

# Digital Misogyny and Its Impact on Youth Culture in Manipur

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence and widespread popularity of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok have given rise to a novel demographic referred to as “influencers”. Influencers are people with a substantial social media following who possess the ability to sway the opinions and behaviours of their audience. Misogynistic influencers, like Andrew Tate, propagate ideas and beliefs that are detrimental to women. Tate, a former professional fighter turned media personality has garnered a huge following by expressing derogatory views on women and sex among other things, particularly appealing to men and young boys. His influence extends globally, reaching even the youth in Manipur due to the pervasive nature of the Internet. While the North East region of India is often considered to be more progressive in terms of gender equality compared to the rest of India, the reality is that women still face subordination in various aspects of life, partly due to entrenched beliefs in their inferiority to men. The misogynistic rhetoric of people like Tate will only serve to exacerbate this situation, necessitating awareness about their influence and the harmful effects of their message. This paper will briefly examine the evolution of online misogynistic influencers and their surge in popularity. It will also explore how this phenomenon originated in the Western world but has transcended geographical boundaries to reach even Manipur, a small state in India. It will further make an attempt to assess the impact of online misogynistic influencers like Tate on the youth in Manipur in the hope of revealing the pervasiveness of misogynistic narratives and their detrimental effects on the attitudes, behaviours and perceptions of youth in Manipur.

**Keywords:** social media, misogyny, Manipur, youth, gender stereotypes

Andrew Tate, the former professional fighter turned media personality, has garnered both criticism and admiration from millions through his viral rants about themes like male dominance, female submission and wealth. He is part of a broader trend where influencers utilize platforms like YouTube, TikTok and podcasts to champion the rights of what they label as high value or hypermasculine men. Their ideas have influenced countless young men who perceive them as role models embodying masculinity. The emergence of online figures like Tate as symbols of masculinity are rooted in the manosphere movement. Manosphere is an umbrella term that refers to a loosely connected network of online communities like social media accounts, blogs and online forums, characterized by its shared misogyny and views on toxic masculinity. Members of this network focus on a range of topics related to men and masculinity, including men's rights, gender roles, relationships, the economy, and feminism. Central to their beliefs is the perception that Western culture is under threat and being undermined by feminism. They argue that women hold undue influence over cultural norms and attribute societal challenges and personal failures to feminist ideals.

The origins of the manosphere movement can be traced back to the men's rights movement as the manosphere is often viewed as an online extension or outgrowth of this movement. The men's rights movement began to gain momentum in the early 1970s, spurred by activists within the men's liberation movement who applied feminist perspectives on gender to scrutinize traditional male roles. These activists contended that societal gender norms were oppressive to men just as they were to women, pointing out instances of institutional discrimination against men, such as the requirement for men alone to register for military service. Additionally, they often attributed men's challenges to women or feminism, asserting that these forces contributed to the difficulties faced by men, a perspective echoed by members of the manosphere.

The manosphere comprises of various subcultures with their own unique and distinct characteristics. The table below delineates them: (Leeming, 2023)

Sub Culture	Description
Pick up Artists	The primary objective of such online communities is to pursue sexual access to women, based on the belief that men are inherently entitled to it. These groups reduce women to mere sexual objects and actively instruct their members on manipulative strategies to pressure women into sex.
Men's rights activists	This group believes that feminism has stripped them of their rights and freedoms as men. What distinguishes them from other subcultures within the broader manosphere ecosystem is their attempt to legitimise misogynistic narratives through the use of academic or pseudo-academic language. Their discourse centres on the idea that feminism, through advances such as women's rights, gender equality, and increased visibility of women in public life, poses an existential threat to men.
MGTOW	Stands for Men Going Their Own Way. This community believes that the best way to avoid harm is to minimise or entirely avoid contact with women. Their reasoning stems from the belief that women are parasitic by nature, capable of exploiting and ultimately ruining men's lives.
Incels	Incels is short for Involuntary Celibates. This group represents the most dangerous and extremist faction within the manosphere. They believe that, as men, they are entitled to sex, and when this entitlement is unfulfilled, they blame women. As a result, they believe women deserve to be punished. This deep-seated resentment toward women can manifest in everyday misogynistic attitudes as well as in more extreme and violent forms, including rape discourse, threats, and even actual instances of sexual assault and murder.

In spite of their unique characteristics, these subcultures of the manosphere coalesce around a common perspective which revolves around the belief that women wield dominance and experience greater societal privileges than men. This belief is further elucidated through the concept of the “Red Pill”, which serves as another unifying factor among these

communities. The Red Pill analogy originates from the 1999 movie “The Matrix,” where the main character, Neo faces a choice between two pills, a blue and a red one. Opting for the blue pill signifies embracing ignorance and living in a state of illusion, while choosing the red pill signifies awakening to the harsh realities of life. In the context of the manosphere, the red pill is believed to open men’s eyes to what is perceived as feminism’s bias against men.

Online influencers like Tate depict high value men as affluent, self-assured, powerful, sexually assertive and deserving of subservience from women. The appeal of influencers like Tate to boys and young men is undeniable, raising the question of why these influencers garner such widespread appeal and attract large followings. This phenomenon can be understood within the broader context of the internet evolving into a platform where individuals with grievances can readily connect with like-minded peers, fostering the formation of echo chambers and rabbit holes. The rise of influencers like Tate should be situated within these digital spaces as they capitalize on the ability to resonate with audiences who share similar perspectives and concerns. Influencers like Tate have built their identity around discussing women and sex in a derogatory manner, while emphasizing the importance of physical fitness and financial success. These figures also often promote regressive and unimaginative notions about gender, relationships and dating. They serve as aspirational figures, showcasing power and allure, which resonates with men and boys who feel marginalized by society. These influencers position themselves as mentors or guides for frustrated young men, offering what they claim are solutions for achieving a better life. Frequently, their proposed solution involves rejecting feminist politics, arguing that feminism, rather than promoting equality, has harmed both men and women. They advocate for a return to traditional gender roles, portraying feminism as the root cause of societal decline. In doing so, they provide these young men with both the language and justification to externalise their frustrations, effectively using women as scapegoats for their personal and social grievances. Building on this, many of these influencers construct a glorified image of masculinity that validates and intensifies male grievances, particularly resentment toward women. By presenting masculinity as under threat and unfairly maligned, their content

resonates deeply with boys and young men who feel alienated or believe that society now blames them simply for being male.

Manosphere communities and influencers like Tate often revolve around recurring themes such as toxic masculinity, the portrayal of men as victims, a longing for an idealized past, and expressions of entitled resentment. These ideas are especially common among young white men who feel socially or sexually marginalized. Tate adeptly capitalises on the prevailing sentiment of male victimhood within the manosphere. He promotes the notion that men are oppressed and offers simplistic explanations that validate this belief, suggesting that societal strides towards gender equality are somehow detrimental to men. His ideas have firmly entrenched themselves in the minds of numerous young men. Even educational social media platforms have featured accounts of boys as young as middle schoolers, echoing his rants and harassing their female classmates. Tate has managed to successfully weaponize the narrative of male victimhood for his personal gain. He even offers an online course titled “The Real World,” previously known as “Hustler’s University,” where individuals pay a monthly membership fee to receive his guidance on how to make money and escape the nine-to-five or as Tate calls it, “escaping the matrix”, another reference to the film, *The Matrix*.

Understanding the manosphere and its ideas is crucial for a number of reasons because it wields the ability to shape knowledge and subjectivities. And because of the online nature of the manosphere, it has the capacity to disseminate its ideologies globally. The internet, being a transnational and borderless entity, facilitates global participation in misogynistic communities such as those found within the manosphere. According to Search Engine Journal, as of January 2022, approximately 4.8 billion individuals worldwide were using social media, representing around 59.9% of the total population. It is crucial because the influence of these ideas extends beyond the realm of the internet and has the potential to manifest in the real world. This matters because violence against women persists at alarming rates. According to data by UN Women, approximately one in three women, totalling around 736 million globally, experience physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner throughout their lifetime.

While it is important to acknowledge that manosphere can indeed be characterized as an extremist discourse, it is equally important to recognize that the line between mainstream discourse and ordinary discourse is often blurred. The ideologies upheld by participants in the manosphere can effortlessly impact the beliefs of individuals who consider themselves part of the mainstream or ordinary discourse. Maintaining this distinction only serves to perpetuate existing systems of oppression because it allows individuals who claim to belong to the mainstream to avoid accountability. This is how everyday microaggressions contribute to the proliferation of extremist ideologies within these spaces. Studying spaces like the manosphere is crucial, as it not only enhances our understanding of such environments but also reveals patterns of thought that extend beyond these fringe communities. It highlights how, as some critics observe, “mainstream gender ideology flows into the men’s rights movement, into the manosphere, and vice versa.”

The rising number of young men who support Tate and adopt his ideas should be a cause for significant concern, as it indicates a troubling trend towards the normalization of extreme misogyny within mainstream discourse. The narratives disseminated by these online groups have extended beyond the digital sphere and materialized offline in instances of violence and hate speech targeting women and minorities. This underscores the fact that extreme misogyny has become a widespread issue, affecting both online and offline environments.

Considering the prevalence of social media, misogynistic ideas held by young men significantly shape and often degrade the online experiences of women. A small state like Manipur has not gone unaffected either. Women, here, are frequently scrutinized for the content they share on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. This dynamic can be analysed through Laura Mulvey’s concept of the “male gaze.” In her seminal 1975 essay *“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,”* Mulvey argues that women in film have historically been represented from the perspective of a heterosexual male viewer. Within this framework, the female figure is positioned primarily to satisfy male desire and fantasy. The patriarchal structures of real-life society, which assign dominance to men, are mirrored on screen: women are reduced to passive objects of visual pleasure, lacking narrative agency. According to Mulvey, the male character in film typically

drives the plot, while the female character halts the narrative flow, becoming a spectacle to be looked at. The camera's gaze, aligned with the male protagonist, encourages the audience to adopt a voyeuristic perspective, thus reinforcing the objectification of women. In this way, the female body is commodified and consumed visually, contributing little to the storyline beyond her erotic appeal. Mulvey's theory remains relevant in analyzing digital spaces today, where women's online presence is similarly surveilled, judged, and sexualized, often with little regard for their autonomy or voice.

Take, for instance, the numerous Facebook posts in local Facebook pages that circulate images of women without their consent, often accompanied by captions that impose moral judgments. One notable case involved a group of young girls, reportedly no older than nineteen, who were filmed dancing at a concert held in 2024. The video went viral, and in its aftermath, a local organisation summoned the girls for questioning. This incident underscores the deeply embedded culture of digital surveillance and moral policing in Manipur. Although there is a popular narrative that women in the state enjoy more autonomy compared to those in other parts of India, such events reveal a different reality. Even harmless acts of leisure such as enjoying a concert, are subject to public scrutiny, male judgment, and punitive consequences. The incident exemplifies how online platforms function as extensions of patriarchal control, where youthful expression, especially by women, is disciplined through shame and digital humiliation.

Another instance involved a woman posing with her boyfriend in front of a Thar jeep, a seemingly ordinary and harmless photograph. However, after an intimate video of the couple was leaked online, the image quickly went viral and became the subject of widespread sexualised commentary. The photograph, stripped of its context, was reinterpreted through a misogynistic lens that reduced the woman to a symbol of male status. Memes began circulating with the underlying message that "if you are rich enough to own a Thar, you will get a hot girlfriend," effectively commodifying the woman and framing her value as dependent on male wealth. The internet's response escalated into a flurry of posts and even memes showing Thar vehicles being imported to Manipur in bulk, further perpetuating the objectification. This incident reflects the precariousness of women's digital presence, where even everyday moments can be distorted, sexualised, and weaponised against them. It highlights how women's bodies

become sites of public fantasy, humiliation, and control in the digital sphere, amplifying their vulnerability in a deeply patriarchal online culture.

The comments beneath such posts reveal deeply entrenched misogynistic attitudes, expressed not only by men but also, at times, by women who have internalised patriarchal norms. These online commentaries should not be dismissed as harmless or incidental; they often have real-world consequences, shaping social attitudes and reinforcing gendered power structures. Sarah Banet-Weiser's concept of "popular misogyny" is useful here. She describes it as a cultural response to the perceived threats posed by "popular feminism," wherein men frame themselves as victims of women's growing rights and liberties. This sense of grievance fuels a collective backlash, where misogyny becomes mainstreamed and normalized in everyday discourse. This phenomenon is closely tied to the space of the manosphere. While early iterations of these spaces engaged in political rhetoric about male disenfranchisement, recent trends show a shift toward personalised attacks on women and feminist figures. These attacks often focus on women's appearance, and are laced with sexualised insults, harassment, and even threats of violence. This shift reflects how digital platforms are increasingly being used to enact the male gaze not just passively through visual consumption, but actively through hostility, control, and intimidation.

The fact that the internet is democratic in nature and allows everyone to participate, combined with the anonymity it offers, makes it easier for people to feel entitled to comment on women. While such comments might seem normal, given that anything posted online will obviously attract attention (both good and bad), the ease with which people speak without second thought points to a deeper issue. Beyond the problem of unregulated internet content, this behaviour reflects a normalised culture—not just of looking down on women, but of blaming them for the frustrations and problems of men. So, anytime a woman is seen to behave outside the moral and normative codes set by a patriarchal society, she will be named, shamed, and punished. This behaviour has been considerably encouraged by the popularity of influencers like Tate who has deeply influenced young men and who are openly endorsing his views both online and in real life.

A state like Manipur, geographically, economically, and politically marginalised from the rest of the country and the world, may appear

disconnected or indifferent to global developments. However, this is far from the truth. In today's globalised world, where we are all part of a digital village, events unfolding in the U.S. or Europe inevitably ripple outwards and impact even remote regions like Manipur. In an online survey conducted among individuals aged 18 to 33 in Manipur in Feb, 2024 seeking for opinions on Tate's content and its message, the diverse responses to Tate's content align with the overarching themes characteristic of the manosphere and specifically Tate's content. Some of the responses are as follows:

"Great impact on youths -if you want to be successful you have to think like a winner."

"Men must be disciplined and hard working and not strip on streets like a hopeless woman."

"Tate's content is appropriate towards women. They are telling us the true meaning of boys and girls."

"....some feminists act like they own the world."

Top of Form

Top of FormTop of FormTop of FormTop of FormTop of FormNo, we want the old world back when there's only men, women and love."

".....believe in women empowerment and traditional feminism but not modern feminism which has become a man hating movement."

"Men respect women but in many occasions, women take advantage of the respect in the name of feminism so please don't only ask men to respect women but also ask women to earn the respect they want. Respect don't grow on trees."

Despite these detriments, there has also been significant resistance, particularly through women-led groups dedicated to education and empowerment. One such group is the Mingsel Foundation, which describes itself in its Instagram bio as "a group of feminists striving for equality and justice." The foundation maintains a strong online presence while also engaging in offline advocacy. Their commitment is evident in the public statements they issue in support of women, especially when harmful or invasive videos go viral, working actively to challenge misinformation and defend those affected.

Although it cannot be denied that women in Manipur experience more freedom compared to women in other parts of the country,

the discrimination they face here tends to be subtle. Women are still subjected to lower status and are greatly constrained by rigid social norms, customary laws, and traditions. Therefore, there is a need to be vigilant of the misogynistic undercurrents within online spaces like the manosphere and regressive ideologies such as those promoted by Tate, as they have the potential to set back progress for women. This is particularly critical in a state like Manipur, which is grappling with conflict and economic poverty.

In conclusion, there is a crucial need for greater awareness and sensitivity towards this issueTop of Form. Misogynistic influencers are conveying to young men the message that their voices are not being heard and that they are being silenced, particularly by those whom the influencers perceive as man-hating feminists. It is then imperative to begin paying closer attention to the experiences and perspectives of boys and young men.

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