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To cite this article: Charo Lacalle, Mireya Vicent-Ibáñez, Irene Sorrentino & Maria Porta (2026) *Manfluencers* and the (re)construction of dominant masculinity in homosocial online groups, Cogent Social Sciences, 12:1, 2741435, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2026.2741435](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2026.2741435)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2026.2741435>



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Published online: 18 Oct 2026.



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Manfluencers and the (re)construction of dominant masculinity in homosocial online groups

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ABSTRACT

This study explores manfluencers' (re)construction of dominant masculinity in homosocial online groups. The research employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the narrative construction of texts circulating on a Telegram channel, identified as one of the least studied digital spaces within the manosphere. The choice of this outlet was primarily determined by its content, reach, and the regularity of its publications, that aim to promote the creator's own self-help books. Findings reveal that the strategies used to sublimate the frustrations of young men are fundamentally rooted in the discourse of a quintessential 'real man', defined by the stoic virtue of self-mastery and the subjugation of women. The channel's messages are driven by two core myths that underpin the manosphere's value system: the centrality of female virginity and sexual exclusivity, and a longing for the lost paradise of patriarchal order. Additionally, the definition of gender roles is reinforced by the discursive construction of a series of passions that shape dominant masculinity. Biblical and classical sources from Greek and Roman historians and philosophers invoked to morally legitimize the premise that women's dependence, along with the symbolic forms of control exerted by men, constitute the fundamental basis for the refoundation of masculinity.

IMPACT STATEMENT

This study examines how manfluencers reconstruct dominant masculinity within a Spanish-language Telegram channel through narratives of self-improvement, male victimhood, patriarchal nostalgia, and benevolent sexism. Combining qualitative content analysis with semiotic analysis, the research identifies how these narratives naturalise gender hierarchies and construct women's subordination as a defining feature of ideal masculinity. The findings also show how misogynistic and reactionary ideas can be reformulated through apparently self-help-oriented and accessible formats, illustrating the processes of "normification" through which extreme manosphere discourses become more widely normalised. By examining Telegram, a comparatively underexplored environment within manosphere research, the study extends existing scholarship beyond more extensively studied mainstream platforms. Its findings contribute to understanding how contemporary digital cultures reproduce and legitimise gender inequality and highlight the importance of further research into the social and educational implications of manfluencer discourse.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 May 2026

Revised 11 September 2026

Accepted 25 September 2026

KEYWORDS

Dominant masculinity; manfluencers; sexism; misogyny; Telegram

SUBJECTS

Social Sciences; Gender Studies - Soc Sci; Social Sciences; Mass Communication; Arts & Humanities; Cultural Studies

Introduction

Over the past decades, conceptions of gender identity have undergone a substantial transformation that has mirrored the profound developments occurred in the social, cultural, and historical spheres. Men from various backgrounds are increasingly faced with challenges in how they experience masculinity, as they seek to strike a balance between tradition and change mediated by digital technologies (Davis, 2018). Instant messaging, online media, and major social networking sites have become key arenas for the ongoing redefinition of masculine identities in response to the shifts and demands of contemporary global society (Ferdiansyah et al., 2024). In this context, anonymity and weak regulation, together with

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ability to replicate content that these virtual spaces afford, have turned homosocial groups' exchanges into powerful generators of meaning, subjectivity, and agency (Farci & Scarcelli, 2024).

The renegotiation of identities in men's bonding platforms simultaneously generates opportunities for both resistance and transformation, while reinforcing entrenched and problematic patterns such as the reproduction of gender inequality (Farci & Scarcelli, 2024) or the encouragement of male participants' harassment behaviors (Semenzin & Bainotti, 2020). Even those emergent masculinities that contest online manifestations of patriarchy and dominance do not always present alternatives that fully embody the principle of equality (Myrntinen, 2019). Consequently, the dynamics of challenging and reproducing gender norms—which are continuously performed, enacted, contested, and resisted—often enable the pervasive dissemination of prejudices against women (Hopkins & Giazitzoglu, 2024; Souza et al., 2023).

Amidst these dynamics, a growing number of male-dominated communities—widely known as the manosphere—have evolved into hotbeds of sexism and misogyny. This loose confederacy of men's interest groups is most notably characterized by advocating sexist and misogynist views (Ging, 2019). They portray women as manipulative, privileged, or untrustworthy, while paradoxically presenting themselves as democratic spaces of gender generation (Rothermel, 2021).

To the extent that prejudices are increasingly spreading within a contemporary socio-political environment marked by the rise of alt-right movements, where digital exchanges often reinforce biases that foster men's exclusionary behaviours (Nagle, 2017). In this sense 'the concept of masculinity offers a crucial analytical lens for understanding the gender politics that unite the far right in its broad sense and the manosphere' (Gottzén et al., 2026, p. 2).

Researchers have argued that contemporary online homosociality amplifies social pressures to conform to masculinist norms, encourages competition, and repeatedly marginalizes women by positioning them as outsiders or objects (Rothermel, 2023). Within these digital environments, sex, gender, and sexual identities are (re)constructed through a symbiotic nexus of reflexive and routine practices that resonate with the individual's personal life history (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2022). Consequently, nostalgia for the patriarchal past has become the primary emotional driver behind political populist messages, acting as a powerful catalyst for intolerance and discrimination (Burns & Paz Martin, 2025; Panico, 2024).

This article investigates the role of manfluencers: internet personalities who weaponize highly performative and extremist notions of masculinity, and who promote regressive, sexist ideas about women in shaping contemporary discourses of men's perceptions on manhood and womanhood (Wescott et al., 2024). The study analyses the photographs and messages disseminated through a Spanish-language Telegram channel to identify the semiotic strategies and discursive structures underpinning the reconstruction of dominant masculinity and its relationship with subordinated femininity. The goal of the research is to categorize men's victimization frameworks and elucidate the rearticulation of reactionary masculinity. It further examines how underlying sexism and misogyny are self-reinforcing and perpetuate the manosphere (James, 2024).

The research premises that hegemonic masculinity is neither a fixed character type nor a mere synonym for dominant men. Rather, it constitutes a historically mobile configuration of gender practice that embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of patriarchal legitimacy. As Messerschmidt (2019) emphasizes, Connell's original focus on the legitimation of unequal gender relations remains essential to the concept: a masculinity only achieves hegemonic status when it successfully justifies the dominant position of men and the subordination of women through cultural ascendancy and consent. In this context, Messerschmidt (2018) and Messerschmidt and Bridges (2022) argue that gender is enacted within discursive social structures—sign systems and representations that produce culturally significant meanings and establish orders of 'truth' in specific situations. Consequently, the images and language circulating on digital platforms like Telegram function as a social structure that (re)constructs masculinities through embodied and accountable practice.

Digital fratriarchies and the performance of masculinity

The manosphere's trajectory is best understood through Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) reformulated framework, which replaces linear migration narratives with a geography of masculinities operating

at local, regional, and global levels. While initial subcultures were cultivated in niche, fringe environments, they subsequently underwent a process of 'normification', where born-digital cultural artifacts diffused into major social media platforms (Solea & Sugiura, 2023). This mainstreaming has been driven by algorithmic amplification and specific platform affordances, which facilitate the normalization of toxic ideologies among social natives (Regehr et al., 2025).

Currently, the manosphere maintains a dual presence: it saturates mainstream social media platforms through 'in(cel)fluencers' (Regehr et al., 2025), while more extreme discourse is pushed into closed niche spaces like Telegram, Gab, and Discord (Gerrand et al., 2025; Solea & Sugiura, 2023). Despite this migration, the vernacular discourse of victimhood remains a pervasive global driver, anchored in the belief that modern society unjustly privileges women while marginalizing men (James, 2024). Consequently, strategies such as derogatory labelling and women-blaming continue to reinforce reactionary male identities across the entire digital spectrum (Gerrand et al., 2025; Massanari, 2017).

Overall, the increasingly widespread dissemination of reactionary masculinities' perspectives across digital platforms reflects the enduring dominance of men, in a technology industry moulded by the sexist viewpoints of its predominantly male creators. Rankin employs the expression 'tech fratriarchy' to describe the gendered power relations and systemic exclusion in digital technological environments, which foster not only masculinity but also misogyny:

The concept of tech fratriarchy invokes the ways in which those with power in the 1950s and 1960s made computing masculine and white. Fratriarchy also invokes fraternities and universities, thereby drawing out university computer centers –and, later, college dorms and tech campuses– as key sites in the making of sexist tech. Significantly, however, my definition of tech fratriarchy includes not just masculinity but also misogyny (Rankin, 2022, p. 179).¹

Tech fratriarchy echoes how digital platforms have progressively become influential arenas for discussing the formation and reinforcement of homosocial bonds among men, by creating shared online spaces where masculine identity is frequently affirmed through the scrutiny and denigration of women. The interactions within these digital 'locker rooms' primarily serve to sustain sexual objectification and perpetuate social dominance hierarchies, which legitimize and normalize sexist and misogynistic contents (Marrone et al., 2019). By doing so, they reinforce ritualized masculinist practices that are central to the reproduction of homosocial ties that facilitate the legitimation of gender hierarchy (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2022).

Still, the reinforcement of homosocial bonds occurs not only through direct displays of strength or dominance, but also by showcasing physical appearance, technical skills, and ironic presentation. While these behaviours are constantly downplayed by participants as harmless banter or jocular exchanges, they operate as mechanisms that accentuate gendered power asymmetries and normalize psychological and sexual harassment as a prescriptive expression of masculinity.

Manfluencers: the prophets of dominant masculinity

Fratriarchies elevate controversial influencers (such as Andrew Tate, Rollo Tommasi or Myron Gaines) to the status of the manosphere's prophets of reactionary masculinity, exploiting men's perceived sense of threat to propagate misogyny (Renström & Bäck, 2024). Their appeal largely derives from their celebratory confrontation between ideal masculinity and women's rights (O'Rourke et al., 2024). Their sexist and misogynistic messages capitalize on men's anxieties by invoking the loss of dominant masculinity markers, promoting regressive ideologies, and framing them as both empowering and indispensable (Gerrand et al., 2025; Haslop et al., 2024; Oliffe et al., 2023; Roberts et al., 2026).

Manfluencers are influencers 'with commonly used discourses, making entry into this type of content creation relatively easy' (Lott et al., 2025, pp. 8-9). Frequently linked to the global right, they act as 'meta-political agents' by endorsing extreme and decontextualized gender ideologies to advance the reassertion of dominant masculinity (Maly, 2023). The manliness they promote is a sociocultural construct built upon social domination, self-affirmation, aggressiveness, and a lack of consideration for others (Katirci et al., 2023; Malonda-Vidal et al., 2021).

Bujalka et al. (2022) consider manfluencers' monetization strategies as a form of 'organized extortion', as they manufacture men's identity crises to market relief through the prescription of an essentialist, hierarchical, and reactionary model of masculinity. In the same line, Dhoest's analysis of mainstream masculinities in TikTok revealed that attracting attention and monetizing user engagement appeared to be the primary goal of manfluencers' reward programs, which 'requires at least 10,000 followers and 100,000 video views in the last 30 days' (Dhoest, 2025, p. 2213). Other authors have strongly warned about the pervasive risk of disinformation posed by these influencers, who, despite condemning men's harmful activities, uphold a rigid ideal of self-discipline that may reinforce harmful masculine norms (Lott et al., 2025).

The above observations are particularly relevant, considering that manfluencers mainly appeal to insecure and disillusioned adolescent and young adult males who pursue an ideal of manhood grounded in self-reliance and stoicism: two masculine norms that do not necessarily constitute effective pathways to self-fulfilment. Indeed, while adherence to these norms may help regulate negative impulses and habits such as violent outbursts, alcohol abuse, and pornography consumption, it is equally true that emotional self-fulfilment can paradoxically be undermined by rigid self-reliance and stoicism (Montiel et al., 2023). Not to mention the mental health risks experienced by many men due to the pressure to conform to traditional roles (Barry, 2023; Borinca et al., 2021; Iacoviello et al., 2022; Kagan & Mahat-Shamir, 2023).

While the digital fratriarchy is a male-centred phenomenon, its discourse often constructs a specific vision of femininity rooted in ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This framework consists of two complementary attitudes to categorize women. On one hand, hostile sexism is expressed through overtly antagonistic and derogatory attitudes toward women perceived as a threat to male status. On the other hand, benevolent sexism involves a subjectively positive—protective and soft—orientation that idealizes women who conform to traditional roles. Despite its affectionate tone, benevolent sexism is fundamentally patronizing, justifying women's dependency and subordination to the alpha male provider.

The myths of dominant masculinity

Research has shown that manfluencers manipulate men's identity formation by promoting specific typecasts that reinforce a constrained—and often detrimental—conception of masculinity, while simultaneously fostering positive social connections and facilitating problematic ideological shifts (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023; Pastrana de la Flor & del Río Almagro, 2022).² These processes of renegotiation between backlash and renewal in homosocial outlets are grounded in the display of an ideal embodied in the physical and moral characteristics of the alpha male: the very 'real man'. This archetype is frequently encountered in the discourses of manfluencers and refers to an exemplary representation of manliness that serves as a yardstick by which men can assess both themselves and others (Greene et al., 2011).

The 'real man' is, therefore, constructed as the dominant male: a protecting provider seeking to restore the legitimacy of the patriarchal order, whose corollary is a submissive woman envisioned through the lens of biological determinism (Krendel, 2020). Crucially, drawing on Connell's (2005 [1995]) and Messerschmidt's (2012, 2018) relational framework, dominant masculinity must be understood as a configuration of gender practice that exists precisely through its positioning in relation to femininity. Within this paradigm, the (re)construction of dominant male identities is inextricably linked to the discursive production of emphasized femininity: a preferred performance of womanhood defined by compliance and accommodation to men's interests.

The 'ideal woman' that is deemed to be worthy of the 'real man' embodies all the stereotypes of subordinated femininity. As researchers repeatedly find out, she is nonthreatening, loyal, and predisposed to accepting traditional roles (Franklin-Paddock et al., 2025); nonautonomous (Roberts et al., 2026); infantilized and immature, both intellectually and emotionally (Lacalle et al., 2024); sexually exclusive and devoted to supporting her man (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023); submissive, nurturing and servile (Maly, 2023); deprived of agency (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022); and in need of protection (Jones et al., 2026). Consequently, women who pursue roles that go beyond submission to men are frequently regarded as morally suspect, due to perceived deficiencies in care and attention, illegitimate aspirations of power, and a lack of ethical reliability, as philosopher Kate Manne (2017) argues.

The composite 'ideal woman' portrayed by manfluencers epitomizes the features of benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). However, rather than constituting a subtle form of control over women, this practice primarily emerges as a strategy to pre-empt censorship or removal from platforms, which could occur when hostile sexist views are expressed openly. Hence, in contrast to the extreme discourse which positions women as the enemy to be defeated, benevolent sexism invokes the purported inferiority of women to state the superiority of men (Bareket & Fiske, 2023).

The discursive construction of sexism and misogyny revolves around two constitutive myths of masculine fantasy: a woman's virginity and sexual exclusivity; and the lost paradise of dominant masculinity. The operation of the virginity myth works on two distinct levels. On one level, it functions as a patriarchal tool used to police and control women through sexual exclusivity (Cerioli, 2018; Dickel & Evolvi, 2023; Lilly, 2016); and on the other level, it is also invoked to vindicate misogyny and, in more extreme cases, even violence (Sparks et al., 2022). All the same, the idealization of the immaculate femineity by both forms of sexism (benevolent and hostile) attaches 'a woman's worth to her virginity/purity' (Lilly, 2016, p. 63), by representing sex as inherently degrading to her (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022).

The myth of the return to the lost paradise, where contemporary men's despair will be assuaged, amplifies the performative side of an 'imagined masculinity' founded on authoritarianism, physical strength, self-confidence, and emotional detachment (Dhar, 2024; Tanner & Gillardin, 2025). Nostalgia for the masculine privileges of the past, in turn, fuels narratives about gender hierarchies (Burns & Paz Martin, 2025; Haslop et al., 2024). This passion operates as a sophisticated affective device—common in both manosphere and broader reactionary spaces—that exploits 'collective mourning' feeling for an idealized past (Lounela et al., 2025) to frame the restoration of patriarchal order as a solution to contemporary insecurity (MacKenzie & Foster, 2017). Yet the objective invariably remains the same: to legitimize sexism and misogyny through the discursive construction of a shared episteme which is intended to transmute mythical thought into an ostensibly rational critique. The mechanisms for re-signifying the sense of nostalgia induced by this second myth involve transforming the past into a golden age and symbolically reappropriating the 'collective memory' (Kessous & Roux, 2007). To this end, the patriarchal society of the 1950s is idealized, while the reactionary backlash is obscured by the promise of a return to an Eden for disillusioned men, united in 'collective mourning' (Lounela et al., 2025).

The self-victimizing imaginary underpinning these narratives of nostalgia thus becomes a pattern that various scholars have described as the 'declinism theory' of U.S. hegemony: the promise, fuelled by Donald Trump, to restore traditional power in order to capitalize on the discontent of broad sectors of the population. The exemplary nature of 'declinism' lies not only in the geopolitical reflection which emerges from the need to make sense of a changing world, but also in its role as the quintessential gender narrative of masculinity in crisis (Eroukhmanoff, 2025). As MacKenzie and Foster (2017, p. 220) pointed out, masculinity nostalgia in time of upheaval systematically 'involves the yearning for gender roles that are assumed to be 'the solution' to current forms of insecurity'.

Needless to say, even though nostalgia for dominant masculinity represents nothing more than what philosopher Judith Butler described as the chimera of 'a nostalgic fury for an impossible past',³ it is far from innocuous. Its strength lies in the power of this passion to transform the 'obsessive longing' for the past into a logic that connects "value" and "the object lost" (Greimas, 1988).

This article is structured as follows: The data and methods section lead into the results, which synthesize the analysis across four dimensions: the (re)construction of traditional masculinity, the discursive framework of (male) identity versus (female) alterity, the mobilization of old myths, and the narratives of benevolent sexism. The paper concludes with a discussion of the main findings and offers brief insights into future investigations.

Data and methods

This research combines qualitative content analysis and semiotic analysis to examine the narrative articulation of dominant masculinity on Telegram, one of the least explored digital environments within the manosphere.⁴ The analytical sample was created by conducting an exhaustive search for the terms

'macho' and 'masculinidad' [masculinity], aimed at identifying the relevant public channels on this app (Jost et al., 2023). The search was carried on two different devices: the mobile app and the desktop computer app, in order to prevent personalized results based on the user.

The choice of the 'Hombre Alfa' channel (@hombrealfa77) was primarily determined by its content, reach, and the regularity of its publications. In terms of subject matter, its stated purpose aligns closely with the central theme of this paper: Rescuing the Masculinity, Dignity, and Value of men in society and family. Furthermore, although the channel has a considerable following on Telegram (13,100 subscribers), its dissemination extends well beyond that platform: 'Hombre Alfa' interactions are also shared on Facebook, with 350,000 followers; on X (@HOMBREALFA7), with 92,000 followers; and on Instagram (@_hombrealfa7), with 230,000 followers. The regularity of the publications (an average of two per week made up of most messages) is due to a promotional strategy of their creator, whereby he marketed his own self-help books on the reconstruction of dominant masculinity.⁵ This radial structure made the Telegram channel the mothership of his transmedia activities (Jenkins, 2006). In this way, the limited room for dialogue on the app (Gangopadhyay et al., 2025) was optimized to generate a continuous flow of information through which to propagate the ideas developed in his self-published books.

After initially downloading 6,279 messages using Telegram's export tool, those that did not meet the thematic inclusion criteria were excluded. Specifically, only messages produced by the channel owner that communicated the creator's own ideas and interpretations were retained. These messages consisted of a photograph with an interpretative text overlay and were consistently identified by the creator's watermark. This resulted in a total of 1,520 single messages, published between February 4, 2024 (the channel's inauguration date) and December 31, 2025. A quantitative content analysis was conducted on these 1,520 messages, examining the following variables: image framing, dominant figure, context, relationship between text and image, female stereotypes, expressions of sexism, male stereotypes, rhetorical devices, and the myths and passions represented. This analysis enabled the identification of seven thematic strands: characteristics of the ideal man, characteristics of the ideal woman, characteristics of the undesirable woman, male nostalgia for predominantly patriarchal times, benevolent sexism, male victimhood, and the use of authoritative discourses or authority figures. The results obtained informed the semiotic analysis, which sought to examine the selected texts regarding the relevant aspects of the discursive construction of the object of study.

The sample used for the qualitative analysis consisted of 456 messages, which were representative both of the different thematic strands highlighted in the quantitative analysis and of the evolution of the channel itself over the period under study. This corpus was constructed through the cross-analysis of the variables identified in the quantitative analysis, allowing for the identification and selection of messages where two or more variables converged. To ensure that the sample was representative of the channel's evolution throughout the study period, messages were selected following the cross-analysis of the variables. The preceding qualitative content analysis identified three distinct stages in the channel's development: its initial stage, consolidation, and subsequent evolution. Based on this classification, an equal number of messages was selected from each stage, thereby ensuring that the qualitative sample adequately represented the channel's evolution over the period under study.

Results

The semiotic analysis yielded findings grounded in an initial empirical mapping, which provided the basis for identifying recurring patterns across the 1,520 messages collected, thereby informing the selection of representative narrative structures for deeper scrutiny. The ensuing results address the (re)construction of traditional masculinity through the alpha male archetype, followed by an examination of (male) identity vs. (female) alterity and the discursive objectification of women. Subsequent sections evaluate how old myths, religious morality, and stoic ethics provide legitimacy to the patriarchal order, culminating in an assessment of the narratives of benevolent sexism.

The (re)construction of dominant masculinity

The owner of the channel presents himself as a role model ('advice from an alpha'), with the aim of guiding his subscribers through the process of self-improvement he promotes ('my goal is for you to be

a good husband, a good father, a good man'). His intended audience is primarily made up of young men in a constant state of crisis, a state narratively constructed through references to suicide, depression, and mental health problems ('Nothing on this planet is worth ending your life for, because what comes after is fascinating').

Most of the comments allude to the two initial phases of the journey of the beta male ('simp', 'doormat' or young man financially dependent on his family) in search of reactionary masculinity: *manipulation*, expressed by adherence to the precepts set out, and *competence* or attainment of the qualities required to face the journey (Greimas & Courtés, 1982). Thus, the initiator notes the disoriented addressee's state of lack ('I know you are asking yourself: what am I lacking? What am I failing at?') and points the way to improve ('How to gain confidence? Earn money, go to the gym, focus on yourself'); ('Laws of an alpha: don't cry for women, don't spend money, don't compete'). It also prescribes a set of practices to avoid, such as masturbation, pornography and sexual activities outside of marriage or for no other purpose than immediate pleasure ('What happens if you give up porn and hand jobs?').

The imaginary of dominant masculinity is shaped by an appeal to fraternity aimed at positioning the bond between men above any other type of relationship with women ('he is not a man if he betrays a male friend for a woman'; 'don't compete for women'). The rest of the principles outlined are evidence of a neoliberal conception of human relations embodied in the use of numerous defining terms of the capitalist paradigm ('invest in your body, it will give you confidence and vitality'), the role of which is to reinforce the two guiding principles of the discursive articulation: 'investment' in oneself and 'transaction' with women.

On a visual level, there are references to recognizable characters from the pop imaginary to illustrate the process of transition from beta man to alpha man (Jake Gyllenhaal, Jason Statham, Henry Cavill, Matthew McConaughey and Kaká, among others). Each of these celebrities refigures different archetypes of the ideal man: McConaughey represents the tough guy associated with luxury and status; Gyllenhaal embodies the elegant, self-sufficient man, but also the bloody, resilient fighter reflected in the well-built gym guy. The latter is also exemplified through the muscled corporeality of the classic hero exemplified by Cavill, or the virtues seen in Kaká (talent, discipline). Will Smith, on the contrary, personalizes the beta man's weakness, appealing to the media's prior knowledge of his private life to reinforce the exemplary function of the antimodel.

These icons generally operate as ideological capsules, combining brief slogans, capitalized typography, and backgrounds that reinforce the paradigmatic nature of the proposed archetypes. All alpha men (25.9% of men represented) hold a status that aims to instill security and self-control in the addressees, as opposed to the images of confrontation or humiliation embodied by sexualized women (42.0% of women represented). The objective remains clear and consistent: to legitimize a masculine code based on self-sufficiency and control, while warning the addressee of the dangers that threaten dominant masculinity.

(Male) identity vs. (female) alterity

The reconstruction of dominant masculinity would not be possible without its counterpart: a form of alterity embodied by femininity. To this end, the man is constructed as the originator of his own ethical code and positions the woman as an object of evaluation and a recipient of his judgements. Thus, within a discursive framework that calls upon men to reclaim their role as dominant subjects, women exist only as objects of domination.

To guide its audience in selecting the ideal female partner, the channel presents a catalogue of female profiles to be avoided, grouped under the trope of the 'bad woman'. Alterity is thus legitimized through the juxtaposition of traits that are sometimes even mutually contradictory, intended to underscore the perceived insubstantiality of the feminine realm. In this way, women are portrayed as being inherently immature, whimsical, ignorant of their own needs and/or desires, and often engaging in self-contradiction ('they want the bad boy and then complain about him'; 'they say they don't want to be sexualized, but they sexualize themselves'). The comments blaming female hormones for their erratic behavior ('during the follicular phase of ovulation, women are more prone to infidelity') reinforce an identification with

nature and, consequently, with irrationality, aimed at stripping women of their agency in order to reduce them to a mere object of consumption.

Sexual synecdoche is the recurrent figure of speech in the discursive construction of the woman-object, which is achieved by means of literal references ('an ass', 'a vagina', 'the crotch') or rhetorical allusions to her intimate parts ('the cave'). The metaphor of 'mileage' travelled—one of the recurring tropes in the sample analysis—alludes to 'sexual "wear and tear"' to reinforce a model of respect that is conditional on some requirements being met: women are valuable if they are modest, homely and reserved; but uninteresting if they exercise their freedom. This logic of exclusivity is exacerbated to the point of turning the sexual past of the experienced woman into a condemnation ('Nobody wants her because she is overused'), on which the specter of ageism is projected by way of scorn for improper behaviour ('At 20 she is unattainable, at 35 she is overused and has high mileage, nobody will want her'). In short, women are reified by being treated as second-hand goods or second-hand vehicles, where their value depends on the condition that they are in.

The 'virginal' woman—the antithesis of the 'used' woman—is ineluctably associated with the home. The kitchen therefore becomes one of the recurrent scenarios for reinforcing the association between the erotic and the conjugal (22.3% of the images analysed). This consolidates the link between intimacy and domesticity: young women dressed as brides or in comfortable clothes sipping a cup of coffee; couples smilingly embracing on a white countertop, accompanied by a text stating that a man gives everything only to a woman who gives everything to him ('The woman who should be treated like a queen is the one who has treated her man like a king'). In this interpretative framework, everyday objects function as signs of traditional female roles, while the smile and the welcoming environment soften the moralizing and exclusionary tone. Glorified domesticity also reinforces a spatial dichotomy that shows women's presence in the private sphere in a positive light, while portraying their participation in the public realm in a negative light. Ultimately, what is reaffirmed is the persistence of an asymmetrical model, concealed beneath the guise of false reciprocity: women's worth is measured by their devotion, capacity for sacrifice, and domesticity.

Old myths, new imaginaries

Portraying women as manipulative subjects is another thematic thread underlying the posts analysed. This conception is deeply rooted in Western culture, tracing back to the figure of Eve and her deception of Adam in the Garden of Eden, or, more specifically in the channel under study, to Delilah's betrayal of Samson to deprive him of his strength. Religious rhetoric also governs the semi-symbolic mechanism that associates the ethical category goodness/evil with the masculine and feminine, respectively, by employing references to the soul of the good man and the demon hidden in bad women ('there are beauties that hide demons, beware'). The deceptive nature of the beautiful woman also echoes another figure with a long history in the collective imaginary: the siren, in an attempt to screen out women who, despite their ability to lure men with their charms, must submit to the judgment of the patriarchal gaze ('don't fall for the siren songs of the hungry woman').

The definition of gender roles is reinforced by the discursive construction of a series of passions that shape dominant masculinity, notably including nostalgia. This 'state of distress', caused by 'the obsessive longing' for a loss (Greimas 1988, 344-345), is embodied in the rural compositions of romantic sunsets, laden with symbolism and associated with a lost agricultural and patriarchal paradise. An idealized vision of nature (golden fields, open skies, flowers) is upheld as a symbol of authenticity and placed in opposition to the urban and the modern, thereby reinforcing a value system that classifies women into those who are virtuous and those who are self-interested, exalting only the former.

There are numerous examples which link nostalgia with the idea of loss, like the kiss of a couple at sunset, supported by the premise that it is difficult to find a woman 'like those of yesteryear', who is faithful to a single man. But the images of bucolic landscapes, white dresses and straw hats, which apparently act as signs of innocence, simplicity and tradition, in fact reignites a hierarchical and exclusionary imaginary. Ultimately, the images of blonde families in idyllic landscapes evoke the bucolic simplicity of a pastoral Arcadia and a Eurocentric ideal of the past, designed to obscure the diverse national and social backgrounds within contemporary society.

The contractual mechanism triggered in all these cases establishes a contrast between the originator (a projection of the channel's owner and the alpha male he embodies) and the addressee, whom he

seeks to flatter ('the prize is not her, it's you'). Here, nostalgia functions as a catalyst for passion, seeking to turn deprivation into an object of desire and thereby transform emotion into a moralizing pathway towards dominant masculinity. As a result of this operation, the invocation of past and traditional values unfolds the benevolent sexism that surrounds the messages analysed: a woman is deemed to deserve respect only insofar as she conforms to patriarchal roles, assigned by a man who sets himself up as judge and guarantor of her recognition.

Religious morality and stoic ethics in the construction of the alpha man

The construction of nostalgic passion is reinforced by the introduction of biblical and stoic quotations designed to intensify the sense of loss of dominant masculinity. The *magister dixit* principle, or appeal to authority, is invoked to link the rarity of the 'virtuous woman' to a mythical and religious past. The resulting figurative pattern combines sacred references with highly aestheticized imagery (hypersexualized women, muscular men, and opulent settings) which serves to highlight the moralizing and prophetic tone of the commentaries.

The example of Samson mentioned above resignifies this biblical fall as a lesson in self-control in the face of female seduction; yet here male vulnerability lies not in a lack of physical strength but in emotional subjugation. From a semiotic point of view, it can be argued that the tension between visual attraction and textual condemnation produces an effect of 'temptation and punishment', aimed at shaping a stoic-inspired framework in which authentic virility is defined by endurance and discipline.

The channel includes references to Heraclitus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, among other Greek and Roman classical historians and philosophers—in a complementary manner to the resignification of biblical myths—to legitimize the masculine ideal based on self-control and self-improvement. Adversity then becomes a necessary test of resilience: the sculpted body of the muscular men in the gym is presented as a gem polished by hardship. But the contrast between the masculine and the feminine reaches its climax in confrontation of the sexualized woman with the reference to temptation and weakness in the texts accompanying the photographs ('Lust, miserable indulgence of the weak', Seneca).

By reasserting the narrative of self-control in the face of desire, the principle of authority adds the weight of founding myths to the ideal of a reconfigured masculinity. Once again, the aim is to associate the myth of ideal femininity with the aesthetics of nostalgia, thereby reinforcing the connection between dignity and respect, on the one hand, and the conservative ideology of modesty and sacrifice, on the other. The result of all these discursive procedures is invariably the establishment of a dual code: the masculine, as an active subject forged by adversity; and the feminine, as a symbolic object of virtue or danger. An alpha-stoic imaginary that legitimizes gender hierarchies under the guise of classical wisdom and moral discipline.

Conditional respect: narratives of benevolent sexism

The dominant narrative values in the analysed images fit perfectly with the description of benevolent sexism made by Glick and Fiske in 1996. This is a seemingly positive—protective and even tender—attitude which, however, perpetuates traditional roles and gender inequalities. This type of inequality consolidates relationships of female dependency and subordination that are presented as desirable behaviour because they conform to patriarchal norms.

At the family level, the attitudes described above reinforce traditional values that are then transmitted to the new generations. For example, the negative judgment of single mothers—on the grounds that only women who conform to the traditional ideal are considered acceptable—constitutes a discursive practice that is consistent with the proposed ideological model. In relation to this pattern, images of very young, bespectacled, natural-looking, angelic girls become role models, accompanied by messages that contrast the (idealized) 'traditional woman' with the (objectionable) 'party girl' to extol purity and intelligence, and advocate respect for the ideal feminine archetype. Other representations assign to women the role of 'educating' men through an appearance that exalts modesty—discreet clothing and makeup, and a reserved demeanor. Such comments frequently use the imperative form to construct a normative and paternalistic tone ('treat her well'; 'honour her'). In parallel, the visual composition highlights the

man's position of leadership: a male hand holding the woman's hand reinforces the idea of guidance and protection.

The aim is to cement the notion that feminine virtue is both visual and passive, inseparably bound to decorum and restraint. Thus, the respect and kindness invoked in these seemingly positive comments are reserved exclusively for the 'good woman'. Consequently, a moral precept is introduced that is defined by the man, the active subject who bestows upon the passive female subject the recognition necessary for her transformation into a feminine object.

From a semiotic perspective, this set of narrative strategies can be said to construct a relational model grounded in economic dependence and symbolic control, albeit disguised as care and provision. The implicit affective contract naturalizes this asymmetry, as the woman is presented as the dispenser of affection and domestic care, and the man as the beneficiary and evaluator. The implicit and concealed inequality behind this benevolent sexism comes to the fore in statements to the effect that not even an appeal to religion can redeem or mitigate the unforgivable grievance of 'sexual mileage'. Proof of this are, for example, the insults alluding to this topic that accompany 69.0% of the female representations ('unfaithful', 'prostitute', 'Onlyfans girl', etc.).

Finally, it should be noted that the discursive construction of visual resources strengthens this hierarchy while the capitalized typography and the objectifying framing of the images (70.0%) intensify this authoritative tone. The enunciator directly addresses a male audience in a prescriptive tone, indicating the attributes that make a woman valuable. The smile and bodily closeness soften the harshness of the message, enveloping female subordination in an aesthetic of tenderness and harmony. The result is, in all cases, a 'reading contract' (Eco 1979) that associates the idea of happy love with adherence to traditional and asymmetrical roles, obsessively refigured in the commentaries analysed.

Conclusions

The channel analysed is presented as a self-help space, aimed at sublimating the frustration of young people through a return to reactionary masculine values. The qualitative approach demonstrates that Telegram functions as a structured digital fraternity that effectively sublimates young men's frustrations. Far from being a general self-help space, it acts as a local node that re-naturalizes the role of the male provider through the relational construction of emphasized femininity.

The study confirms that the channel's affordances allow for a covert dissemination of manosphere tropes—such as lookism and male victimhood—that are sanitized for a broader audience but maintain a toxic core. By examining this closed environment, we gain a deeper understanding of how the manosphere contributes to legitimise gender hierarchies and to restore patriarchal privileges in an era of perceived crisis.

In order to re-naturalise the roles of the alpha-male provider, the channel owner constructs himself as a 'mentor' capable of guiding the addressees on their hero's journey (Vogler, 2007) towards dominant masculinity. This strategy functions as a form of 'organized extortion' (Bujalka et al., 2022), manufacturing identity crises to market relief through a traditional model of manhood grounded in self-reliance and stoicism (Montiel et al., 2023). The outcome of the proposed voyage is a rigidly structured social hierarchy that subordinates women to men, and values them solely as bearers of traditional virtues.

The discursive articulation of the messages analysed is based on the two myths that define the value system of the manosphere: the women's virginity and sexual exclusivity; and the nostalgia for the lost paradise of a patriarchal society. This passion operates as an affective device—common in both manosphere and broader reactionary spaces—that utilizes 'collective mourning' (Lounela et al., 2025) to frame the restoration of patriarchal order as a solution to contemporary insecurity (MacKenzie & Foster, 2017). The narratives delineated define an exclusionary universe rooted in the ancient conception whereby women's dependence and the symbolic control exercised by men constitute the very essence of masculinity.

The study is a novel approach to semiotic analysis, based on a representative sample of the plays used to naturalize the dominant status of men. The results obtained revalidate the principles and strategies defined in the different contributions of the literature review on the subject provided in the first part of the article. Ultimately, these findings are timely, as they document the manosphere's evolution

into a 'neo-manosphere' (Gerrand et al., 2025), characterized by the 'normification' of extreme content (Solea & Sugiura, 2023). By identifying these semiotic structures, the study provides an essential foundation for addressing the resurgence of male supremacy in digital cultures and its tangible impact on social and educational settings (Lacalle et al., 2024; Wescott et al., 2024). In this sense, it can be said that the channel analysed constitutes an 'exemplary text' (Barthes, 1975) of benevolent sexism: a true guidebook for the domestication of women aimed at restoring the privileges of dominant masculinity.

Important questions remain to be studied in greater depth, such as the real impact of these manfluencers on the young men they address, as well as the narrative articulation of benevolent sexism and the return to dominant masculinity within the discourses of the far right. To expand on these issues, future research would benefit from cross-cultural approaches that contrast these pan-Hispanic dynamics with both Anglophone contexts and distinct nation-specific frameworks. Such investigations are urgently required, with the overarching objective of informing public policy and educational programs designed to counter misogyny.

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The data analyzed in this study were collected from the public Telegram channel 'Hombre Alfa' (@hombrealfa77), which is openly accessible to the general public without registration barriers or privacy restrictions. The data usage complies with Telegram's Terms of Service regarding public content. No copyrighted materials were reproduced or redistributed. All text and data metrics were utilized strictly for academic, non-commercial research purposes under fair use principles, and all user analytical data have been fully anonymized to protect privacy.

Notes

1. For a more comprehensive definition of the concept of fratriarchy, see the eponymous entry in Kathleen Starck in the *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities* (2007, p. 216).
2. See also the report *Being a young man online Tensions, complexities and possibilities*. Available at: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/Being-a-young-man-online-June-2024.pdf>
3. Judith Butler interviewed by *El País*, December 15, 2024. Available at: <https://english.elpais.com/culture/2024-12-15/judith-butler-philosopher-if-you-sacrifice-a-minority-like-trans-people-you-are-operating-within-a-fascist-logic.html>.
4. Telegram has mostly been studied through the lens of far-right radicalization, extremist network formation and conspiracy theories, with specific attention to misogyny in works such as Alvisi et al. (2024) and Zhong et al. (2024).
5. *Porno enemigo de la masculinidad* (2024); *El despertar de los Simp* (2024); *Recupera tu masculinidad* (2024); *La verdad oculta de las mujeres* (2025); *El hombre de alto valor* (2025); *Hombre domesticado* (2025); *10 Secretos para ser atractivo* (2025); *La mujer oscura* (2025); *Muerte al porno* (2025).

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CRediT: **Charo Lacalle**: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Mireya Vicent-Ibáñez**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Irene Sorrentino**: Investigation, Writing – original draft; **María Porta**: Investigation, Writing – original draft.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This research was conducted within the framework of the project Challenging Online Narratives of Political Hatred and Misogyny (ref. PID2023-147506OB-I00), funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation and the Spanish Research Agency (AEI) of the Government of Spain.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, CL, upon reasonable request.

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