and inferior, thus justifying aggressive behaviour towards them (De Gasperis, 2021; Pilla & Dolce, 2019). Finally, male victimhood is a recurring narrative in which men perceive themselves as oppressed by a social system that favours women, a view particularly upheld by Italian MRAs (Ricci & Farci, 2021; Semenzin & Bainotti, 2020).

Ethnographic observation of blogs, forums, and social networks allowed us to identify Facebook as a useful platform for analysing nodes (like pages) and the connections among them to reconstruct the structural characteristics of the Italian manosphere.

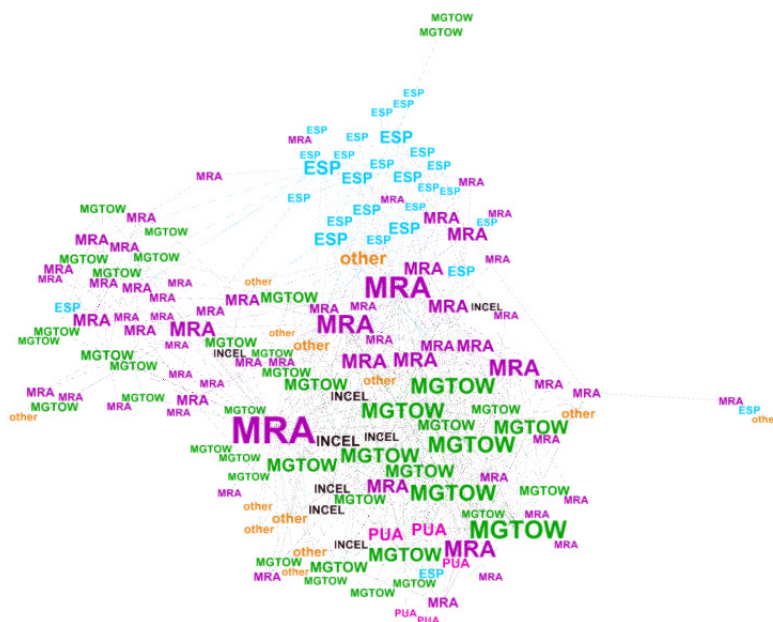
## **5.2. Italian Manosphere Networks on Facebook**

Ethnographic analysis allowed for the initial identification of seed pages: that is, initial nodes known to belong to the manosphere, such as "Vita da Brutto—The Red Pill Never Dies" for Incels, "MGTOW Italia" and "Coscienza Maschile" for MGTOW, "Diritti Maschili—Equità e Umanità" for MRAs, and "Essere Uomo" for PUAs. Through interactions like mentions, likes, comments, and follows, we identified other connected pages from these initial nodes. This methodology allowed us to map the connections among the various pages that belong to different categories of the manosphere.

The result is a complex and interconnected network composed of 158 nodes whose classification highlighted a significant presence of pages related to MRAs (39%) and MGTOW (27%). Incels and PUAs both have a lesser presence (5% and 3%, respectively). Various pages (18%) were identified as mixed pages, which share themes related to the rights of separated fathers (ESP). This constellation, while focusing attention on legal issues related to child custody and the conditions of separated or divorced fathers, conveys topics from the manosphere. Furthermore, we classified 8% of the retrieved pages as "others."

The network analysis reveals a complex structure (see Figure 1) in which different pages play specific roles, contributing to the cohesion and dissemination of these groups' ideologies. Additional graphical representations are included in the Supplementary Material, along with the centrality measures for the most significant pages within the network.

MRAs' Facebook pages seem to be the most central, exhibiting elevated indegree, authority, and PageRank values (see centrality measures graph and tables in the Supplementary Material). This signifies that these pages not only acquire numerous connections but also attract links from reputable and substantial pages. Websites like *Il Maschicidio*, *Diritti Maschili—Equità e Umanità*, and *Smascheriamo il Femminismo* serve as authoritative entities within the network, indicating their role as primary sources of information and ideology in the Italian manosphere. Their prominence underscores that the MRA movement both is influential and serves as a benchmark for other pages and groups within the manosphere network.



**Figure 1.** Network of Facebook pages related to the manosphere. Node labels depict manosphere groups, and their size is proportional to node degree. The network is visualised through Gephi (<https://gephi.org>) with MultiGravity Force Atlas 2 algorithm (LinLog mode).

MGTOW pages function as gateways within the network, as evidenced by their elevated outdegree values: 12 out of 20 pages with the highest hub scores belong to this category. Therefore, MGTOW pages are notably effective in linking various segments of the network, serving as hubs that promote the distribution of content among otherwise isolated groups. These pages are essential in consolidating the manosphere, facilitating the exchange of ideas among diverse factions, and strengthening the sense of unity within the movement.

Incel pages hold a distinctive status within the Italian manosphere. Despite their lack of prominence in centrality measures, these pages are critical in user radicalisation. Incels frequently function on the periphery of the network, yet their discourse serves as a catalyst for individuals already inclined towards radical ideologies. This group, although less interconnected than MRAs or MGTOW, is crucial for comprehending the internal dynamics of the manosphere, as it appears to serve as an entry point for individuals. We should not interpret its marginal position as a sign of irrelevance but rather as a manifestation of its unique role within the network: It attracts individuals who may later engage with the movement's more central or radical discourses. The Incel community frequently comprises young men who find it challenging to connect with women, and, upon entering the manosphere, they may exacerbate their feelings of frustration, thereby deepening their involvement in the network. The Incel network functions as a “filter” that facilitates individuals' entry into the manosphere and, in certain instances, propels them towards more extreme viewpoints. This phenomenon of radicalisation, although less pronounced in Italy, has been noted in the United States and Canada. The insular and self-perpetuating dynamics of these groups enable a milieu where radical ideas can proliferate unchallenged, due to weak external connections, as indicated by low indegree.

PUA pages exhibit relatively low centrality measures. This suggests that, while they are part of the manosphere network, PUA pages have limited influence and do not serve as central nodes within the Italian manosphere.

Their presence, however, is not irrelevant, as they act as specialised niches within the network, focusing on specific themes related to seduction and the manipulation of interpersonal relationships.

The Italian network exhibits a robust affiliation with content and pages from global entities: Of the 158 pages, 36 are not based in Italy. Furthermore, Figure 2 illustrates that a substantial segment of the Italian manosphere is linked to international Facebook pages that predominantly disseminate content from the American manosphere.



**Figure 2.** Network of Facebook pages related to the manosphere. Node label colour indicates the origin of the page: red labels represent Italian pages, while blue labels represent international pages not based in Italy. Node label size is proportional to node degree. The network is visualised through Gephi (<https://gephi.org>) with MultiGravity Force Atlas 2 algorithm (LinLog mode).

### 5.3. Profiles of Italian Manosphere Forum Participants

The examination of blogs and forums within the Italian manosphere has facilitated the categorisation of participants across diverse groups and corroborated the insights derived from ethnographic analysis and network analysis on Facebook concerning the roles of the various groups. The sample consists of 695 self-presentations made on blogs and forums. Among these, 309 (44%) originate from Incel groups, 187 (27%) from MRAs, 152 (22%) from PUAs, and 47 (7%) from MGTOW.

We identified demographic characteristics, including gender and age, from the self-presentations. Among the participants, 9.9% are female, with the lowest proportion of women (4.3%) noted among MGTOW individuals. Women occasionally demonstrate interest in the movements, frequently influenced by familial experiences involving sons, husbands, or brothers who encountered instances of “discrimination.” Women’s participation is frequently motivated by curiosity and academic pursuits, primarily in disciplines like anthropology and psychology, or aimed at providing or soliciting counsel and sharing personal narratives rather than partaking in a formal ideological debate, as is typical among men. On the other hand, female proponents of manosphere ideologies articulate dissatisfaction regarding the absence of a dedicated platform on which women can exchange experiences and narratives with others who comprehend or have

endured analogous circumstances. Analysis of the self-presentations by women reveals that they generally adopt a more cautious and less confrontational demeanour than men. There is a prevalent inclination to apologise or request permission prior to speaking, suggesting a perceived minority status or a belief that their contributions may not conform to the prevailing tone of the discussions.

The Incel group has the lowest average age of 27 years, whereas MGTOW groups, which typically consist of separated or divorced men who have withdrawn from stable relationships, have the highest average age of 36 years. The mean age of participants in PUA groups is approximately 32 years, whereas, for MRAs, it is about 33 years.

The qualitative analysis of self-presentations, coupled with the findings from the keyness analysis that facilitated the reconstruction of the vocabulary employed by members of diverse groups (see Figure 3), uncovers notable disparities among the subgroups regarding the topics addressed, the manner in which users identify with and engage in these communities and the interactions and discourse between members of different groups and users from other groups.

### 5.3.1. MRAs' Self-Presentations

MRAs set themselves apart from other manosphere groups through their recognition as a social and cultural movement, their use of formal and sophisticated language, their frequent integration of Latin quotations, and their generally elevated rhetoric, all of which lend legitimacy and authority to their assertions. MRAs primarily concentrate on perceived disparities detrimental to men, particularly in domains like family law, the labour market, and criminal justice. For instance, the self-presentations include the following statements:

Dear friends, let's form an "alliance." We resist because we are the axis mundi, the beacon, the reference point, the compass. We men.

Many men's movements do excellent work, but they accept the rules of a futile and gynocentric society built on foundations such as divorce and mass abortion (both subject to female discretion), and empty, commodified human relationships. To improve the condition of men, it is not enough to reform a few laws (which are useless in a feminist system, as seen with shared custody) but it is necessary to change the rules of an entirely anti-male system.

Today, Western society seems determined to throw away, in a very short time, all or nearly all of the progress, the achievements of civilisation, rights, freedom, and humanity gained over the last two thousand years; not by chance, these achievements are due to men; they are masculine achievements. It is no coincidence that men and everything masculine are now despised, blamed, denigrated, and ridiculed.

MRAs keywords encompass: feminism (*femminismo*), man (*uomo*), woman (*donna*), equality (*uguaglianza*), masculine (*maschile*), rights (*diritti*), privileges (*privilegi*) and violence (*violenza*; refer to Figure 3). Although they harbour animosity towards feminism, their methodology seems less confrontational and more organised than that of MGTOW, focusing on legal and institutional challenges rather than a complete repudiation of relationships and social interactions.

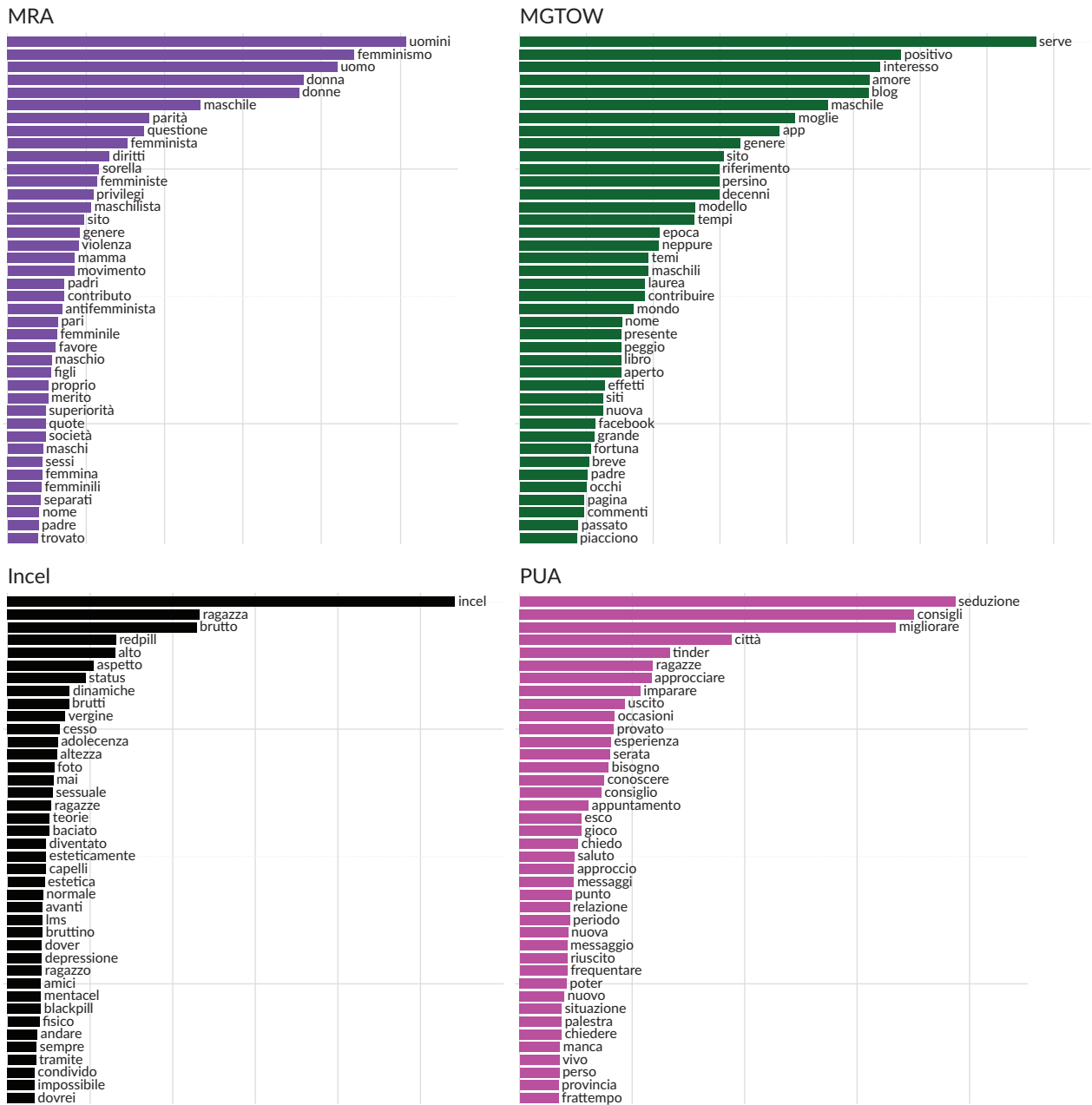


Figure 3. Keywords used by the members of manosphere forums.

### 5.3.2. MGTOW's Self-Presentations

MGTOW do not convey frustration regarding limited access to relationships; instead, they voluntarily reject conventional romantic dynamics. Their rhetoric, characterised by strong autonomy, is imbued with contempt for interpersonal connections and emotional engagement, perceived as a snare for men. The keyness analysis (see Figure 3) substantiates this interpretation, as the emerging keywords pertain to the realm of relationships between men and women (*amore*—love, *maschile*—masculine, *genere*—gender, *moglie*—wife).

This community exhibits a diverse array of experiences: Some individuals identify as single by choice, while others are engaged, married, or divorced, yet they all adhere to the principles of emotional detachment and self-sufficiency:

I have been “battling” with the fair ladies for many years, thankfully not in an extreme form. However, I can’t help but notice that my personal freedom is always called into question by them. Fortunately, I don’t have any draining family histories behind me, and honestly, I hope to never have any in the future.

In my life, I have had a few long-term relationships (LTR) and some brief flings, and at the moment, I am single. After the last and, as always, disastrous LTR that happened a few years ago, I decided to stop, execute the command “format C:” in my brain, and reinstall a new, updated, and “clean” operating system.

The result was only to understand how I ended up in the trap of marriage (I am now divorced). The greatest disappointment was discovering that all the abuses I suffered were not random, but rather the result of a narrative that sees men as disposable objects.

My luck was having a truly womanly wife, intelligent, who sacrificed her job for family and children and who always shared with me the male issue while dissociating herself from feminism in all its forms. On this occasion, she encouraged me to support the gender issue by recognising the now-commonplace misandry.

MGTOW forum members often employ misogynistic language in their presentations, belittling women and reinforcing negative stereotypes. This language not only reflects their frustrations but also fosters a sense of camaraderie among members, as they bond over shared grievances and reinforce their ideological beliefs. The effect of this rhetoric can be significant, as it contributes to a toxic environment that discourages healthy relationships and promotes a divisive view of gender dynamics:

When I pointed out their impulsiveness (not emotional as the common narrative would suggest, but impulsive) and frivolity, I was told that I hated women and that I couldn’t understand them. Alas, it seems to me that understanding women is quite simple: They are beings driven by convenience, often exhibiting distorted behaviours and acting as social climbers.

I found myself immersed in an environment filled with cuckolds of various kinds who worshiped women and reacted violently to anyone who dared to show that they also have (and perhaps only) flaws.

One must be truly foolish to fall in love with women in today’s world!...And anyway, if someone absolutely can’t do without them, they should realise that a dog can give more pure and sincere affection than a woman ever could!

### 5.3.3. Incels' Self-Presentations

The examination of Incel self-representations reveals that Incels frequently act as the principal gateway into the manosphere. These individuals present themselves as victims of an unfair social system focused on perceived “discrimination” against less attractive or economically and socially disadvantaged men:

When I message girls on Instagram or Tinder, they ghost me before we even meet up, or they disappear after the first date where nothing ever happens. I would give everything I don't have to be a GigaChad and get tons of them pregnant.

They suddenly became cold and hostile, started making up excuses and commitments that never existed, and a few days later I'd find out they were hooking up with the latest Chad in line.

Themes like the “friendzone” (perceived as an injustice committed by women who fail to reciprocate these men's romantic affection) and casual relationships (often viewed as failures or elusive pursuits) centre their personal narratives:

Not ugly, but completely inadequate. And girls could sense this; after a while, they would either run away or friendzone me with no chance of anything more.

These users frequently encounter bullying and perceive societal rejection or neglect by women, exacerbating their frustration:

I am a guy affected by nervous tics, without relationships, experiencing maladaptive daydreaming, and continuously haunted by images of my past life as a bullied boy.

In short: a life destroyed by bullying experienced in adolescence. All my problems stem from that.

I managed to get just one kiss at the age of 17 with a classmate of mine, and then when I tried to ask her to hang out alone, she rejected me like I was the lowest of the low.

Notably, numerous individuals self-identify as Incels despite being in stable relationships or married with children. This highlights the idea that involuntary celibacy may be more of a psychological condition than a reality—a mindset that influences even those who have attained what Western society considers significant success, i.e., establishing a family:

Although I am married (with a son), I consider myself an Incel.

I am 55 years old, have been married for 22 years, but in reality, it feels like I am alone; I have always been alone and always will be.

The Incels' vocabulary (see Figure 3) reveals that aesthetic beauty (*alto*—tall, *brutto*—ugly, *cesso*—piece of trash, *bruttino*—unattractive, *fisico*—physique, *esticamente*—aesthetically), socioeconomic status (*amici*—friends), sexuality and relationships with girls (*baciato*—kissed, *sessuale*—sexual, *vergine*—virgin),

antifeminism (*femminismo*—feminism, redpill, blackpill), and personal and social distress (*depressione*—depression) are the main themes emerging from the presentations.

#### 5.3.4. PUAs' Self-Presentations

PUAs advocate techniques and offer advice for “seducing” women, grounded in a heavily stereotypical perspective of interpersonal dynamics. Users portray themselves as “hunters,” using overtly misogynistic language that reduces women to mere targets for manipulation. In contrast to Incels, who perceive relationships as inaccessible, PUAs assert that they can master them through acquired skills and deliberate strategies. Nonetheless, their writings indicate a desire for community validation and social endorsement, as numerous users appear to pursue affirmation of their masculine value through relational and sexual achievements:

On Tinder, I usually give 25/30 likes a day on days when there's a lot of activity.

Before showing my true self, my character, I have this damn need for other people's approval, so I need to be sure that a girl likes me before I make a move and show my best self. If I'm not sure, I freeze.

I joined this forum hoping to regain a winning mindset and improve my seduction skills with women.

I'm planning to dive deep into the texts that could help me the most—like six months of in-depth study—to at least have a better theoretical understanding of what needs to be done.

So, I hope to find in this forum a place where I can sharpen my seduction skills.

You helped me get back on my feet by giving me some foundations that are now part of my daily life, and I can't thank you enough.

The prominence of the theme of seduction and manipulation for seductive objectives is apparent from the keyness analysis findings. Terms like advice (*consigli*), learn (*imparare*), approach (*approcciare*), improve (*migliorare*), and especially seduction (*seduzione*) frequently emerge in introductions on forums and blogs associated with Italian PUAs.

## 6. Discussions: Social Movements, Political Movements, or Communities of Practice?

Based on the results, we can delineate the characteristics of the different groups within the Italian manosphere. Like the global arena, it presents characteristics that define both social and political movements. There is, however, a broad consensus that it is mainly perceived as a social movement with significant political implications. The factions constituting the manosphere typically coalesce around narratives of opposition and resistance to societal transformations, especially regarding women's rights and feminism. This positioning portrays them as social agents engaging in the dynamics of conflict and identity-driven assertions, typical of social movements. The Italian manosphere exhibits a political bias, particularly when its members use language that reflects radical right-wing rhetoric or aligns with populist movements. Thus, it functions as an “echo chamber” for far-right political ideologies and, in the Italian context, incorporates aspects of the radical left, thereby exacerbating the polarisation of public discourse.



An alternative approach to understanding the manosphere is to view it as a constellation of “communities of practice,” a term that denotes groups of individuals who share a common interest and engage in regular interactions to enhance and refine skills relevant to that interest.

The digital realms of the manosphere enable the formation of homosocial communities, wherein users exchange experiences, language, and practices that bolster their shared identity. The use of specific language and practices, including the generation and dissemination of sexist memes as instruments of internal communication, strengthens the group’s cohesion. In many instances, engagement within the manosphere prioritises the cultivation of a collective culture that reinforces and magnifies the prevailing beliefs of its constituents over explicit political objectives.

Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoPs) are online communities that emerge either organically or through deliberate design, as distinguished by the exchange of shared interests, experiences, or challenges among participants. These virtual groups offer digital environments for individuals to collaboratively learn, exchange knowledge, and acquire new skills. In contrast to conventional communities of practice, VCoPs are not constrained by geographical proximity; rather, they use digital platforms to connect their members, fostering networks of support and collaboration in the digital realm (Maretti et al., 2022). The notion of communities of practice was initially formulated by Lave and Wenger (1991) and has subsequently been modified for analogous structures established in digital environments. These virtual communities coalesce around shared issues, enabling participants to exchange experiences and resources and thereby enhancing collective knowledge (Wenger, 2011). VCoPs stand out for their ability to foster informal learning and the development of social capital, functioning beyond the confines of formal, institutionalised organisations (Jiménez-Zarco et al., 2015). A fundamental characteristic of VCoPs is their capacity to adapt and address the evolving needs of their members. These communities frequently serve as instruments for resilience, particularly in crisis or emergencies, where they facilitate collective well-being and information management (Amaratunga, 2014; Lucini, 2014).

We can identify several essential traits and characteristics of VCoPs. Initially, these communities arise from common issues, often stemming from a collective need among the members. This cultivates an initial rapport among participants, encouraging a cooperative atmosphere. Secondly, VCoPs operate as informal mutual-support entities, offering emotional and practical assistance as members exchange experiences and solutions to shared challenges. Third, they emphasise the exchange of practices and knowledge, encouraging the collective enhancement of social capital within the group. Moreover, members possess a common value system that directs their interactions, enhancing group cohesion and collective identity through a shared culture and language. VCoPs foster the development of social capital by cultivating trust-based relationships that may transcend the virtual realm and spread to real-world contexts. Ultimately, they possess the capacity to generate opinion bubbles, reinforcing homogeneous viewpoints while potentially constraining exposure to alternative perspectives. These characteristics define VCoPs as dynamic settings for collective development and cooperation.

Despite the absence of specific literature, research suggests that most nodes within the manosphere can be characterized as VCoPs, sharing common ideologies and methodologies to reinforce their identities. These virtual communities function analogously to the established VCoPs in the educational, social, and health domains, emphasising knowledge dissemination, collaborative learning and the development of a shared

culture through consistent online engagement (Ging, 2019; Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021; Van Valkenburgh, 2021). The VCoPs in the manosphere serve as venues in which members convene, articulate, and sustain particular narratives of masculinity, frequently in contrast to conventional values. For example, participants in groups like MGTOW, Incels, PUAs, and communities of separated or divorced fathers convene online to exchange experiences, adopt a shared vocabulary and formulate internal guidelines for interaction that bolster their perspective on the male role in society. Consequently, the manosphere operates as a collection of online communities of practice that enhances the resonance of shared ideologies through the community-reinforcement mechanisms characteristic of VCoPs. Using Papacharissi's (2015) definition of "affective publics" as story structures linked by emotions and personal experiences, the manosphere's nodes appear and disappear through emotional connections, using and solidifying stories of individual pain to create an affective consensus about a claimed shared gender experience—specifically, men's perceived diminished status in society due to feminism (Ging, 2019).

It would be reductive, however, to limit the manosphere phenomenon exclusively to VCoPs, as it can be regarded as a political movement with global affiliations associated with the conservative political realm: the alt-right in the United States and various European contexts, as evidenced by numerous studies on conservative right-wing factions, or, in the Italian context, even with a segment of the conservative left. An underlying ideology, extensively documented in the literature and this research, crystallises into a central tenet of the antifeminist narrative, specifically within MRA groups. These groups clearly define specific objectives to achieve full parity between men and women. These objectives include organising campaigns against violence towards women and men, protecting paternal rights, abolishing alimony for ex-wives, imposing stricter penalties for sexual crimes, eliminating compulsory military service for men, and supporting male school dropouts. Additional goals include raising awareness of male victims of trafficking and exploitation, ensuring media coverage for men's rights issues, and campaigning for equal representation in employment and public spaces. There is also a focus on improving men's health and promoting psychological support for victims of workplace discrimination.

The assertions and organisational framework of the manosphere, along with the requisite distinctions among these diverse groups, lead to its being accurately characterised as an authentic social movement. A "social movement" is defined as a collective of individuals or groups united by a shared objective to effect social, economic, or political change, collaborating to influence or alter public policy, society, or established institutions. Diani (1992) defines "social movements" as networks of informal interactions among diverse individuals, groups, and/or organisations engaged in a political or cultural conflict rooted in a common collective identity. This concept is applicable to the manosphere, a diverse network of online groups (including MGTOW, Incels, and MRAs) that propagate a shared antifeminist narrative and advocate male interests. They establish a communal collective identity. According to Diani, a shared collective identity unites members through common beliefs, values, and objectives. Within the manosphere, this collective identity is frequently formulated around the concept of "masculinity in crisis" and opposition to feminism and perceived societal transformations as threats. Furthermore, social movements participate in political and cultural conflicts that seek to advocate or resist cultural transformations. The manosphere comprises groups that are variably and intensely involved in a cultural conflict, aiming to influence gender norms and public discourse concerning the roles of men and women in society. Social movements function independently of formal institutions. The manosphere, operating mainly on digital platforms and social media, eschews conventional institutional methods for enacting social and cultural change, opting instead to shape public

opinion and construct counter-narratives. Collective identities are formed through meaning-making processes and symbolic representations. This is evident in the formulation of novel terminology and concepts within the manosphere (such as “red pill” or “beta male”) that define the identities and experiences of its members.

## 7. Conclusion

Our parallel analysis of user profiles on blogs and forums, as well as the network of groups on Facebook, highlights the diversity of user profiles while simultaneously revealing the structure and functions of the different groups within the Italian manosphere, offering a perspective that goes beyond the structural insights provided by Facebook. Blogs and forums in particular serve as privileged spaces for the construction of identity narratives and the consolidation of anti-feminist ideologies, functioning as tools closely tied to personal reflection and radicalisation. These platforms enable a deeper exploration of subjective experiences and emotional dynamics, making them an essential complementary element in the analysis of the manosphere.

Our examination of the composition, structure, and functions of the Italian manosphere underscores its diverse yet interrelated characteristics. The reconstruction of the Facebook network and analysis of self-presentations on blogs and forums have yielded a reliable understanding of the internal dynamics of this digital ecosystem. Despite thematic and objective distinctions within the Italian manosphere, its factions collectively espouse a fundamental anti-feminist and misogynistic ideology, as articulated through discourses on the “crisis of masculinity” and “male victimisation.”

MRA pages function as pivotal nodes within the network, acting as ideological authorities for other groups. MGTOW pages serve as “bridges” among different segments of the manosphere, enabling content exchange among otherwise segregated groups. The role of Incels, while peripheral, is pivotal: They act as gatekeepers and are critical to the radicalisation of users, exacerbating anti-feminist ideologies. Ultimately, PUAs constitute a niche subgroup, yet they are noteworthy for their contributions to discussions on seduction and dominance in interpersonal relationships.

Although the Italian network’s international connections are less pronounced than those in Anglophone contexts, they confirm the influence of global trends on the Italian manosphere while maintaining distinctive elements tied to the national socio-cultural context. Italian manosphere groups seem to be less radical than those found in the US context and are more connected to a conservative view of gender roles and the traditional family. Nevertheless, the Italian manosphere represents an archipelago of groups that, collectively, significantly shape public discourse on gender relations, especially among members of the younger generations.

Given the functions of these groups, they can be termed “online communities of practice” in which members share experiences and strategies, thereby strengthening their collective identity. Moreover, they may be perceived as authentic social movements with possible political ramifications in shaping gender relations. Understanding this phenomenon, particularly concerning younger generations, is crucial due to its increasing influence on the polarisation of public discourse and on gender representations in Italian society.

It is important to acknowledge some limitations of the present research. The decision to focus exclusively on Facebook as the platform for analysis, although justified by the availability of public data and the ability to map connections among pages, potentially excludes significant dynamics present on other platforms such as Reddit, TikTok, or Discord, where some subgroups of the manosphere, as well as younger generations in general, are more active. The data collected reflect a specific temporal snapshot, providing a picture of the Italian network on Facebook and offering reflections that will undoubtedly necessitate further exploration on other platforms.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

### Data Availability

Data are available from the authors upon request.

### Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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