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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## (Red)Pills vs. Bread(Tube): examining YouTube as a vector for manosphere radicalization and de-radicalization

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, the affordances of YouTube have been exploited by those creating extreme ideological content that can be collectively understood as 'defined by [their] opposition to visions of social progress' and social justice movements (Lewis, 2018, pp. 3–4). Individuals aiming to push back against alt-right and socially divisive movements have used the same platform, forming an informal network known as BreadTube. Although some BreadTube influencers explicitly state the aim of attracting alt-right viewers, no scholarship has examined BreadTube's deradicalizing potential. This empirical study provides the first direct comparison of the communication style and topics of interest to each cohort, finding that BreadTube's approach shares limited features with that of the content consumed by the alt-right audience they aim to attract. We also examine an ordinary, entertainment-oriented cohort, as a control. This mixed-methods approach enables the qualitative findings drawn from 42 manually coded transcripts to be explored and verified at a larger scale by the quantitative analysis using LIWC and a dataset of over 500 transcripts. From this, we evaluate the extent to which BreadTube content has the potential to engage manosphere content viewers and achieve BreadTube's stated goal of deradicalizing members of alt-right communities, such as the manosphere.

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## Introduction

YouTube is today not a supplementary platform where one might seek out or share amateur content as it began; but an entertainment destination in its own right that even stands as a competitor to major streaming services like Netflix (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Its vast potential to influence peoples' lives and worldviews requires the scrutiny of its content, particularly when the content is linked to the promotion of social discord. Scholarship on YouTube has pointed to its capacity to radicalize viewers into extreme right-wing political views through algorithmic pipelines that lead people to content they may never have otherwise encountered (Hosseinmardi et al., 2021; O'Callaghan et al., 2015; Whittaker et al., 2021). Video streaming more broadly has allowed mass murderers

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to livestream their actions to online platforms, compounding the terror they inflict (see, for example, Burke & Planas, 2023; Goggin & Collins, 2022; Willis, 2021). Indeed, as Juergensmeyer (2017, p. 75) points out, 'Terrorism without its horrified witnesses would be as pointless as a play without an audience', for 'what makes an act [of violence] terrorism is that someone is terrified by it'. Streaming platforms' capability to enable people to broadcast their lives, when taken to extremes, can inevitably also showcase the worst sides of humanity.

Alongside the benign influencers, conspiracy peddlers and violent extremists are those who seek to impact society and politics through subtler means, while also sustaining a career. This includes groups like the alt-right and the manosphere, who promote a rigid gender ideology that is widely known for its derogatory and entitled attitudes towards women. In contrast, there are the BreadTubers, who promote equality across social demographics and collectivist action and who have emerged as a grassroots movement to counter the alt-right. In describing BreadTube as *grassroots*, we mean that it is not a formally networked or funded organization, distinguishing it from conservative online networks such as PragerU (see Dickinson & Cowin, 2022 for a detailed analysis of PragerU). While it may be tempting to view the manosphere community as wholly 'bad', and the BreadTube community as its moral binary opposite, in this study, we do not aim to evaluate the truth of claims made by either group, but rather focus on their cultures. This approach follows Grusauskaite et al.'s approach of 'step[ping] away from such moral concerns by empirically studying conspiracy theories in a concrete media context' (2022, p. 1). We present a qualitative and quantitative empirically driven exploration of both BreadTube and the YouTube manosphere, with particular attention to their topics of interest and distinctive stylistic traits, to determine how they attract and maintain their audience. From this, and drawing on our prior empirical research examining how members of fringe online communities have been deradicalized (Booth et. al, 2024), we evaluate the extent to which BreadTube content has the potential to engage manosphere content viewers and achieve BreadTube's stated goal of deradicalizing members of alt-right communities, such as the manosphere. Therefore, we are not directly evaluating BreadTube as a tool for deradicalization, but rather how it distributes its messaging and potential effectiveness, in light of the community's stated goals. We also compare these groups to the traits of a control cohort of normal, entertainment-oriented content producers.

## The manosphere: origins to today

Manosphere is a contemporary term that encompasses a range of conservative men's groups; however, they have their origins in social movements initiated by men seeking to improve gender equality in society. Messner (2016, p. 7) draws from his own past studies of 'men's liberation groups' in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States to describe how originally these groups sought to function as complementary to women's liberation movements, highlighting the very real ways in which existing patriarchal gender roles *also* had negative impacts on the physical and emotional wellbeing of boys and men (Messner, 2016, p. 8). However, subsequent claims of a 'false symmetry, viewing men and women as differently but equally oppressed by sex roles' ultimately caused a schism in the groups; with one faction recognizing the disproportionately negative impacts of

patriarchy on women, and the other actively downplaying these impacts on women to assert their own victimhood (Messner, 2016, p. 8). By late-1970s, the latter groups had escalated their stance, with claims that ‘men actually have it worse than women’ and ‘are the true victims of prostitution, pornography, dating rituals, sexist media conventions, divorce settlements, false rape accusations, sexual harassment, and domestic violence’ (Messner, 2016, p. 9). Many of these points are easily recognizable to those familiar with the manosphere today, including both the sincere concerns for men’s wellbeing, and the perception that men are the most discriminated against gender. These views were further amplified and consolidated during the 1990s, which saw a shifting of discussion of women’s rights out of the public view more generally as well as an anti-feminist backlash from men who felt progress for women’s rights had eroded their freedom (Ging, 2019; Messner, 2016).

The manosphere today is comprised of groups reminiscent of that described above, as well as other related groups that formed around comparable ideologies. This includes incels, members of the anti-women movement ‘#gamergate, the alt-right, men’s rights activism, and pickup artist[s]’ (Van Valkenburgh, 2021, p. 84). The term ‘manosphere’ was coined in a blogpost by two users named only as Ben and Geoff on 10 November 2009, which, although defunct, is still accessible at the time of writing (Ben & Geoff, 2009).<sup>1</sup> The term gained some traction across various online platforms but was popularized with a self-published book that collected many of these online articles and retroactively grouped the above movements under the one umbrella term of manosphere (Ging, 2019; Ironwood, 2013). Since then, a core set of worldviews among members of the manosphere has emerged, which is often described in scholarship as encompassing a hostility to women’s rights, a strong belief in their entitlement to sex, obedience and children from women, and the neoliberal view that one can only gain access to women, money and other capitalistic rewards through rigorous physical self-improvement. Manosphere ideologies are able to reach a wide, and increasingly young, audience because of the prevalence of the internet and social media; and the fact that this content appeals to boys and young men is unquestionable given the widespread popularity of its influencers; most notoriously, controversial influencer Andrew Tate (The Man Cave, 2023).

### **BreadTube: A grassroots response to radicalization**

BreadTube is a community response that has organically emerged on YouTube in recent years as a response to far-right movements online. While creators do not necessarily claim the label – and indeed, some reject it due to the implication that they are an organized network – there are some notable figures associated with the community, including Lindsay Ellis (LindsayEllisVids) and Abigail Thorn (PhilosophyTube), and Shaun (Shaun\_vids). Maddox and Creech (2021) particularly point to the acclaim given to Natalie Wynn, YouTube alias Contrapoints, for her ability to engage and shift the opinions of people through her sympathetic yet well-reasoned videos on relevant topics. There is limited research on BreadTube to-date, despite its significance in the YouTube ecosystem; however, Maddox and Creech’s (2021) point to the community as a hub for the ‘political left’ – broadly speaking, those who express support for women’s rights, queer rights and anti-racist movements. Videos are often of high production value, featuring playful

elements such as skits that seek to maintain the interest of their audience (Maddox & Creech, 2021). While a BreadTube video might debate a controversial or political topic – for example, transgender rights – the outcome will usually align with the ‘political left’ politics described above.

While video conclusions with ‘politically left’ conclusions may suggest the assumption of an audience with similar views by the producers, some influencers have expressed a specific desire to challenge alt-right movements online. In the case of Wynn, who is arguably the most famous BreadTuber, she has said she aims to do this by making what she calls ‘better propaganda’ than them (Marantz, 2018). Some BreadTubers also claim that their content is developed to deliberately exploit the recommendation algorithms on YouTube, to increase the likelihood of their content being promoted to those with far-right views (Lee, 2021); although these same strategies are also used by alt-right groups to promote their content (Lewis, 2018, p. 31). Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of BreadTube through individuals who have come forward to speak to the media, asserting that content, such as Wynn’s did indeed de-radicalize them from far-right views (Roose, 2019). Such examples suggest that BreadTube is having a deradicalizing impact on the YouTube environment, in line with the movement’s aims, but its content has not been studied together with that of its target alt-right cohort to date.

## De-mystifying the YouTube algorithm

Understanding the YouTube environment necessitates an understanding of how recommendation algorithms play a role in shaping the user experience via curating the content a person is exposed to; and so in this section, we provide a brief explanation of how such algorithms are built and the factors specifically disclosed by YouTube that influence how their algorithms operate. While this is by no means exhaustive, we believe an awareness of how recommendation algorithms are built to shape the YouTube environment and user experience is essential to understanding the platform.

Recommendation algorithms use data on user behaviour, such as watch time, clicks, likes and comments, along with metadata associated with the videos, such as titles, descriptions and tags (Covington et al., 2016). Such tools exploit the presence of a homophily of users by grouping them into clusters based on shared interests and behaviours (Mønsted et al., 2017). Additionally, a process called ‘collaborative filtering’ is leveraged to compute the likelihood that someone may want to click on a certain video, based on both the viewer’s individual watch history, and the watch history of viewers like them (Schafer et al., 2007). The greatest challenge is the technical process of fine-tuning the recommendations to ensure they are relevant and engaging for the user at that specific moment when they are active on the platform (Gomez-Uribe & Hunt, 2015). On the user end, which is what this paper is concerned with, these processes result in the filtering and delivery of content in response to not only what the user has searched for, but their previous activity history, which is also used by the platform to determine the content they see.

While the foundations of recommendation algorithms are widely known, what is typically not disclosed to the public is *how* a company optimizes its algorithm: what content features it seeks to promote, and those it wishes to suppress. This is due to the specifics typically being a trade secret. It is this aspect that typically garners the most

scrutiny from the general public and scholars alike, with people wanting to understand how their data are being used to feed them content (Noble, 2018). YouTube has previously disclosed that they promote content with 'good visual and audio quality', which 'refrain from sexual topics and profanity' and are 'easily matched with branded content' (Bishop, 2018, p. 72), catering explicitly to advertisers; as well as the length of a video, the words tagged as metadata by the creator, and the words spoken in the video's audio as captured by YouTube's transcription software (Bishop, 2018, pp. 74–75). In this way, awareness of algorithms can influence the nature of the content on the platform. As the optimization features of the algorithm can be changed at any time, without disclosure to creators or viewers, it is a powerful but unknown influence in the YouTube environment.

### **Manosphere, misinformation, radicalization and intervention**

The rise of the online manosphere has occurred alongside the rise of both online misinformation and online violent radicalization; and so a brief consideration of how the manosphere intersects with them and the strategies used to counter them is beneficial here. A manosphere influencer may, intentionally or otherwise, promote misinformation to their audience to justify their claims or sell a product. They may also promote conspiracy theories, which have spread widely on the platform and attracted their own devotees (Aupers, 2020). Simultaneously, misogyny is a strong predictor for support of violent extremism including racially motivated hate crimes (Meger et al., 2024); and so the hostility against women and girls that manosphere influencers are known for promoting to their audience directly fuels attitudes that could radicalize members into committing terrorist attacks. Indeed, the dense networks that the alt-right has established on YouTube means that it is easy for viewers to become exposed to content that explicitly advocates for extreme political ideas, such as white supremacy through collaborations between influencers (Lewis, 2018). As these phenomena become increasingly intertwined, more and more effective strategies will be necessary to respond to them.

In recent years, one strategy has been the removal of content or banning of individuals who promote hate or violence, as eventually occurred to manosphere figurehead Andrew Tate on YouTube – but not until he had already achieved significant prominence and his content had made a widespread impact on many YouTube users (The Man Cave, 2023). Furthermore, among influencers and everyday users, the removal or suppression of individual pieces of content has been found to lead to individuals claiming they are being censored, drawing greater attention to the content and boosting its engagement (Johns et al., 2024), potentially further radicalizing users rather than intervening. Moderation of unverified claims with fact-checking is another strategy that has been increasingly deployed in recent years, but which is 'significantly limited' when the accurate information is counter to an individual's desired worldview, or when the material contains visual elements (Walter et al., 2020). Indeed, decisions from platforms, such as Facebook to end their content moderation and fact-checking have been supported by Donald Trump since his re-election as President of the United States (Booth et al., 2025; Swan, 2025), further muddying the online environment.

Without dismissing the importance of platform responsibility in what they distribute and algorithmically promote, and the essential role that fact-checking has for providing

resources to the general public, there is a need for tools that identify what leads people to seek out such content in the first place, as well as how it engages them, and how to intervene. Susceptibility to and belief in conspiracies, misinformation and violent ideologies are also influenced by human factors, such as prior attitudes towards a topic or personal uncertainties and anxieties (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Dahlke & Hancock, 2025; Grzesiak-Feldman, 2013; Kruglanski et al., 2022). These fringe communities also display different levels of insularity and homogeneity of views depending on their topic of interest, meaning the strategies that reach one group may not reach another (Grusauskaite et al., 2024). Rather, tailoring interventions to the community, such as by adopting similar communication styles to the community members and producers (Lee et al., 2025), or by avoiding stigmatizing any underlying concerns that may have led a person to seek out misinformation and other fringe content (Booth, 2025; Booth et al., 2024), can elicit more positive responses to interventions.

Due to increasingly younger boys being drawn in by atmospheric content, such as that by Andrew Tate, and the subsequent increase in harassment of female teachers and students alike as a direct result (Douglas, 2022.; Chrysanthos, 2021; Rachwani, 2022; Fazackerley, 2023). Government interventions into the manosphere have focussed on school-age boys (Stahl et al., 2023). However, as has been observed in similar cohorts, such as incels, interventions by those perceived as outsiders are less effective due to the strong 'Us vs Them' rhetoric that pervades these heavily gendered online environments (Daly & Reed, 2022). Drawing on our previous research, indicating that understanding the communication style (Lee et al., 2025) and topics of concern (Booth et al., 2024) in fringe communities aid in designing interventions, we propose that a similar approach to manosphere communities could better enable reaching consumers of manosphere content. Noting that BreadTube is a community in which influencers have been known to state that they aim to deradicalize alt-right communities (Lee, 2021; Marantz, 2018), the question of whether their content aligns with the needs that manosphere content appears to meet arose as an area for investigation.

In line with this, we ask and address the following research questions in this study:

- (1) What are the topics of discussion and communication style(s) of manosphere producers and BreadTube producers?
- (2) Based on findings for RQ1, to what extent do BreadTubers effectively tailor their communication style and topics to achieve their goal of engaging and potentially deradicalizing online politically right communities, such as the manosphere?

## Method

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather and analyse the empirical data discussed in this paper. After receiving ethics clearance from our university Human Research Ethics Committee on the condition that all data be de-identified and anonymized in any dissemination of findings (number: ETH23-8018), we manually identified YouTube channels that met our initial criteria for each cohort, informed by the literature discussed above. We note that the conditions of our ethics approval prohibited us from using the visual and audio components of YouTube videos in our analysis, as this would require collecting personal data in the form of people's voices and faces. After manually

identifying videos for our sample, we also consulted the algorithmically recommended videos that YouTube considers to be of comparable interest based on metadata to find additional channels, and a fresh browser was used for each of the three stages of source identification to ensure there was no cross-contamination between the results. All channels chosen were over the YouTube monetization threshold, meaning they were active producers with significant followings, and therefore, more likely to be representative of their cohorts due to their established status.

For manosphere channels, we selected those that had videos, featuring a male presenter (sometimes two) discussing key manosphere topics as described in existing scholarship, which also referenced certain phrases or figures known to be associated with the manosphere community (e.g. references to being alpha males or Andrew Tate) and which regularly expressed negative stereotypes about women. For BreadTube channels, we consulted fan-made lists of notable channels as a way into the community space online, and then similarly reviewed videos to ensure their videos were politically engaged with a stance against far-right movements, discussing social issues and media (see, for example, *BreadTube.Tv*, 2021). For entertainment videos collected as a control, we chose from the channels promoted on the front page of YouTube, which had high levels of views, channel following and comments, and which were not politically oriented in nature. To access the transcripts, we collected the YouTube channel ID for each channel, identified other videos that the channel had published, and then downloaded transcripts of all the channel's videos via the Youtube API. This allowed the transcripts to be collected anonymously from the channels, with a random sample of 42 transcripts (12 per cohort) chosen for analysis.

The transcripts were qualitatively analysed using thematic coding in the programme NVivo, identifying both the topics and communication style of each cohort. *Topic* here referred to what was discussed, whereas *communication style* referred to how it was communicated through language choices, such as the use of humour or tone. Thematic coding allows researchers to identify and hone in on what is novel, interesting and relevant to the research interests, and it is these qualities that guide analysis rather than the number of instances of a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Due to the length of the videos, which was often upwards of 2 h each, and the corresponding length of the transcripts, data saturation was quickly achieved with this sample size. Our initial codes were developed inductively within the two categories identified in the research questions (topic and communication style). Examples of initial topic codes were *overweight women are ugly*, *Jordan Peterson*, *supplements*, *gym* and *get rich quick*, and examples of initial style codes were *slang*, *meme*, *humour* and *citation*. We then applied these initial codes to the entertainment dataset to deductively code for any alignment, with *gym* and *money* being two that overlapped with the entertainment cohort. These initial codes were then revised and used to form themes in the data pertaining to both topic and communication style. For the manosphere, themes, such as *Money is power* and *relationships with women* emerged; in the BreadTube dataset, themes, such as *supplements are dangerous* and *women's rights should be protected*. Themes developed from the coding for style included *skit*, *personal anecdote*, *story* and *analysis*; and some of these were shared across manosphere and BreadTube cohorts, like *personal anecdote*.

No unique themes emerged in the entertainment dataset in terms of topic, due to the limited overlap in topics with the two cohorts of focus, and the nature of the

entertainment videos to be filming live (or staged-live) events, such as streaming a video game or visiting a particular location, which did result in any recurring topics in the cohort except *money*. There was limited overlap with style themes in either the target cohort of BreadTube and the Manosphere, with only *personalized address* and *skit* overlapping. As the entertainment cohort is only included in a control, to inform the extent to which certain traits are unique to the two target cohorts, this was not a limitation to the project. We present the qualitative analysis below, discussing both the topic and communication style, respectively, for each group.

To supplement the findings of the qualitative analysis, we also conducted a computational analysis of 553 transcripts collected from manosphere (250), BreadTube (203), and normal YouTube channels (100). This allowed us to distinguish the most common traits of each cohort of videos, giving us perspective on what an ‘average’ video in each might contain. Specifically, we used the programme called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (henceforth LIWC) to determine if there were significant differences in the language use of the YouTubers, as recorded in the transcripts (Pennebaker et al., 2001). LIWC is a computational text analysis software designed to quantify linguistic features and psychological constructs in written and spoken texts. By categorizing words into over 100 psychologically relevant categories, LIWC allows researchers to systematically analyse a wide range of linguistic dimensions, such as emotional tone, cognitive processes, social relationships and stylistic features. LIWC also provides summary categories such as analytical thinking (Analytic), emotional tone (Tone) and Clout. For example, the *Analytic* metric evaluates the logical and formal articulations in a text, with a higher score equalling a more analytical text. Similarly, *Tone* captures the degree of positive or negative tone, with a higher score suggesting a more emotional text, and *Clout* measures the use of language related to leadership and status. The tool’s ability to quantify language patterns enables researchers to uncover subtle differences in communication styles, contributing to fields, such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and communication studies (Haber, 2015; Iosub et al., 2014; Lyons et al., 2018; Nguyen & Rose, 2011). LIWC is therefore a useful supplement to qualitative analysis, as we can isolate metrics that correspond with topics and language choices that we identified – or identified as conspicuously absent – in the transcripts.

## Findings

In this section, we first provide a qualitative analysis of the manosphere, BreadTube and entertainment-oriented (control group) cohorts’ videos. Due to university ethics requirements, findings are described in the aggregate without direct quotes; however, we provide paraphrases of commonly uttered sentiments where possible to illustrate the description. This is supplemented by a quantitative analysis of the transcripts of videos from the communities, which reveals the most commonly used linguistic features and categories, in lieu of direct quotations, and validates the qualitative analysis. We present

**Table 1.** Summary of qualitative analysis on producer communication style and topics across 42 transcripts.

Cohort	Communication style	Topics
Qualitative analysis		
Manosphere	Informal, motivational	Money, relationships with women, physical fitness and mental discipline
BreadTube	Formal, analytical	Prejudice and discrimination, workers' rights, corporate corruption
Entertainment	Informal, humorous	Stunts and popular culture

**Table 2.** Summary of quantitative analysis of producer communication style and topics across 553 transcripts. Note that while the score for 'Word count' alone is a representation of the number of words used, all other scores are percentages, as discussed in the findings below.

Cohort	Measures of complexity and emotional tone			Measures of proactiveness, powerful status, and desire				Measures of references to humans including self			
	Word count	Analytic	Big words	Tone	Verb	Allure	Clout	Pronoun	Social references	Female	Male
Quantitative Analysis											
Manosphere	1761	22	13	36	21	10	79	20	14	2	2
BreadTube	5116	52	19	24	15	5	56	13	7	0	1
Entertainment	1660	18	10	53	21	10	62	19	9	0	1

an aggregated overview of the communication style and topics of interest identified in each cohort, before discussing the quantitative findings that affirm similar patterns persist in a larger data set. [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) summarize the relationship between the cohorts and the data.

## The manosphere

### Communication style

Although the manosphere has a reputation as a 'toxic' space, the atmosphere in the examples analysed in this paper was surprisingly positive. Influencers often presented themselves as a supportive older brother or mentor, speaking to their audience in a candid manner. This included frequent slang and swearing, as well as directly addressing their audience when encouraging them to think for themselves or do their own research. Occasionally, producers referenced academic figures like Jordan Peterson or specific journal articles, from which they would cherry-pick certain quotes to support their points. More often, they relied on personal anecdotes to structure and deliver their messaging: The male presenters use themselves as examples of success in these areas, but also emphasize their past issues with achieving this (e.g. *I did it and that means **you** can do it!*).

### Topics of interest

Broadly speaking, videos had themes of money, relationships with women, physical fitness and mental discipline. While the topics sound benign at a glance, a closer examination reveals the dangerous aspects of manosphere ideology. For example, while the

belief in physical fitness encouraged avoiding junk food and exercising, it could be taken to extremes, with some videos suggesting the use of supplements which could be dangerous. Any man who was not living up to the standards set by the presenter was implied to be failing at being a man at an individual level. A similar fixation was seen with the topic of money, with presenters repeatedly equating money to success in life, and promoting a range of 'get rich quick' strategies to their viewers like starting a business, becoming an influencer (e.g. *it's just so easy, just film a couple of videos!*), or working oneself to the bone to ensure their success.

Frequently overlapping with personal development and money as well as guiding its own conversations was the topic of women, who could be framed as either villains or trophies. As villains, presenters would rail against women's rights movements and feminism for having supposedly oppressed men through social advances, such as encouraging more women to work rather than depend on men as breadwinners. As trophies, presenters provided extremely narrow and stereotypical criteria about what made the women valuable (e.g. *she will make cookies for the kids and bang you like a pornstar*). Either way, women were consistently discussed with either open hostility or in demeaning, reductive ways; and this combination of anger and desire made it the most complex topic in the manosphere cohort.

## BreadTube: Qualitative Findings

### Communication style

BreadTube producers' work was highly scripted, as evident from the clear structure to videos, which began with a hook to capture the viewer's attention, introduced a problem, methodically analysed it from multiple perspectives using various sources, before leading into a conclusion that advocated for some kind of societal change. When a source was potentially difficult for their audience, like a journal article, they unpacked the ideas with examples from memes and popular culture references, or through comical 'skits'. Producers frequently sought to engage with multiple perspectives on their chosen topic – a kind of 'seeing both sides' approach – to demonstrate a good-faith engagement with the topic, even when their own perspective is abundantly clear. Many of the producers mentioned having a Master's degree of some kind, suggesting that this highly structured, logic-driven, evidence-based format may at least in-part result from their educational background. While there were individual differences in how the producers delivered their content, the structure and style were highly consistent across the sample studied in this paper.

### Topics of interest

BreadTube producers engaged with pressing social issues, like prejudice and discrimination against historically marginalized groups, workers' rights, corporations that were engaged in activities seen as potentially dangerous to others, and health topics. This meant there was a very wide range of topics discussed in detail, and producers also offered their own solutions, which typically called for collective, community-based responses to a problem, as well as government-regulation of practices or technologies

perceived to be unethical. In this way, producers did not simply identify problems and explain their existence, but aim to provide hopeful ideas for how issues could be addressed, even if some solutions were more practical than others.

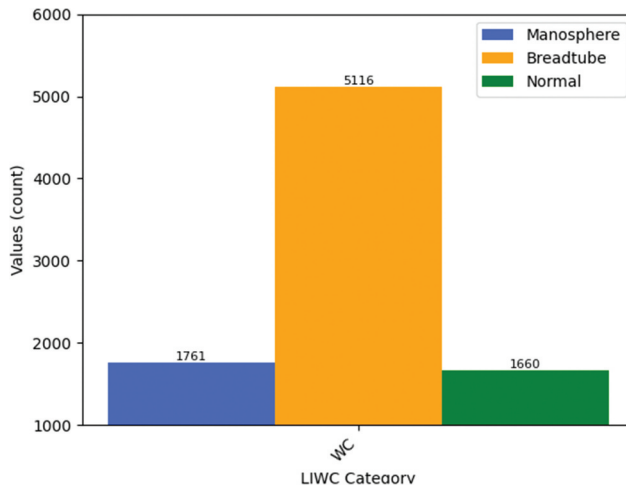
### Entertainment-oriented videos: qualitative findings

Included in our study as a control group, we provide only a brief description of this group. The entertainment videos included in our sample as a control group were friendly and informal in nature, treating the viewer as a friend or a confidant. Their videos often involved structured stunts (e.g. *watch me eat 1000 eggs in a day*) or activities like discussing popular culture. Self-deprecating humour was heavily deployed as part of the playful atmosphere, which also appeared to be a mechanism to try and balance the at-times obviously above-average financial status of the producers. There were few recurring topics, as this depended on the individual producer, with glancing references to gym attendance being the only notable code that appeared in the other cohorts. Overall, these videos avoided potentially sensitive or political topics and remained consistently light-hearted.

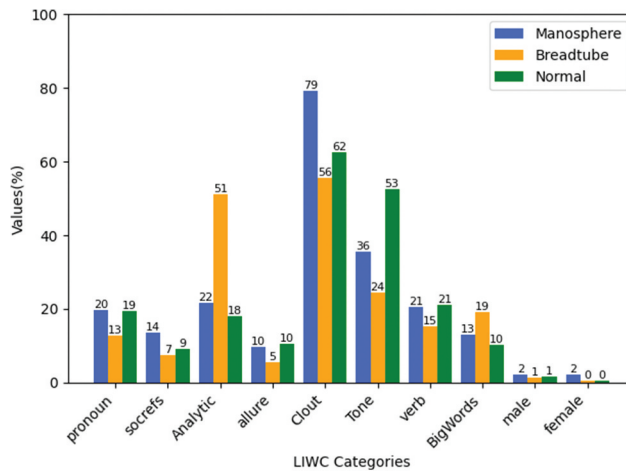
### A quantitative comparison: manosphere BreadTube and entertainment

This section presents quantitative linguistic differences between the three video cohorts based on LIWC results. Most of the LIWC output scores are percentages of the total words within a text (except 'WC', word count). For each video's transcript, we ran LIWC analysis and averaged the scores for each group. Next, we used the independent samples *t*-test to determine whether the groups exhibited significant differences for each LIWC category. We applied the Bonferroni correction, a statistical adjustment method applied when performing multiple-hypothesis tests simultaneously and set the alpha value to 0.05/117. Of the 117 categories, 55 showed significant differences between the manosphere and BreadTube cohorts. We discuss key results below which supplement the qualitative analysis above.

The LIWC analysis of 553 transcripts across the two cohorts affirms the trends found in the qualitative analysis, relating to the differing linguistic complexity and overall atmosphere of the two YouTube cohorts. [Figure 1](#) depicts the 'Word Count' of each, and [Figure 2](#) depicts all other score categories. In the first group of measures, including word count, analytic, tone and 'BigWords', we gain insight into the complexity and emotional tone of the producers' communication style. Taken together, the combination of these four scores suggests that the creators of the BreadTube videos tend to produce texts that are analytically rigorous but are more reserved in expressing positive emotion due to their lower score in positive emotional tone. In contrast, the lower scores for these categories related to complexity and emotional tone in the manosphere suggest less complex videos with more casual language and that presenters readily express positive emotions. Lastly, the entertainment-oriented video scores indicate that they were the shortest and least complex, but most positive in emotional tone, of the cohort, with a relaxed atmosphere like the manosphere. The findings echo the qualitative analysis, which found that the manosphere presenters used informal language and often created a positive environment for their audience,



**Figure 1.** Word count of the manosphere, breadtube, and normal cohorts.



**Figure 2.** Measure for manosphere, breadtube, and normal cohorts, covering the metrics of pronoun use, social references, analytic tone, allure (desire), clout, tone, use of verbs, use of big words, use of references to males, use of references to females.

compared to the more emotionally reserved and analytical approach BreadTubers were found to use.

In the second category, measures of proactiveness, powerful status and desire, we again found notable differences between the cohorts. *Verb*, which indicates the presence of verbs and thus reference to actions, and *Allure*, which indicates the desire to possess things, were identical in the manosphere and the entertainment cohort, but markedly lower in the BreadTube cohort, suggesting that BreadTube producers speak less about taking action and express less ‘want’ for things (e.g. objects, people, change) overall. The category of *clout*, which refers to leadership, status and power, was highest in the manosphere, followed by the entertainment cohort, and lastly BreadTube, suggesting that

speaking assertively or expressing authority was most common among the manosphere but least common among BreadTubers. These findings point to the types of discussions held in each space: discussions about wanting things (money, girls, social change), taking actions of a kind (e.g. going to the gym, going to a protest), and the invocation of status within each group, suggesting the manosphere is more aspirational and proactive environment compared to BreadTube.

Lastly, the measures of references to humans, including the speaker themselves, point to the extent to which speakers personalize videos and refer to other people. The broad category of *social references* points to the manosphere as being a more personalized and socially engaged space at twice the rate of BreadTube, with the entertainment cohort coming in second. Drilling down into these results, we see that *pronoun* (e.g. I, you, we, she, he, they) mirrors this broader distribution across the cohorts, with BreadTube being the least frequent cohort to use this language and refer to people in their videos. Lastly, given the particularly gendered nature of our findings relating to the manosphere, we investigated the measures for *female* (she, her, hers, sister) and *male* (he, him, his, brother) to assess if there were any differences. Once again, we found that the manosphere had the highest prevalence of this language, indicating the extent to which gender is discussed or invoked during the videos. In this instance, neither BreadTube or the entertainment cohort used *female* language, while both indicated some use of *male* language. Overall, the manosphere was a notably gendered space compared to the other two cohorts.

Taken together, both the detailed qualitative analysis and the large-scale quantitative analysis suggest that BreadTube and the manosphere communities are distinctly different in their chosen style for communicating with their audiences and topic scope. The quantitative analysis completed on a sample of 553 transcripts validates the qualitative analysis conducted on 42 transcripts, and our findings about communication style and topics discussed. While we anticipated differences between the manosphere and BreadTube, given our qualitative observations, we were surprised by the extent to which the manosphere and the entertainment-focused videos were when analysed at a large scale, across almost all categories. While there are some points of larger divergence (e.g. positive tone), the similarity in many other areas highlights that many of the traits in the manosphere are perhaps *not* unique to them or abnormal. Rather, their videos more obviously align with the content that audiences might consume purely for entertainment purposes. This makes sense as while attitudes to women are strong in the manosphere community, as we have qualitatively observed, many other everyday and benign topics are also discussed.

These differences have two notable implications for how recommendation algorithms respond to the content. First, because, as noted above, they function by profiling users and promoting content that matches what similar users also watched, the algorithm would likely select videos to promote from a pool of content that has similar metadata (such as that extracted from the transcript). Therefore, in addition to the different videos potentially not appealing to viewers from the other cohort, it is also likely that manosphere content viewers may never be exposed to BreadTube's content due to the algorithm determining it is too different. The differences between the two cohorts suggest that BreadTube's influence may be limited, first, at the level of the algorithm, and second, at the level of audience interest, undercutting their potential de-radicalizing

influence. Second, and perhaps more troublingly, the similarity we observe between entertainment videos and manosphere content appears to explain, at least in part, how and why YouTube algorithms appear to push manosphere content on audiences and create radicalization pathways: the same metadata that is used to inform the algorithm of BreadTube's *difference* to the manosphere would also respond to these *similarities* between the manosphere and entertainment videos, and thus, promote manosphere content to those on YouTube for entertainment purposes purely based on these factors originating from producers' communication style and topics.

## Discussion

First, we provide a brief comparison of the three cohorts. We observed that despite the manosphere's standards that viewers were encouraged to aspire to, in terms of possessing fitness, money and women, and the unhealthy or dishonest strategies that viewers were encouraged to employ to acquire these benchmarks for success, it was clear how this content could appeal to boys and young men seeking direction and role models in their life due to the brotherly, and direct, manner it was delivered in. By contrast, although BreadTube presenters consistently demonstrated an earnest desire to share what they learned during their tertiary studies, with out of recognition that many people may not be able to access university education, their delivery and approach of tackling structural inequalities in society rather than everyday experiences risks coming off as 'elitist' to the audiences whose minds they want to change. Unlike the manosphere, which sought to provide ideologically charged lifestyle advice, or BreadTube which sought to educate viewers, entertainment-oriented producers created welcoming environments that gave the impression that anyone who wanted to could join the (non-political) fun.

Several factors emerge through the comparison of these online influencer communities. First, we suggest that while there is potential for BreadTube content to act as an organic intervention that could disrupt the online radicalization process, we believe this impact may be limited to those who are still open to this influence and have not been fully drawn into these online communities. An additional factor that might limit BreadTube's effectiveness is the need to maintain support from their core left-leaning audience. As Maddox and Creech (2021) note, Wynn's controversial style, while apparently effective at deradicalizing some alt-right men, has also at times frustrated her user base due to the perception among some that her method of engagement with right-wing ideas or conspiracies might lend them credibility even if she does so with the purpose of ultimately denouncing them. This tension would understandably impact the design of their content, and ultimately, its ability to engage users across the political spectrum.

Likewise, we find that there are possible limitations in the potential effectiveness due to both the topics and style of BreadTube content, in terms of appealing to the audience and being recommended by the algorithm. The broad range of topics and logic-driven breakdowns of each key issue lack the intimacy and personal atmosphere of the manosphere, meaning there is little overlap in relevant content. Furthermore, even if BreadTube addresses relevant topics, it will not necessarily address that underlying personal anxieties that could otherwise drive someone to manosphere content: learning about patriarchal social structures and discrimination against women will not help an awkward teenage boy feel more comfortable speaking to girls.

## Conclusion

There are a number of important insights to be gained from this study. The first is that, despite the BreadTube aim of combatting the alt-right, our empirical analysis finds that BreadTubers have limited potential to engage and potentially deradicalize communities such as the manosphere due to their differing communication styles and topics of concern. This not online influences what audiences may choose to watch, but the content that algorithms deliver to manosphere audiences, which is based in part around similar metadata and keywords from transcripts; the latter of which, we have found to be extremely different between cohorts. BreadTube's choices, while satisfying their left-leaning audience, put them at an algorithmic disadvantage when it comes to the alt-right audience they aspire to convert; a problem perhaps compounded by scholarship that demonstrates YouTube algorithms nevertheless create right-wing pipelines (O'Callaghan et al., 2015; Whittaker et al., 2021; Hosseinmardia et al., 2021). This is the first empirical study to provide a direct comparison of the two cohorts to evaluate potential success. Second, in terms of recommendations, we believe that targeted interventions could be made by applying the manosphere styling of videos to content that addresses key topics of interest to teenage boys and young men, while maintaining the informative and balanced approach of the BreadTube content. For example, a government-sponsored series of Youtube channels, or custom resources created for use by educators or parents, could be a beneficial addition to the online environment that provides a viable alternative to manosphere content. Crucially, if it addresses the same issues in a comparably personal manner, it may be able to overcome the barriers we believe could limit the reach of BreadTube. This is not to suggest that BreadTube provide teenagers with dating advice; rather, examination of related issues like self-confidence or constructions of masculinity could also be examined as broader social phenomena, paired with advice about how to maintain a strong self-concept and reject pressures, such as those related to body image. This study has provided detailed insights into the style and topics that could be deployed.

Third, further transparency around the recommendation algorithm, which could be mandated by government legislation that requires allowing researchers access to study them directly, could better identify when users are being promoted increasingly extreme content, and enable direct intervention to correct such pipelines. Governments around the world, in recent years, have stepped in to regulate algorithms, with California (Austin, 2024) and New York (Tenbarga, 2024) in the United States being particularly notable. Holding companies legally responsible for the negative impacts their product has on broader society could also result in better regulation of the online environment. This is relevant not just at the level of political and gender ideologies, but in terms of national security: given that misogyny is a strong predictor for support of violent extremism including racially motivated hate crimes (Meger et al., 2024), manosphere content can be seen to directly fuel risks of this degree too.

In terms of future research, we note that while we were unable to do so in this study due to restrictions in our university ethical approval, future studies could incorporate analysis of the YouTube visuals and personal attributes of the influencers themselves to consider how these factors may affect the content and its uptake, as well as engaging with

audiences, such as through interviews to gain insights into their perspectives on each type of content. Additionally, while it may prove challenging, interviews with manosphere producers to understand their motivations and worldviews would better inform our ability to respond to whatever underlying needs they perceive their content as addressing.

## Note

1. <https://themanosphere.blogspot.com/2009/11/start-of-manosphere.html>.

## Author contributions

CRedit: **Emily Booth:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Jooyoung Lee:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Marian-Andrei RizoIU:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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