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Chapter-X

Contesting the Manosphere: Feminist Interventions Across Digital Discursive Ecologies

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Abstract

This chapter argues that the contemporary manosphere operates as a reactionary discursive formation that responds to and reshapes feminist interventions within digital publics, producing new configurations of patriarchal power that are both global and locally inflected. Rather than existing at the margins, the manosphere functions as a dense textual ecology in which narratives of grievance, nostalgia, and male victimhood circulate through platform logics that amplify affect, normalize misogyny, and render masculinist backlash culturally legible and politically potent (Ging, 2019). These formations do not simply oppose feminism; they actively rework gendered power relations by mobilizing irony, repetition, and

mediated intimacy to reassert masculine authority amid perceived social and political displacement.

Situated within contemporary digital cultures, the chapter examines the manosphere as a site of textual resistance and counter-resistance at the intersection of gender, caste, power, and discursive production. Encompassing men's rights forums, incel communities, red-pill networks, and misogynistic influencer cultures, these spaces articulate a shared affective economy of resentment and rage that reframes men as structurally oppressed subjects in response to feminist gains (Ging, 2019). Approached as a textual and affective formation rather than solely a sociological phenomenon, the manosphere generates meaning through algorithmic amplification, memes, and networked performances of masculinity.

Drawing on Debbie Ging's media-theoretical analysis alongside Indian feminist interventions by Rohini Lakshané, Kavita Krishnan, and Nivedita Menon, the chapter offers a comparative reading of feminist responses to reactionary masculinities. While Ging emphasizes platform capitalism and affective circulation, Indian feminist critiques foreground the entanglement of online misogyny with caste hierarchies, communal politics, nationalism, and state power (Krishnan, 2016; Lakshané, 2020; Menon, 2012). Placing these perspectives in dialogue, the chapter contends that resistance to the manosphere must be understood as both discursive and material, encompassing feminist critique, legal advocacy, and political intervention.

Keywords

(*Affective Economies, Digital Misogyny, Digital Publics, Feminist Textual Resistance and Manosphere*)

Introduction

Feminist engagements with digital misogyny demand a theoretical framework that situates discourse at the heart of power, subject formation, and knowledge production. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theorization of discourse as a constitutive force, power is understood not as something possessed or imposed from above but as something that circulates through language, norms, and everyday practices. As Foucault argues, discourse is "not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but that for which and by which there is struggle," (Foucault, 1990, 101) emphasizing its productive role in shaping social reality. From this perspective, the manosphere cannot be reduced to isolated instances of misogynistic speech; rather, it operates as a structured discursive formation that produces and legitimizes specific masculinist subjectivities. Through repetition, affective intensification, and claims to truth, manospheric discourse normalizes gender hierarchy and trains subjects to apprehend feminism as an existential threat rather than as a political critique. Within such a framework, feminist textual resistance emerges as a counter-discursive practice that seeks to unsettle these regimes of truth. Foucault's insistence that "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1990, p.96) is crucial here, particularly because resistance is not positioned outside power but is immanent to it.

Feminist interventions, whether academic, journalistic, or cultural, do not merely rebut misogynistic claims; they disrupt the epistemic authority of the manosphere by interrogating the conditions under which its truths are produced and circulated. Feminist discourse, thus, intervenes at the level of knowledge-production itself, challenging the naturalization of gender hierarchy and the supposed inevitability of male grievance. This analysis is further informed by intersectional feminist theory, particularly the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, who warns against treating gender as a singular or isolated axis of power. Crenshaw argues that "the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite - that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1242). In the Indian context, this insight is especially significant, as caste operates as a constitutive structure that shapes how gender is lived, narrated, and policed. Masculinist discourses within the manosphere often draw legitimacy from caste privilege, even as caste itself is rendered invisible through claims of universal male victimhood and abstract narratives of merit or injury. The figure of the aggrieved male subject frequently relies on the erasure of caste-based asymmetries, allowing dominant-caste masculinity to present itself as a universally oppressed position. An intersectional feminist critique, therefore, insists that misogyny cannot be analytically separated from caste hierarchies and that digital masculinism must be read as a site where caste and gender power are mutually reinforced.

Also, Sara Ahmed's work on affect and feminist politics provides an additional lens for understanding the emotional economies of digital

misogyny. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed introduces the concept of affective economies to explain how emotions circulate, accumulate value, and align bodies toward particular objects. As she notes, "emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities-or bodily space with social space" (Ahmed, 2004, p.119). Within manospheric cultures, affects such as anger, resentment, humiliation, and entitlement circulate intensely, binding participants together through shared orientations of grievance against feminism. These affects (emotions) do not reside solely within individual subjects; rather, they move across texts, images, memes, and platform-specific affordances, repeatedly producing feminism as an object of collective hostility. Ahmed's observation that emotions "stick" to certain figures helps explain how feminists are persistently constructed as threats to social order and masculine identity (Ahmed, 2004, p.11). Feminist resistance, within this affective framework, involves not only ideological critique but also a reorientation of feeling itself. As Ahmed argues in *Living a Feminist Life*, feminism often begins with a refusal to accommodate harm, noting that "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation, and sexual oppression, but it is also a way of living with the consequences of that refusal" (Ahmed, 2017, pp. 5-6). Naming injury, refusing silence, and cultivating feminist solidarities interrupt economies of rage by challenging the emotional rewards that sustain misogynistic communities. Feminist texts, therefore, function affectively as well as politically, creating alternative attachments and modes of belonging that contest the affective infrastructure of the manosphere.

Drawing on scholars such as Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, digital platforms, algorithms, and infrastructures are treated not as neutral conduits but as active participants in the production of discourse. Haraway's assertion that "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (Haraway, 1991, p. 150) unsettles any clear boundary between human intention and technological mediation. Similarly, Barad's concept of 'intra-action' emphasizes that agency does not precede relations but emerges through them (Barad, 2007, p.33). From this perspective, the manosphere is co-produced through the interaction of human actors, platform architectures, algorithmic visibility, and political economies of attention. This expanded understanding of agency allows for an ecological reading of digital cultures, where power emerges from the entanglement of human desires, technological systems, and socio-political structures. Within this theoretical frame, the manosphere appears as a toxic discursive ecology sustained by unequal relations of gender, caste, and technological power. Feminist interventions, by contrast, gesture toward more ethical and accountable modes of co-existence in mediated publics, modes that foreground relationality, responsibility, and the possibility of inhabiting digital spaces otherwise.

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Analysis of the Chapter

The Manosphere as a Digital Textual Formation

The term manosphere refers to a heterogeneous constellation of online spaces that articulate masculinist identities through narratives of loss, entitlement, and victimhood. These digital formations, ranging from men's rights forums and incel communities to red-pill influencers, frame feminism as an oppressive force responsible for the erosion of male privilege, social status, and emotional security. Central to manospheric discourse is what Michael Kimmel identifies as 'aggrieved entitlement', a sense that men have been unjustly deprived of power they believe is rightfully theirs (Kimmel, 2013, p.9). Within this framework, power is discursively inverted: men are positioned as marginalized subjects, while women and feminists are depicted as beneficiaries of allegedly rigged social systems.

From a textual perspective, the manosphere operates through recognizable narrative tropes-decline, betrayal, and restoration. Feminism is cast as a conspiratorial project that has destabilized 'natural' gender relations, while the past is romanticized as a time of masculine authority and social order. As Susan Faludi observes in her analysis of backlash politics, such narratives thrive on the claim that "the enemy is feminism, which has supposedly robbed men of their rightful place" (Faludi, 1991, p.10). These stories are sustained through memes, ironic humour, pseudo-scientific claims, anecdotal evidence, and selective appropriations of evolutionary psychology, lending an appearance of rationality to deeply affective grievances. The repetition and circulation of these textual elements generate what Sara Ahmed describes as 'affective economies' wherein emotions such as resentment, fear, and anger accumulate value as they circulate, binding individuals into imagined communities (Ahmed, 2004, p. 119). In the manosphere, affect does not merely express belief; it actively produces it, aligning bodies toward shared objects of hate, feminism, women, and perceived liberal elites. Through this circulation, internal contradictions within manospheric ideology are obscured in favour of a coherent emotional narrative of injury and resistance. Importantly, the manosphere is not confined to fringe platforms. Its discourses increasingly seep into mainstream social media through influencers, lifestyle content, and algorithmically amplified outrage. As Angela Nagle notes, digital cultures of reaction thrive precisely because they "collapse irony, sincerity, and provocation into a single communicative register" (Nagle, 2017, p.16). The boundary between extremist and everyday misogyny thus

becomes porous, enabling reactionary ideas to circulate under the guise of self-help, humour, or free speech.

Understanding the manosphere as a textual ecology allows us to see how meaning is produced not only through explicit statements but also through affective cues, platform affordances, and modes of circulation. Following Foucault's insight that discourse is productive rather than merely reflective of power relations, the manosphere can be read as a site where gendered power is continuously renegotiated through language, affect, and repetition.

Affective Economies and Digital Masculinities: Debbie Ging's Intervention

Debbie Ging's work provides a crucial framework for understanding the manosphere as a digitally mediated affective economy, one that cannot be reduced to the psychology of individual misogynists. Rather, Ging insists that the manosphere must be read in relation to the political economy of digital media, where visibility, virality, and engagement are structurally rewarded. She argues that the manosphere is not simply a collection of angry men online but a networked ecosystem that thrives on affective intensity and platform amplification (Ging, 2019, pp. 638-657). In this sense, misogyny becomes not an aberration but a profitable mode of communication within attention-driven platforms. Ging emphasizes that contemporary digital infrastructures privilege content that provokes strong emotional reactions, noting that anger, resentment and outrage are particularly compatible with the logics of algorithmic circulation. Within such attention economies, emotions function as

currency. Misogynistic narratives gain traction not despite their hostility but because of it, as emotional extremity increases visibility and engagement. The manosphere, thus, operates as what Ging describes as an 'affective feedback loop', where grievance is continuously intensified through likes, shares, metrics, and antagonistic commentary (Ging, 2019, pp. 638-657).

A central contribution of Ging's analysis lies in her demonstration of how personal insecurities are translated into collective political affect. She observes that experiences of sexual rejection, economic precarity, or perceived social displacement are reframed within manospheric discourse as evidence of 'systemic discrimination against men' (Ging, 2019, pp.5-6). This reframing transforms private vulnerability into public resentment, enabling what Ging calls a 'politics of victimhood' that is both emotionally compelling and ideologically reactionary. Through irony, memes, gamified interactions, and in-group vernacular, manospheric spaces foster solidarity while simultaneously insulating themselves from critique.

Crucially, misogyny within these spaces is frequently disavowed through claims of humour or irony. Ging notes that sexism is often articulated through irony, satire, or edgy humour, allowing speakers to deny intent while reproducing deeply hostile gender norms (Ging, 2019, pp. 8-10). This strategic ambiguity makes misogyny difficult to challenge, as feminist critique is dismissed as humourless, excessive, or authoritarian. Irony, thus, functions as both a shield and a weapon, reinforcing gender hierarchies while evading accountability. Ging also highlights how digital mediation reshapes masculinity itself,

producing what she terms 'platformed masculinities'. Masculine identity in the manosphere is performed through textual and visual cues - screenshots, follower counts, reaction videos, rage-bait posts, and performative outrage, that reward aggression, dominance, and emotional hardening. These environments function pedagogically, teaching users how to feel, how to speak, and how to position themselves in relation to women and feminism. As Ging argues, the manosphere operates as a training ground for affective and ideological alignment, socializing participants into shared narratives of grievance and gendered injustice (Ging, 2019, pp. 6-9**)**

Feminist critique, therefore, cannot be limited to content moderation or ideological rebuttal alone. Ging's intervention makes clear that effective resistance must engage the affective infrastructures and platform condition**s** that enable misogyny to flourish. As Ging argues, without addressing the media systems that reward antagonism and emotional extremity, efforts to counter online misogyny remain partial and ultimately ineffective (Ging, 2019, pp.18-20). Her work, thus, compels feminist scholarship to attend not only to what is said in digital cultures of masculinity, but to how emotions circulate, accumulate, and acquire political force within them.

Feminist Interventions in the Indian Digital Context

While Debbie Ging's analysis illuminates the global dynamics of the manosphere, feminist interventions in India foreground the specific historical, political, and structural conditions that shape digital misogyny in the subcontinent. Indian feminists such as Rohini

Lakshané, Kavita Krishnan, and Nivedita Menon approach online masculinist backlash through an explicitly intersectional lens, emphasizing that gendered violence in digital spaces is inseparable from caste, religion, nationalism, and state power. As Nivedita Menon reminds us that gender does not operate in isolation from other axes of power; it is always already entangled with caste, class, and community (Menon, 2012, pp. 18-20)**.**

Rohini Lakshané's work on digital rights, platform governance, and disinformation offers a critical account of how online misogyny in India is frequently weaponized as a political tool. Writing on coordinated harassment campaigns, Lakshané observes that abuse against women online is rarely spontaneous; it is often organized, targeted, and politically motivated (Lakshané 2020, pp. 6-8). Women journalists, activists, academics, and dissenting public figures are routinely subjected to sexualized threats, doxxing, and rape fantasies, frequently combined with casteist and communal slurs. These attacks function as what Lakshané describes as disciplinary mechanisms aimed at silencing voices that challenge dominant narratives (Lakshané, 2020, pp. 20-22). Crucially, Lakshané highlights the role of platform governance failures and state complicity in enabling such violence. She argues that the reluctance of platforms to act decisively against coordinated abuse, coupled with weak legal accountability, creates an ecosystem of impunity (Lakshané 2021, pp. 8-11). In this context, online misogyny cannot be understood merely as hate speech; it operates as a technology of intimidation, regulating who is permitted to speak in the digital public sphere.

Kavita Krishnan situates online misogyny within the broader ideological project of Hindu nationalism, arguing that attacks on feminists are deeply connected to anxieties surrounding social transformation. She notes that feminism is perceived as a threat because it questions not only patriarchy but also caste hierarchies and the sanctity of the Hindu family (Krishnan, 2016, pp. 3-6). In digital spaces, this anxiety manifests through coordinated trolling, sexualized vilification, and accusations of being 'anti-national' or 'Westernized'. The figure of the feminist, thus, becomes a 'symbolic enemy' against whom nationalist masculinity is mobilized. Krishnan further argues that misogynistic digital cultures cannot be separated from authoritarian politics, observing that gendered abuse is central to how right-wing movements consolidate power, both online and offline (Krishnan 2018, pp. 12-15). In this sense, the manosphere in India frequently overlaps with 'right-wing digital ecosystems', where misogyny, casteism, and communal hatred circulate together. The boundary between gendered hate and political extremism becomes increasingly blurred, as attacks on women serve simultaneously to police gender norms and suppress political dissent.

Nivedita Menon's feminist political thought offers a broader structural framing of this backlash. Menon insists that resistance to feminism is not simply cultural or moral but fundamentally 'political', rooted in struggles over authority, resources, and recognition. As she argues, backlash emerges precisely at moments when existing hierarchies feel themselves to be under threat (Menon, 2012, pp. 3-7). From this perspective, online misogyny is symptomatic of a deeper crisis of legitimacy, as feminist, anti-caste, and democratic movements

challenge entrenched forms of social power. Seen through Menon's lens, digital misogyny operates as a reactionary response to structural change, rather than an expression of individual resentment alone. Online abuse becomes a means of reasserting authority in a context where traditional markers of dominance, patriarchal control, caste privilege, and nationalist certainties, are increasingly contested. Feminist interventions in the Indian digital context, thus, reveal that misogyny is not an accidental byproduct of social media but a political strategy, embedded within broader struggles over gender, caste, and the meaning of democracy itself.

Caste, Gender, and the Digital Public Sphere

A critical distinction between Euro-American analyses of the manosphere and feminist interventions in the Indian context lies in the centrality of caste as a structuring force of digital misogyny. In India, gendered online violence cannot be adequately understood without attending to caste hierarchies that regulate bodies, speech, sexuality, and access to public space. The manosphere's rhetoric of male dispossession frequently draws, implicitly if not explicitly, on upper-caste assumptions of entitlement, honour, and social dominance, even as caste itself is disavowed or rendered invisible. Indian feminist scholars have repeatedly demonstrated that claims of gender-neutral or universal male victimhood function to obscure historically sedimented caste privilege. Narratives that portray men as oppressed by feminism rely on a strategic erasure of caste, class, and religious power, producing what may be described as a 'caste-blind masculinity'. This discursive manoeuvre enables dominant-caste male

subjects to position themselves as aggrieved minorities while continuing to benefit from entrenched social hierarchies. Such claims of dispossession, thus, operate less as diagnoses of inequality than as reassertions of normative authority.

Digital platforms intensify these dynamics through affordances such as anonymity, virality, and coordinated harassment. Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women, as well as Muslim women, are disproportionately targeted by forms of online violence that combine sexualized threats with casteist and communal abuse. These attacks function as mechanisms of social regulation, disciplining marginalized subjects who claim visibility, voice, or authority in digital public spheres. In this context, misogyny is inseparable from caste violence; it works to police not only gender norms but also the boundaries of social belonging. Feminist textual resistance in the Indian digital context, therefore, entails more than countering misogynistic speech. It requires exposing the casteist logics that underpin ostensibly gendered attacks and situating digital abuse within longer histories of social exclusion and humiliation. By foregrounding caste, Indian feminists challenge the universalization of the category 'man' that underlies much manospheric discourse. They insist that masculinity in India is always already caste-marked and that digital misogyny frequently operates as a means of reasserting dominant-caste power in moments of social flux.

Reading the manosphere through caste, thus, reveals it as a reactionary formation, invested in preserving hierarchical social orders under the rhetorical cover of free speech, meritocracy, or men's rights. This

sharpened caste analysis also reframes feminist resistance as a struggle over the terms of digital citizenship itself. Questions of who is allowed to speak, to dissent, and to inhabit public platforms without fear emerge as deeply political. Feminist interventions that center caste make visible the material consequences of digital discourse - silencing, exclusion, and violence, thereby linking textual resistance to broader projects of social justice and democratic transformation.

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Implications of the Study

This study has several significant implications for feminist scholarship, digital media studies, and contemporary literary discourse. First, by conceptualizing the manosphere as a digital textual ecology rather than a collection of isolated misogynistic actors, the chapter shifts analytical focus from individual pathology to structural,

discursive, and affective conditions. This reframing underscores the necessity of reading digital misogyny as a culturally productive force—one that generates meaning, subjectivities, and political alignments through repetition, affective circulation, and platform affordances. Such an approach extends Foucauldian insights on discourse and power into the terrain of algorithmically mediated publics, offering a model for analyzing other reactionary digital formations.

Second, the study demonstrates the indispensability of intersectional analysis, particularly the centrality of caste in understanding digital masculinism in the Indian context. By foregrounding how claims of male victimhood rely on the erasure of caste privilege, the chapter challenges universalized accounts of the manosphere and cautions against Eurocentric frameworks that overlook locally specific structures of domination. This has implications for global feminist theory, suggesting that transnational analyses of digital misogyny must remain attentive to historically situated hierarchies of caste, religion, and nationalism.

Third, the study advances feminist resistance as a multi-layered practice—discursive, affective, structural, and legal. It implies that effective interventions cannot be limited to counter-speech or content moderation alone but must engage platform governance, state accountability, and the affective economies that sustain misogynistic communities. Feminist textual resistance, as articulated here, becomes a mode of political praxis that links representation to material consequences such as silencing, intimidation, and exclusion.

Finally, by situating digital cultures within the scope of modern literary discourse, the study expands the field's methodological horizons. It affirms that memes, online narratives, and platformed performances of masculinity are critical texts through which contemporary struggles over gender, power, and democracy are negotiated. In doing so, the chapter positions feminism not merely as critique but as an ongoing project of reimagining more ethical, inclusive, and accountable digital publics.

Conclusion

The manosphere operates within a digital ecology shaped by algorithmic amplification, platform monetization, and uneven regimes of governance. These conditions produce a communicative environment in which reactionary discourses flourish, sustained by logics of visibility, outrage, and polarization. Feminist resistance to the manosphere may, therefore, be read as an attempt to reconfigure discursive ecologies themselves - to cultivate spaces in which counter-narratives, ethics of care, and relational modes of engagement can take form. Activist interventions, counter-speech, legal challenges, and feminist pedagogical practices collectively intervene in the infrastructural conditions that determine how texts circulate, gain legitimacy, and exercise power. This ecological framing also foregrounds the materiality of digital discourse. Online misogyny is not merely symbolic or representational; it produces concrete effects in the form of threats of violence, psychological injury, professional silencing, and physical vulnerability. Feminist textual resistance insists on the continuity between discourse and material reality,

rejecting any tendency to dismiss online abuse as immaterial, ephemeral, or inconsequential.

Across contexts, feminist resistance to the manosphere assumes multiple, intersecting forms. Symbolic interventions contest misogynistic narratives through critique, parody, and practices of re-signification. Structural interventions engage questions of platform accountability, legal regimes, and state responsibility in regulating gendered harm. Affective interventions work to interrupt economies of rage and resentment by cultivating solidarity, care, and modes of collective action that refuse masculinist scripts of antagonism. Crucially, feminist resistance is not oriented toward rebutting isolated statements or individual actors. Rather, it seeks to unsettle the discursive logics through which masculinist power is reproduced and naturalized. By exposing internal contradictions, naming structural conditions, and amplifying marginalized voices, feminist critique reconstitutes the manosphere, from a site that claims unchallenged authority into a contested and politically accountable terrain.

The manosphere constitutes a critical site in which contemporary struggles over gender, power, and meaning are actively negotiated. Read as a digital textual ecology, it illuminates the ways misogyny is produced, circulated, and legitimated through the interplay of narrative forms, affective economies, and platform infrastructures. Feminist interventions, whether articulated through media theory, political activism, or intersectional critique, thus, emerge as indispensable modes of textual resistance, contesting reactionary masculinities and working toward the reconfiguration of more just and accountable

discursive environments. By bringing global and local feminist perspectives into dialogue, this paper underscores the necessity of context-sensitive analyses that remain attentive to transnational circulations of power. In extending the scope of modern literary discourse to encompass digital textuality, the study affirms feminism not merely as a politics of representation, but as a critical practice that confronts the material and symbolic power relations shaping our shared discursive worlds.

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