

Tracing Online Misogyny

An analysis of misogynist ideologies and practices
from a German-international perspective

Summary

This report deals with a highly virulent, acute and ever-more relevant topic of hate directed against women. This issue has consistently increased across both analog and digital communication as women are systematically being attacked and denigrated on the internet. In online discourse, they experience fear of harassment, fantasies of violence, rape and even death threats. The result is many women avoid speaking out publicly or others opt to withdraw from such spaces. This worrying trend has made the voices of women more invisible, leaving the online sphere free to those who engage in violent and misogynistic behavior.

The aim of the report is to explore country-specific narratives and framings of misogynist practices online – particularly in relation to the so-called manosphere. Our focus is on the German-speaking digital space and sets this in comparison to French, English, Slovakian and Dutch language areas in a quantitative analysis. The quantitative methods applied in our study allow us to draw conclusions on the degree to which misogyny is prevalent in online contexts. As a complement, the qualitative analysis focuses on Incel subculture as well as masculinity influencers from the Pick-Up Artist scene.

The Study

Part of the work pursued by the *Federal Association for Countering Online Hate* (BAG), the study “Tracing Online Misogyny” is the result of collaboration between *Das NETTZ*, the German networking initiative against online hate, and the Belgium-based technology company *Textgain*. The four-month project was carried out in close cooperation between the two organizations along with experts Karolin Schwarz and Dr. Sylvia Jaki (University of Hildesheim), building on the work of the *European Observatory of Online Hate*.

Key findings:

- 1 Misogyny is widespread on the internet, with women being deliberately threatened and frightened via uninhibited, derogatory language.
- 2 One common denominator among misogynistic communication is the devaluation and objectification of women using aggressive, sexist language.
- 3 Misogynistic communication has become more visible in recent years, advanced by the wide reach of misogynistic influencers such as Andrew Tate and and “coachings” for young men.
- 4 Misogynistic online subcultures are on the rise, and their messages have also seeped into the political mainstream via social media.
- 5 Peaks of misogynistic communication on social media platforms follow similar patterns of development across language boundaries.
- 6 Language and sentiment analyses reveal that violent fantasies are common among the Incel community, expressed through uninhibited language calling for violent attacks and sexual assaults against women.
- 7 Levels of misogyny in German-speaking countries are similar to those in other languages, whereas violent statements are less common in the German-speaking digital mainstream.

Recommendations:

- 1 **Set up on-going monitoring tools:** Consistent monitoring of trends in online misogyny accompanied by in-depth analyses should be more firmly established in research to enable the implementation of targeted interventions.
- 2 **Expand international cooperation:** Online misogyny is a transnational phenomenon that, to date, has largely only been considered within the nation-state context. At the same time, greater exchange at both the legal and research levels are needed to collectively learn lessons and champion best practice across the geographical region.
- 3 **Promote interdisciplinary cooperation:** To account for the complexity of the issue, analyses of misogyny in online realms demand an interdisciplinary approach drawing from the areas of linguistics, social psychology, law and political science.
- 4 **Organize effective knowledge transfers:** The jargon of online misogyny requires the knowledge of associated codes and specific slang to be disseminated. Concurrently, training for teaching and security staff is needed so that they may intervene early to counter the normalization of misogyny.

