

Nietzsche's Ressentiment in the Age of Algorithm-driven Social Media

O Ressentimento em Nietzsche na Era das Redes Sociais Guiadas por Algoritmos

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Como citar: GOMES, Karolina-Dzhoanna. Nietzsche's Ressentiment in the Age of Algorithm-driven Social Media. *Revista de Filosofia Aurora*, Curitiba, v. 38, e202633376, 2026. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/2965-1557.038.e202633376>

Abstract

This article focuses on the phenomenon of online outrage campaigns, which usually revolve around such topics as religion, race, gender, and sexuality. Being one of the features of the current antagonistic climate in the online public sphere, these campaigns are largely exacerbated by the algorithmic rules that incentivise the production of provocative content for maximum visibility. One of the explanatory concepts for such radicalisation of the online public sphere is Friedrich Nietzsche's ressentiment, introduced in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, the concept which has seen a marked return to contemporary academic and public discourse. Ressentiment means a mental attitude that arises when vengeful impulses lose their touch with the object. This attitude is characterised by both impotence in changing something about the subject's own deprived state and proactiveness in creating values out of this state. This article will first trace the development of Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment and its evolving role in cultural and political theory. It is proposed to view ressentiment not as a diagnostic tool applied to specific groups but as a state that the online public sphere is already saturated with.

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Secondly, it will examine how resentment operates within the algorithmically driven online public sphere, setting several online outrage campaigns as examples. In doing so, the paper hopes to contribute to a clearer understanding of how negative affect functions in digital spaces, facilitates identity building and conceals the real discontent of online users.

Keywords: Nietzsche. Ressentiment. Negative affect. Algorithms. Outrage campaigns.

Resumo

Este artigo enfoca as influências das campanhas de indignação online, que geralmente giram em torno de temas como religião, raça, gênero e sexualidade. Sendo uma das características do clima de antagonismo presente na esfera pública digital contemporânea, essas campanhas são amplamente exacerbadas pelas regras algorítmicas que incentivam a produção de conteúdo provocativo voltado à visibilidade máxima. Um dos conceitos explicativos para essa radicalização da esfera pública online é o ressentimento de Friedrich Nietzsche, introduzido em sua obra Genealogia da Moral — conceito que tem retornado com força ao discurso acadêmico e ao público contemporâneo. Ressentimento significa uma atitude mental que surge quando os impulsos vingativos perdem o contato com seu objeto. Essa atitude caracteriza-se tanto pela impotência em transformar algo na condição de privação do sujeito quanto pela proatividade na criação de valores a partir dessa própria condição. Este artigo buscará, em um primeiro momento, traçar o desenvolvimento do conceito de ressentimento em Nietzsche e seu papel crescente na teoria cultural e política. Propõe-se aqui enxergar o ressentimento não como uma ferramenta diagnóstica aplicada a grupos específicos, mas como um estado que já satura a esfera pública online. Em segundo lugar, será analisado como o ressentimento opera dentro da esfera pública digital movida por algoritmos, utilizando como exemplos diversas campanhas de indignação online. Ao fazê-lo, este trabalho espera contribuir para uma compreensão mais clara de como os afetos negativos funcionam nos espaços digitais, facilitar a construção de identidades e ocultar o verdadeiro descontentamento dos usuários online.

Palavras-chave: Nietzsche. ressentimento. efeito negativo. algoritmos. campanhas de indignação.

Introduction

In recent years, the affective social media sphere has received increasing attention in academic and public debate. With the proliferation of hate, symbolic violence that often leads to acts of violence in real life and overall political polarisation that is believed to be fueled by algorithmic rules, we see social media not as a public square but rather as platforms of antagonistic tensions. Social media platforms like X/Twitter, 4chan, and Reddit are considered hubs of violent discourse (Capelos et al., 2024; Just, 2025; Tietjen & Tirkkonen, 2023), with concepts such as “rage-bait” posts (Shin et al., 2025) being proven to have higher levels of audience engagement and popularity. Algorithms incentivise not only negative affect but also certain themes, such as collective memory, national dignity, racial, ethnic, and gender identity, sexuality, religious feelings, and traditional family morality; the list of sensitive topics is long and constantly growing. This leads to the formation of a certain pattern of conflicts on social media, namely, an online outrage campaign. In this paper, I define an online outrage campaign as a coordinated or spontaneous digital effort to harass, intimidate, or harm an individual, group, or organisation through targeted, hostile, and often abusive messages and actions across social media platforms.

One of the explanatory frameworks for understanding this phenomenon is Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*, which has seen a notable return to contemporary political and cultural discourse (Tuinen, 2018). The rise of populism, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism, alongside the growing public visibility of diverse political and social groups, has created fertile ground for the resurgence of resentment. Following Nietzsche, resentment can be understood as a condition of excessive, paranoid victimisation that justifies vengeful and spiteful attacks on perceived oppressors or scapegoats. In contemporary digital culture, this manifests in outrage campaigns directed towards various forms of cultural expressions, such as artworks, video games, and posts on social media platforms. Examples of them include a 2014 gendered outrage campaign known as *Gamergate*, attacks on creators whose works are considered offensive or ideologically biased (across the political spectrum), and aimed attacks at random users, often members of minority groups.

While for much of the 20th century resentment was treated as an affective pathology underlying protest ideologies of various orientations, recent scholarship, such as postcolonial theory, has attempted to reevaluate its role. Some theorists have framed resentment as a potentially productive impulse when expressed by historically marginalised groups, while maintaining its pathological character when it emerges from reactionary, traditionalist positions. In a more recent literature resentment is also viewed through psychopolitical lenses, as a useful tool to diagnose affective public states, such as Slavoj Žižek's study of violence and “authentic resentment” (2008), Lawrence Grossberg's “affective epidemics” (1992), Sara Ahmed's “affective economies” (2004), Peter Sloterdijk's “banks of rage” (2010), Jock Young's study on moral panics and resentment (2009), politics of envy (Nussbaum, 2018), and an identity recognition (Fukuyama, 2018). These studies are united in their understanding of negatively charged affects as forces behind the inversion of real and valid grievances. These forces can be strategically used for various ideological purposes. For example, Grossberg in his 1992 study of conservative populism shows how conservative discourse appropriates parts of everydayness (that he calls “mattering maps” 1992, p. 82) such as starting a family and having children and recontextualises

them in an affective, resentimental way. The real social, political and economic concerns are transformed into “the ruins of a displaced, perhaps even misplaced, paranoia” (Grossberg, 1992, p. 284).

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it will trace the development of the concept of ressentiment, its evolving role in cultural and political theory, while also addressing issues surrounding the use of this concept: its ambiguous semantics, terminological discrepancies, and its value-laden character. This is necessary to avoid an overly broad interpretation of ressentiment, as it is actively used in political and sociological sciences to explain a wide array of contemporary sociocultural processes, from gender relations (Capelos et al., 2024) to intergenerational conflicts (Young, 2009). Second, the paper will examine how ressentiment operates within the algorithmically driven online public sphere, using recent online controversies as examples.

Ressentiment and the State of Being Offended

The first to introduce ressentiment as a philosophical and psychological term was Søren Kierkegaard, who claimed that ressentiment is the product of “a passionless age”, where society “hinders and stifles all action” (1961, p. 23) in creative and progressive individuals. Kierkegaard argued that people who refuse to conform to the masses become targets of ridicule and give the masses a sense of superiority. Later, German philosopher Eugen Dühring referred to this term, arguing that the concept of justice originated from it. Dühring used the French word *ressentiment*¹ (which does not have an analogue), meaning a bitter memory of something or the desire to take revenge for being wronged (Solomon, 1994, p. 117). Finally, Friedrich Nietzsche, in his *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), formalised the term into a concept and gave it categorical status.

Nietzsche viewed ressentiment as a driving force in the structuring of moral values. Morality, in his view, arises from a division of people into “masters” and “slaves”, but this is not a social distinction; rather, it is an anthropological opposition between two types that runs throughout the entire history of humanity. These two moralities do not merely coexist, but exist in a state of constant interaction. Nietzsche noted that the visible signs of ressentiment are vengeful impulses, bitterness, and hatred (2007, I §10). Yet Nietzsche’s true contribution was not simply to systematise these emotions or to trace their origins to ancient times. The decisive point is that Nietzsche understood ressentiment not only as a psychological phenomenon but as an active force that creates a world, possessing its own social and cultural ontology. The key characteristics of this world are as follows: it is never original, never independent, but only a reaction to an original, creative, constructive action, and thus inherently destructive. “Slave morality” constructs its life principles by opposing itself to the values of the “masters”, inverting them into their opposites (2007, I §7). Revenge, in this framework, is seen as a radical reevaluation of the values of the ‘masters’ (the aristocrats), turning them inside out so that the rejected, the powerless, and the downtrodden become bearers of “the good”, while the powerful become “evil”. We should not be misled into assuming that the morality of the “masters” was always and exclusively positive. Nietzsche constantly warns against this danger of absolutising the division

¹ The etymology of this word can also be traced to “ressentir,” meaning not just “feeling” but feeling repetitively and vividly (Seibert 2024: 397).

between good and evil, and of rigidly attaching them to particular human types, as “it misjudges the sphere it despises, that of the common man” (2007, I §10).

Ressentiment distorts the very demand that, according to its own rhetoric, motivates it: the demand for justice.² Nietzsche repeatedly reflects on how punishment in history was most often not the consequence of the offender's guilt nor an equivalent for the harm done (which would have been a rational manifestation of true justice), but rather an equivalent of suffering. Justice is conceived as the infliction of suffering upon another and the pleasure derived from it; this counter-pleasure becomes the primary goal for the person of resentment. In this way, resentment sanctifies revenge under the name of justice, retrospectively exalting all reactive affects in general, pushing objectivity aside.

The person of resentment deals with real anthropological and social problems purely affectively: “because the release of emotions is the greatest attempt at relief” (2007, III §15). Nietzsche compares this action to anaesthetisation. The true cause of “resentment, revenge and their ilk, in a yearning, then, to anaesthetise pain through emotion: – people generally look for the same thing, wrongly in my view, in the defensive return of a blow, a purely protective reaction” (2007, III §15). It's important to note the mechanism of displacing the true cause of suffering, a displacement that occurs all the more deeply, the more hidden this cause is. An illusory understanding of the source of suffering generates an inseparable complex of guilt, fear, punishment, and the will to endlessly reproduce this complex.

The genealogical approach of Nietzsche lies in his attempt to show the functional aspects of this affective state. From the Modern era onward, societies began to develop utopian ambitions and an individual search for one's rightful place. As a result, people and groups occupying different levels of social welfare began constantly comparing themselves to one another, forming value comparisons along the lines of: the Other as a fatal injustice to the Self. The Other simultaneously becomes an enemy (the source of offense) and the possessor of a coveted position (the source of envy). Ressentiment is not simply the state of being offended, but a fusion of offense-taking with envy. Since, in resentment, hatred loses its connection to the object (as people are structurally unable to express protest directly toward those in power), resentment is affected from without, seeking material in the external world for its embodiment. Ressentiment becomes creative and generates values.

Though the logic of Nietzsche's reasoning about resentment proceeds not from the concept of “offense” (rather from other notions: suffering, guilt, bad conscience, punishment, and the ascetic ideal), the concept of “offensiveness” has absorbed the semantics of resentment, to the point that in many cases it has become dissolved within offense-taking. The logic of being offended and the logic of resentment are not identical, but closely related and tightly interacting within online outrage campaigns, as will be shown further in the article.

From Individual-Emotional to Social Ressentiment

After Nietzsche, the concept of resentment was further elaborated in the early 20th century by Max Scheler in his work *Ressentiment* (1915). Scheler granted the phenomenon of resentment a methodological and conceptual dimension. For Scheler, moral attitudes and experiences operate on a

² This is the critical distinction between Nietzsche's and Dühring's usage of resentment.

different level from ordinary emotions. While resentment originates from such affects as envy and revenge, it is not exhausted by them; it includes other crucial elements: the feeling of impotence, hatred, malice, hostility, and deceitfulness, where the “injury is experienced as a destiny” (1915, p. 8). The notion of destiny is key here, because it points not to an individual’s specific reaction to a particular object (an emotion), but to a moral disposition rooted in a socio-historical context, such as national pride amid political impotence, or formal equality amid actual oppression. Another argument for why resentment cannot be reduced to a simple emotional reaction to a specific object of offense is that resentment’s criticism “does not seriously desire that its demands be fulfilled. It does not want to cure the evil: the evil is merely a pretext for the criticism” (Scheler, 1915, p. 8-9).

For Scheler, resentment is a psychological disposition that arises as a result of a lack of opportunities to respond to immediate sources of failure, hostility, or offense, gradually becoming a prolonged, deferred form of revenge. Lacking the ability to express natural and appropriate affects promptly, a person begins to actively construct a worldview dominated by resentment. Resentment is persistent because postponed revenge, having lost its connection to the original object, is redirected and discharged through affects aimed at the essential being of the other. The active nature of resentment is revealed in its readiness to initiate conflict and to take offense. Resentment is social, as it requires the presence of another person for its emergence, and it is always manifested externally and established in interaction.

The social-historical dimension of resentment was already present in Nietzsche’s work, within the limits set by his genealogical method. But the very genesis of the concept itself was shaped by the specific context. In Nietzsche’s time, the term *ressentiment* carried a particular ideological weight. From the standpoint of class theory, the bourgeois class used this term to justify its privileges and to rationalise the absence of such privileges among poorer classes. In this sense, resentment was invoked to explain protest actions by lower social strata not as a response to oppression, but as a desire to seize from the rich what they possessed. After Nietzsche and Scheler, who interpreted resentment mainly at the intersection of ethics and anthropology, many scholars began using the concept to describe the problems of modern society. For example, the sociologist Robert K. Merton interpreted Nietzsche’s concept of resentment as the poisoning of the will in the form of deferred and imaginary revenge, within the framework of his research on how people adapt to different forms of anomie. He mentions resentment in the context of rebellion as one mode of adaptation. According to Merton, rebellion is a genuine revaluation, unlike resentment. Thus, by combining the concepts of Nietzsche and Scheler, Merton arrives at the following characteristics of resentment: “First, diffuse feelings of hate, envy and hostility; second, a sense of being powerless to express these feelings actively against the person or social stratum evoking them; and third, a continual re-experiencing of this impotent hostility.” (Merton, 1968, p. 211).

In this way, resentment both obscures the original trauma and at the same time accumulates it, transforming the trauma into prolonged, unrelenting suffering. The concept of trauma here neatly connects the sense of powerlessness, the repression of the true cause of suffering, and its repetitive reliving. This repetitive reliving is continuously inflamed by the media, which inserts narratives of moral panics or public indignation, effectively manufacturing these sentiments by imitating a public consensus around various issues and amplifying public fears and outrage. In the same vein, Jock Young

(2009) searched for the roots of moral panics in resentment, doing so on the example of moral panics around youth subcultures. Youth subcultures are demonised for their perceived lack of discipline and real effort by members of society who suffer from the same socio-economic and institutional problems (Young, 2009, p. 13). Of course, the subject of panic does not become something random, but real societal anxieties or “pressure points”, such as unemployment, drug usage and other criminal activities. Yet, moral panics fueled by mass resentment do not lead to real solutions. Instead, they result in the repeated exoticisation and alienation of another group. Gilles Deleuze, in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, also addressed this paralysing effect of resentment, which robs a person of any active force to improve the material conditions (2006, p. 127). What we have instead is fictitious, imaginary revenge projected towards the future, the promise of another world.

There is a widespread scholarly practice of distinguishing between *resentment* and *ressentiment*, where the former is considered an appropriate moral response to the ill will of another and the latter is a vindictive emotion, often personal, petty, and disproportionate to trivial matters (Meltzer & Musolf, 2002, p. 241; Strawson, 1962). In the discourse around resentment and resentment there were numerous attempts to defend the former and dismiss the latter, with the core belief that resentment can “slide” into resentment. However, the alternative view exists, warning that this slide, in practice, is almost impossible to localise and “as soon it becomes topical, has already occurred” (Tuinen, 2020, p. 238). Thus, theoretical models of distinction between “good”, justifiable and reasonable resentment and “bad” self-righteous resentment are fundamentally flawed. As Jaeggi points out, resentment cannot distinguish between emancipatory and antiemancipatory movements, since resentment distorts and obfuscates real problems that can be solved (2022, p. 502).

Thus, over the course of the 20th century, the concept of resentment underwent significant transformations, and in the modern context, its purely pathological character has been largely removed. Indeed, for a long time, resentment was invoked to disqualify any emancipatory movement or ideology as being driven by envy or other pathological, irrational affects. However, today, the social significance of resentment is growing, and reducing all forms of protest activity to deviant behaviour no longer aligns with contemporary realities. Both Nietzsche's and Scheler's interpretations of resentment, with their undeniable merits as well as flaws, should be considered through the lens of 19th- and early 20th-century categories. When turning to the concept of resentment today, it is necessary to make several important qualifications. Recognising the polemical nature of the concept itself, in this paper, I refrain from attempting to identify its original bearers. The inverted logic of life and morality revealed by Nietzsche through resentment did not involve normative assertions, but that does not mean his views were entirely disinterested. Any effort to point to a particular group as the carriers of resentment places the one using the term in a moralising position, one that overlooks their own susceptibility to resentment and the value delusions founded upon it.

Algorithmic Ressentiment

Before delving into the application of resentment to the online sphere, let us first begin with how negative affect functions on social media in general. In her influential book *Affective Publics* (2014), Zizi Papacharissi examines how affectively charged discourse on platforms such as Twitter, YouTube,

and Facebook serves as a form of political expression. At the heart of her argument is the idea that social media facilitates feelings of connection and engagement, enabling members of the public to create imagined collectives through shared affect. This was a widely held sentiment in the early 2010s, particularly in the wake of events such as the *Arab Spring* and various “Twitter revolutions”. However, in retrospect, a growing sense of disillusionment with the tangible outcomes of such movements has given way to a more cynical, inward-facing orientation. It increasingly seems that online activity serves personal interests and self-branding, rather than building lasting, politically or socially significant communities. At the same time, it is also clear that hateful and transgressive rhetoric online can have a real-life impact. It is widely acknowledged that online consolidation of right-wing anonymous users on platforms such as 4chan and X/Twitter contributed to the win of Donald Trump in both the 2016 (Thorleifsson, 2022) and 2024 U.S. presidential elections. This raises further questions about the role of algorithms in shaping these dynamics. Can algorithms enable collective organisation, or do they merely reinforce existing interests by curating content aligned with users’ preferences?

Jodi Dean argued that affective attachments to media cannot produce true communities but instead generate “feelings of community” (2010, p. 22), in which individuals experience the sensation of political participation without its substantive effects. The affect is inseparable from the technological infrastructures through which it circulates, so features like comments, reposts, and quote tweets become a type of performative strategy. However, this performative context also introduces significant risks. The strategic nature of online engagement (the desire to increase the visibility of certain posts, often fueled by the fact that many social media platforms provide financial incentives for a high number of views³), where sincerity and tactical offense-taking become indistinguishable, produces an environment in which public reactions are often instrumentalised for various political purposes. This ambiguity of online posts complicates research, as it is often unclear whether content stems from “nihilistic troublemakers” or “committed racists” (Colley & Moore, 2022, p. 18).

Thus, algorithms are increasingly critiqued as violent tools that not only automate processes based on biased data but also perpetuate harmful, exclusionary, and hateful content. This process can be described as “algorithmic violence” (Richardson, 2023, p. 423), highlighting how automated systems reproduce existing social inequalities under the guise of neutrality. Mass movements in general thrive by exploiting negative affects, offering disaffected individuals a new sense of belonging through shared opposition to the existing social order. This dynamic is particularly potent in digital environments, where offense-taking (whether deliberate or genuine) serves not only as a unifying force but also as a means of identity building.

This problem of an “authentic” negative affect is evident in how, in online outrage campaigns, the content that is deemed offensive is routinely misinterpreted. For instance, one of the *Festivité* segments at the 2024 Olympic Games opening ceremony in Paris was deemed offensive by Christian groups in various countries, the Russian Orthodox Church (Telegram, 2024), some muslim institutions (Khazen, 2024), and conservative media in general (Smith & Burke, 2024). The performance was an

³ For example, the monetisation of posts on X/Twitter. See: X.com, no date. Disponível em: <https://help.x.com/en/rules-and-policies/content-monetization-standards>. Acesso em: 21 jul. 2025.

allusion to the Bacchanalian feast, featuring Drag queens and models, but many viewers interpreted it as a depiction of the Last Supper scene and considered it a blasphemous mockery. Media pundits and online personalities used the controversy as an opportunity to draw attention to their ideological causes, claiming that this performance was a confirmation of satanism and anti-Christian propaganda in the media (See: Quoracles Digital Gospel, 2024). In cases like this, the response of the offended public is much more violent than the initial symbolically offensive content they respond to, frequently resulting in hateful speech and real threats. Laaksonen et al. argued that “the current media ecosystem not only mediates affects but also supports affectivity” (2022, p. 194), with visual and textual practices on social media reinforcing in-group identity and community bonds. This aligns with Sarah Ahmed’s (2004) concept of affective economy, where emotions are circulated and intensified through repetition, a process deeply embedded in algorithmic content distribution. Affects in this framework are not just individual psychological states but are culturally and socially constructed. The interplay of algorithmic rules and affective engagement thus creates a feedback loop, where extremist ideologies gain traction through shared emotional resonance rather than purely rational persuasion.

In this regard, when analysing the affective social media sphere, resentment is especially appealing, as it has more operational advantages when analysing specific cases of online conflicts. The process of how resentment proliferates on social media platforms is usually explored via either resentment-hate or resentment-envy modes. These are the emotions typically central to the discourse on the negative affect on social media in general, with online hating (Sinelnikova, 2022) being the inversion of real discontent and envy-competitiveness (Ceilutka, 2022) being the product of online users’ necessity to abide by the neoliberal logic of the online platforms. Some attempts were even made to present an empirical model of measuring resentment in political contexts, such as a 2022 study by Capelos and Demetris, which affirmed the toxicity and futility of this state, identifying it as an affective response. The study does not attribute this state strictly to one group over the other, but it does point out that conservatives are more prone to resentment than left-wingers, as it precedes reactionary orientations (Capelos & Demetris, 2022, p. 112). Some studies have also considered how media, in general, perpetuates resentment (resentment) as a result of the crisis of trust in institutions, as expressed by many members of the public. Legacy media and journalism nowadays are viewed more often with discontent, suspicion and hostility (Jakobsson & Stiernstedt, 2024). All this is happening against the backdrop of a general tendency of legacy media losing its relevance to more alternative media outlets, such as podcasts, YouTube and TikTok channels, and social media personalities.⁴

In academic literature and media reports on hateful and dangerous online trends or conspiracy theories, there is a tendency to consider online users and audiences as easily swayed. However, this view of the audience as accepting everything they see online at face value is an oversimplification of much more complex processes. First of all, online users do give their attention and privacy for entertainment, but they don’t necessarily do so out of ignorance of how platforms work. The rules of

⁴ Which doesn’t mean that they are less politically engaged, but they are perceived as more genuine and “on-the-ground” as they seemingly operate in more direct ways, with users posting “unedited” footage, information and their opinions. Social media platforms like X/Twitter are claimed to be “public town squares”.

social media algorithms are sometimes understood even better by the audiences than by the researchers who study them. For example, Bucher (2016) researched how the algorithmic awareness dictates the behaviour of social media audiences on the example of Facebook. She points out that there are certain strategies and formulas for posts that adapt the content to be “algorithmically recognisable” and affectively productive (Bucher, 2016, p. 8).

The second aspect is a desire to be recognised (Anderson, 2006; Fukuyama, 2018; Honneth, 1996; Swann et al., 2009). Audiences want to be noticed and picked up by the algorithms, not ignored. Social media has already reformulated the boundary between the public and private spheres, where, to meet the needs of the attention economy, users are more ready to overshare, overexpose and engage in polemic discussions. However, this struggle for recognition should not be solely linked to the logic of algorithmic media. Since the second half of XX century, there was a certain therapeutic turn (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 100) that marks the new socio-political climate, where trauma and “lived experience” become the basis of identity. Ressentiment is especially prolific in these conditions, since, as was mentioned earlier, it has *anaesthetic* properties.

The connection between ressentiment and its assisting role in building online identities was shown in several studies of the online manosphere⁵ and “involuntary celibates (incels)” (Capelos et al., 2024; Cottee, 2020; Tietjen & Tirkkonen, 2023). For instance, the proliferation of ressentiment in the online manosphere is exemplified in the moral discourse around perceived victimhood and sense of injustice, all blame for which is typically placed on women. There were attempts to apply ressentiment as an analytic concept to explain the resentful victimhood culture of incels and its role in their moral argumentations against the societies they live in (Tietjen & Tirkkonen, 2023, p. 2). In these cases, ressentiment also functions as an anaesthetic, a mechanism of emotional transformation and the displacement of real suffering.

Ressentiment forms a value attitude constructed through negating the image of the Other as an enemy. The Self, in this case, is established as an opposition to the unjust Other. In this regard, online users employ offense-taking as an opportunity to demonstrate their identity through the media. The 2014 Gamergate controversy is one of the most widely documented examples of such a coordinated online outrage campaign that mobilised a number of gamers into a group with reactionary views that opposed themselves to progressive tendencies in the game industry. The campaign started in August 2014 after a game developer’s post accusing his ex-girlfriend of having intimate relations for favourable reviews of her game went viral. Initially, framed by its supporters as a movement for ethics in video game journalism, Gamergate quickly became a networked harassment campaign targeting women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and marginalised creators within the gaming industry (Salter, 2017). Such online controversies as the Gamergate showcase a paradox. On the one hand, the offended public wanted to be recognised, yet at the same time, it was anti-institutionalist. The participants criticised the gaming industry for “pushing” progressive ideology and feminism without taking into account their interests

⁵ “Manosphere” is an online community that includes such groups as Pick Up Artists (PUAs), Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs), and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW). See: Cottee, 2020, p. 2.

and desires of a more traditional, predominantly male audience, while simultaneously addressing these demands for change to the industry itself.

Another recent example of an online outrage campaign that unfolded in a resentimental way was a 2024 when Dr. Ally Loucks, a scholar who publicly announced the completion of her PhD at the University of Cambridge (X.com, 2024) and became the target of a coordinated harassment campaign on X/Twitter. The post was met with overwhelming misogynistic and anti-intellectual attacks. The campaign spread with users' quote tweets using aggressive, cruel or post-ironic commentary, from mostly anonymous accounts. Users accused Loucks of benefiting from supposed ideological favouritism in academia, questioning her qualifications and sending threats. This case exemplifies the ways in which affectively charged discourse on social media platforms can rapidly mobilise hostility against visible individuals, missplacing the actual source of offense. The attacks against Loucks were not based on the content of her research but rather on what she symbolised within broader reactionary narratives about higher education, expertise, and perceived "elitism". In the times of declining income and lack of job opportunities, overall deprivation and dissatisfaction with the quality of life faced by a lot of men, the sense of helplessness can potentially be muted by the power felt from targeted attacks on women perceived as unjustly prosperous. These groups of online attackers did not operate on the principle of creating something new that could affirm their values in opposition to those they perceived as degenerate and offensive. Instead, they seek to destroy the values of the Other, constructing their own values through negation, in this case, negating the worthiness of progressivist Humanities. The campaign also reveals the dynamics of strategic offense-taking, wherein users perform outrage not necessarily as spontaneous emotional responses or a prompt for considered critique, but as an opportunity to draw attention to their ideological cause. In this sense, Loucks's academic success functioned as a trigger within grievance-oriented online communities that view higher education institutions as emblematic of exclusionary liberal or progressive values.

In cases mentioned above, it is tempting to use ressentiment in a *diagnostic* manner, by pinpointing the groups, such as online misogynists, as being the carriers of this state. However, the picture is more complex. In both cases, the groups targeted are no less immune to the ressentiment-laden attitude of learned helplessness than the ones attacking them. This does not diminish the responsibility of online attackers as they are the aggressors. What is meant here instead is that many people who are not the direct victims of the attackers start to identify as targets as well, building their identity out of a sense of deprivation and inability to act and represent themselves. As suggested by the universal interpretation of ressentiment, all spheres of culture have been affected by it. Mirroring Nietzsche's ascetic ideal (as the core of ressentiment), groups targeted by online outrage campaigns, who are frequently members of the creative class or academics, also exhibit a proneness to offense-taking directed to the sphere of culture, downplaying the real influence they have on it. Accordingly, manifestations of ressentiment in all their diversity can also be found in all members of these conflicting interactions.

In contemporary realities, the danger of ressentiment is precisely in its function as a strategy of control, where subjects are easily swayed into frustration backed up by envy while overlooking any possibility of genuine public action and change. If we take a distance from the connotations of ressentiment as a trait specific to a particular group of people, we will see that the online (public) sphere

itself is saturated with resentment as a disposition. Resentment has already arisen because conditions of actual scarcity in access to material and cultural goods exist alongside nominal egalitarian trends in society at large. Resentment-driven online outrage campaigns reflect a complex relationship of users' engagement with the algorithmic media. The affect itself emerges in the already mediated space, it largely complies with the algorithmic logic by promoting the content that sparks the most discourse. Online conflicting discourse should be interpreted within the framework of the struggle that is essentially concealed behind the discourse of offense. The overarching goals of this struggle are among the most obscure aspects in the study of such conflicts, but some assumptions can be made. Online outrage campaigns initiated frequently by anonymous posters indicate not only attempts to inflict damage in response to a perceived offense but also a need to establish oneself as a legitimate participant in political discourse and different spheres of culture, including those once privatised by the creative class.

Conclusions

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the concept of resentment offers significant explanatory possibilities when applied to the dynamics of contemporary online outrage campaigns. These campaigns are not merely personal grievances or isolated acts of online hostility. Rather, they function as semantic platforms where deeper cultural and social tensions play out, amplified by the algorithmically driven media environment. Attempts were made to reconstruct the development of resentment as a socio-historical concept, identifying the key elements that define its affective and political function in digital culture today.

Nowadays, we are witnessing a new type of reactionary discourse of offense. One driven not by constructive political engagement, but by the emotionally charged pursuit of grievance. In this climate, resentment becomes a lens through which to understand why online outrage surrounding various forms of cultural expression has become so frequent and so polarised. Resentment operates simultaneously as a passive feeling of victimhood and an active, organising force, creating values and identities. It provides a primary impulse for conflict by displacing the true sources of dissatisfaction onto symbolic targets. Online outrage, especially when amplified through algorithms, becomes less about a specific offense and more about sustaining an enduring attitude which actively seeks out new targets to attack. This explains the cyclical nature of public outrage on platforms like X/Twitter, where acts of offense-taking emerge in rapid succession, often disconnected from meaningful critique.

Importantly, resentment-driven discourse reframes public space as a site of moral injury rather than debate. While public consensus attitude treats conflict as something to be managed, regulated, and ultimately ended, the social development attitude treats conflict as a form of criticism, a struggle that is the engine of social change, and in this sense, conflict is a necessary companion of broadly understood politics. Yet the kind of conflict driven by resentment is distinct, as it lacks a developmental trajectory, tending instead toward repetition and symbolic retribution.

Studying online outrage campaigns under these conditions poses unique challenges. Researchers must consider the interplay between online behaviour and offline social realities, acknowledging that much of what occurs on social media resists straightforward measurement. Yet one thing is clear: affect, intensified by algorithmic rules, is central to how publics form, fracture, and

mobilise. As this study has shown, the resentment-driven outrage campaign is not a pathology, specific to one group over another, but a structural feature of the contemporary digital public sphere. Going forward, understanding the mechanism of resentment: its logic, targets, and emotional economy, will be essential in analysing how negative affect is produced, circulated, and weaponised in digital spaces and in crafting responses that go beyond censorship or biased moderation.

Data availability statement

The main focus of this article is contributions of a theoretical or methodological nature, without the use of empirical data sets. Therefore, in accordance with the journal's editorial guidelines, the article is exempt from being deposited in SciELO Data.

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Editores responsáveis: Léo Peruzzo Júnior e Jelson Oliveira.

RECEBIDO: 12/08/2025

RECEIVED: 08/12/2025

APROVADO: 04/02/2026

APPROVED: 02/04/2026