

"Heil Sol Brah"

Community-building practices around far-right masculinist influencers

JOSHUA FARRELL-MOLLOY¹ & EVIANE LEIDIG^{II}

¹DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL POLITICAL STUDIES, MALMÖ UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

^{II}INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR, THE NETHERLANDS

ABSTRACT

In this article, we explore community-building practices among followers of far-right masculinist influencers. Utilising visual ethnography and netnography, we examine the Right-Wing Bodybuilder (RWBB) community on the platform X and focus on how followers cohere around and promote two previously pseudonymous influencers: Sol Brah and Bronze Age Pervert. Our analysis of memes produced by these follower communities highlights the participatory nature of culting influencers, a process that fosters community-building and reinforces in-group cohesion. We also show how follower communities facilitate message uptake by disseminating influencer messages and mobilising against threats to their credibility from adversaries. Our article contributes to influencer studies by examining the reciprocal dynamics between influencers and followers through these engagement practices.

KEYWORDS: far-right, influencers, netnography, masculinity, visual analysis

Introduction

The enemy today is what I like to call, “soy globalism”. The globalist aim is to destroy nations and local communities. And they do this by isolating communities and sickening them through food. And also, through so-called medicine, and all the dreadful chemicals we’re exposed to on a daily basis

[...] The best response to this is a strong politics of nationalism. The nation is only as strong as the individuals who make it up [...] By making the individual strong, you make the nation strong.

These were the words of pseudonymous far-right influencer Raw Egg Nationalist (REN), in a voiceover in a 2022 *Tucker Carlson Originals* thirty-minute documentary titled “The End of Men”. REN is a leading voice in the Right-Wing Bodybuilder (RWBB) community, a niche subculture which promotes bodybuilding and alternative health and nutrition advice alongside conspiracy theories and far-right ideology. At that time, Tucker Carlson was the most-watched American cable news host in history, with the *Tucker Carlson Tonight* show on Fox News averaging a nightly 4.33 million viewers. The episode, which investigated the alleged “collapse” of American males’ testosterone levels, generated widespread media coverage, giving visibility to REN’s platform and the RWBB movement.

REN, who emerged on Twitter (later renamed X) in 2020, has authored several books and gained over 230,000 followers on X. The rise of REN from obscurity to appearing on a major Fox streaming-service television show in just two years represents a growing trend: the emergence and visibility of right-wing political influencers on social media. Our focus in this article is not on REN, but the two most-referenced influencers within the same RWBB sphere: Bronze Age Pervert (BAP) and Sol Brah. Other figures, like REN, do not inspire the same volume of posts within the community.

Abidin (2015: para 1) has defined social media influencers as,

everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in digital and physical spaces, and monetise their following by integrating “advertorials” into their blog or social media posts.

Both BAP and Sol Brah are vocational social media users who have developed consistent branded personas through influencer practices, such as monetisation, with BAP hosting a popular subscriber-funded podcast, “Caribbean Rhythms”, while Sol Brah sells his own range of clothing, merchandise, and supplements.

Influencers typically create content, provide entertainment, and shape consumer decision-making processes for millions of online users. But influencers can also play subversive roles that risk causing societal harm. This includes spreading disinformation and propaganda (Woolley, 2022), increasing polarisation (Betts & Bliuc, 2022), or merging “conspiratoriness” (the fusion between conspiracy theories and New Age spirituality) with wellness culture (Baker, 2022). Contemporary far-right influencers include conspiracy theorist Alex

Jones, “America First” show host and “Groyper” movement leader Nicholas Fuentes, and Canadian anti-Islam activist Lauren Southern. These individuals use a combination of either mainstream or alternative social media platforms. In addition to promoting sponsored products, they adopt influencer engagement techniques, such as presenting themselves as relatable in order to distribute far-right ideology (Lewis, 2018). For example, far-right female influencers who adopt “tradwife” personas to promote traditional notions of femininity, motherhood, white victimhood, or nationalism, use networked intimacy techniques to foster connection with their followers (Askanius, 2021; Leidig, 2023; Tebaldi, 2023).

In the research on far-right influencers, there is a general tendency to focus on how influencers use strategies to promote their message and less on how followers perceive them or engage with their content. This is an important gap to explore because it offers insight into how followers are built around influencers to help with message uptake, enabling the consumption and reproduction of influencer ideas.

A few scholars have examined user uptake: Lewis (2018) devoted minor attention towards user engagement with influencers, highlighting that overlapping guest appearances (“collabs”) between influencers can introduce users to more ideologically extreme influencers and thus create radicalisation potential. Building upon Lewis’s work, Munger and Phillips (2022) claimed that increased availability of YouTube content catering to extremist ideologies resonates with users previously constrained by the limitations of ideologies in traditional media. Jurg and colleagues (2024) challenged Munger and Phillips’s argument, highlighting that users who perceive and engage with conservative political commentator Ben Shapiro do so with both ambivalence and a quest for truth and reason. Accordingly, they found that Shapiro’s followers “were not so much concerned with Shapiro’s ideological position, but rather communicative style and position as a rational figure” (Jurg et al., 2024: 14).

In another relevant study of masculinity within the Jordan Peterson subreddit, Nesbitt-Larking (2022) found that young men, while diverse in their support of Peterson, are drawn to his figure as a role model who is perceived as sincere and complex in his validation of young men seeking affirmation as spiritual and physical beings. And finally, Åkerlund’s (2020) analysis of the differences between influential and non-influential users among the Swedish far-right on Twitter highlights that influential users define the conversation for others, yet use more neutral language than non-influential users, allowing them to facilitate but evade responsibility for hateful content. Although not a study specifically focused on influencers, Åkerlund raised important insights into the use of platform affordances and identified power dynamics between users that are connected within the same network.

While this research provides us with an important starting point, there remains a significant knowledge gap concerning how users engage with influencers’ online personas and their messaging. This interaction is key to understanding how the popularity and appeal of influencers are co-created by both the influencer and the labour of their followers. An influencer’s success depends upon the loyalty

of followers, who provide them with a consistent base for engagement, financial support, and opportunities to gain visibility (Glatt, 2024). By ignoring the roles of followers, an important aspect of how far-right influencers achieve the reach and spread of their ideological message is overlooked. Hence, in this article we aim to address the following research question: How do follower communities of far-right masculinist influencers engage in community-building practices and interact with the message' of influencers?

The follower communities in our case studies comprise a dedicated network of X users who are actively engaged in content creation and dissemination practices that valorise the two influencers: Bronze Age Pervert (BAP) and Sol Brah. In what follows, we introduce the RWBB community, BAP, and Sol Brah. In the subsequent sections, we outline our methodological approach of combining netnography with visual analysis and present our findings summarised as two core practices of follower engagement: community-building through culting, and the uptake of message through proselytisation and mobilisation tactics.

Case studies: Right-wing bodybuilders

The two chosen influencers are situated within the broader online subculture of Right-Wing Bodybuilders (RWBB). To clarify, there are several communities on X focused on bodybuilding that adhere to right-wing politics, and the community we focus on is distinct within this broader context. RWBB is part of so-called Frogtwitter, a term used to describe a sphere of pseudonymous accounts on X that serves as the main idea hub for the “dissident right”. The dissident right is broadly conceived of as a loose coalition of far-right groups who oppose mainstream conservatism by adopting more radical beliefs such as anti-democracy, anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes, antisemitism, and white nationalism. Adherents of the dissident right self-identify with the label to downplay and sanitise their more extreme views, positioning themselves as counter-cultural figures to mainstream progressivism, and even to mainstream conservatism.

Yet, the dissident right has influenced ideas within Anglosphere conservatism through key figures operating as cultural intermediaries. REN, who we mentioned in the introduction to this article, is a contributor to *The American Mind*, a publication of the conservative think tank, the Claremont Institute, described as the “single most important intellectual articulator of and influence on [Trump conservatism]” (Borg, 2024: 2236). The reach of the dissident right extends to intellectual conservative elites and institutional politics. Prominent conservatives such as Richard Hanania and Christopher Rufo have publicly praised RWBB influencer BAP (Breland, 2023), who was also reported to have followers among young Trump White House staffers (Schreckinger, 2019). Michael Anton, senior national security official in the first Trump administration, reviewed BAP's book, *Bronze Age Mindset*, for *The Claremont Review* and described its growing influence among young men (Anton, 2019). REN and BAP also count Vice President JD Vance among their followers on X (Hall & Lozano, 2024).

As an online subculture, RWBB reflects a broader trend across the contemporary far-right, which aligns personal development with physical strength as an aspirational model for men in reaction to what has been termed the crisis of masculinity (Copland, 2023). Several masculinist RWBB influencers represent what Burnett (2023) has labelled “manfluencers”, referring to influencers that call upon young men to resist a perceived decline in the natural order and degeneration of masculinity by following a path of self-improvement focusing on their bodies, virility, and physique. They advance far-right conspiracy theories, white supremacy, and traditional gender roles in the face of perceived threats to a natural hierarchy, often using alternative nutrition advice as a vehicle to spread extremist ideology. These narratives include concerns of threats to masculinity and health posed by the modern food industry (Muller et al., 2024) and promoting conspiracy theories about novel sources of protein (Farrell-Molloy & Leidig, 2022).

The RWBB community mostly consists of users who conceal their identities behind anonymous accounts but merge into a collective avatar (Devries, 2021). Anonymity is a core feature of the RWBB community as well as the broader dissident right, shaping both individual participation and collective identity. On X, most users operate under pseudonyms and take care to not reveal identifiable information, referring to each other as fellow “anons”. Influencers emerge from this same anonymous pool, in which the use of pseudonyms hinders the ability to cultivate relationships with followers in the same way as non-anonymous influencers, instead placing a greater importance on shared beliefs, aesthetics, or interactive content.

However, for influencers, it is not sufficient to simply produce content to gain visibility. Influencers must build a network of followers who interact with their messaging through likes, shares, and other forms of engagement available through the affordances of social media platforms (Maly, 2024). Consequently, we examine the follower community dynamics around the two most discussed influencers within the RWBB community: BAP and Sol Brah (see Table 1).

Table 1 BAP and Sol Brah accounts on X

Influencer	X handle	Followers
Bronze Age Pervert	@bronzeagemantis	179,848
  Sol Brah  	@SolBrah	230,951

Comments: The X handles and follower count of RWBB influencers Bronze Age Pervert and Sol Brah as of 23 January 2025.

Source: (Bronze Age Pervert, n.d.; Sol Brah, n.d.)

Bronze Age Pervert, or BAP, is the pseudonym of the self-published author of *Bronze Age Mindset* (2018), the seminal RWBB text. *Bronze Age Mindset* is a call to action and self-improvement manual for young men, which blends vitalism, Nietzschean philosophy, and lifestyle advice, and rejects equality and liberal democracy. It extolls the virtues of masculine strength and a hierarchical society in which the strong rule the weak. The book quickly gained a cult-like following among the dissident right, with hundreds of BAP acolytes, known as BAP-ists, on Twitter. “Bapism” has been described by Vandiver (2021: 244) as a “masculinism which is palingenetic in aspiration”.

BAP is notable for his unique persona. He frequently posts eroticised images of male bodies, showcasing idealised Aryan bodybuilders. His online posts and texts are authored in a pidgin-style of writing also reflected in his caricatured voice of an exaggerated Eastern European accent on his podcast. BAP’s use of a pseudonym generated an element of mystique, but in 2023, journalists confirmed that Costin Alamaru, a reportedly part Jewish Romanian-American doctoral graduate in political science from Yale University, was behind the BAP account (Wood, 2023).

Our second influencer is Sol Brah, an Australian health influencer known for his scepticism of modern healthcare, promotion of pseudoscience, and conspiracy narratives. Sol Brah emerged online in 2019 and gained traction during the Covid-19 pandemic by opposing vaccines and lockdown measures. Unlike BAP, Sol Brah’s content consists of videos and images of himself, yet Sol Brah also began his online presence by pixelating his face to hide his identity. In January 2024, Sol Brah purposefully revealed his identity in a promotional video released with great fanfare, timed to increase the hype around publication of his book, *The Sol Way*.

Sol Brah’s content includes motivational tweets offering empowering advice to followers and short weightlifting tutorial videos. He explores and promotes a wide array of esoteric health advice to his followers, ranging from sunning testicles, eating raw meat, and avoiding chemicals deemed harmful by rejecting products such as perfume or polyester clothing. He sells a range of products that he markets as solutions, such as his own range of “natural scents”, cotton sportswear, and health supplements.

To theorise how followers engage with BAP and Sol Brah in the RWBB community, we rely on two key conceptual frameworks. First, as far-right social media influencers such as BAP and Sol Brah have risen in popularity, power dynamics emerge around cults of personality. Building upon Weber’s concept of charismatic authority, Cocker and Cronin (2017) proposed the notion of “new cults of personality” for the Web 2.0 era. Whereas traditional cults of personality have historically been considered a top-down process, achieved through propaganda and mass media, new cults of personality are co-created through “the collaborative and communal interdependence between the contemporary culted figure and his/her community of followers” (Cocker & Cronin, 2017: 457).

Additionally, we draw upon the concept of message uptake. As Maly (2024: 12) wrote, “message” is an analytical term and refers “not only to the ‘literal message’ but also to style and identity of the speaker”, whereas “uptake” relates to how users are both consumers and (re)producers of discourse. Accordingly, in order to regularly facilitate message uptake, influencers require a consistent network of followers who will interact with their content.

Thus, the conceptual frameworks of new cults of personality and message uptake are applied to our study of analysing practices of follower engagement surrounding these two RWBB influencers. Our findings, discussed below, illuminate the participatory nature of what we – drawing upon Cocker and Cronin’s (2017) work – term the culting of influencers and of facilitating message uptake. The following section details our methodological approach to observing these practices of follower engagement.

Data and methodology

Our aim is to understand follower engagement with masculinist influencers in the RWBB community on X through their visual practices. The images we focus on consist of user-generated memes featuring BAP or Sol Brah, as well as their products (i.e., books or merchandise). In an “age of screen-mediated belonging” (Thorleifsson, 2022: 288), visual culture is increasingly important for the study of in-group dynamics in online communities, with users reinforcing bonds of a community through the circulation of memes based on shared references and cultural context. Therefore, our focus on memes posted in the central feed on X offers valuable insights into how users engage with influencers, within the context of community-building.

One of the influencers, Sol Brah, also regularly uses Instagram for lifestyle vlogging, documenting his meals and travels around the world. However, whereas follower engagement practices are mostly restricted to likes and comments on Instagram, X’s central feed design provides a public sphere around which networks coalesce (see Bouvier & Rosenbaum, 2020). RWBB activity is also more limited on Instagram, and often consists of screenshots of posts from X. Overall, X is the main hub of activity for RWBB, as evidenced by how often the platform is referenced by members across RWBB websites, channels, and podcasts.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the practices of follower engagement related to BAP and Sol Brah, our approach combines netnography (Kozinets, 2015) and visual ethnography (Pink, 2020; Rose, 2022) for data collection and analysis. Netnography involves sustained researcher engagement in a community over time and gaining an in-depth understanding of a specific online culture, allowing us to capture the routinised and ritualised media practices of users online. The prevalent use of netnographic analysis in research on online extremism demonstrates its usefulness for gaining an in-depth understanding of the range of media practices involved in far-right community-building, especially on alt-tech platforms (Askanius & Keller, 2021; Collins, 2024; Ebner, 2023; Tuters, 2019).

The initial step of our netnography was to enter the RWBB community, so an X account was created for the purpose of covert observation. Due to risk and ethical considerations, no contact was established with users, and we only accessed publicly available information, that is, no private accounts. During the exploratory stage, we identified discourse relating to the influencers as key to the community's sense of self.

To familiarise ourselves with the RWBB community more broadly and with BAP and Sol Brah in particular, we followed a process of “reverse snowballing” (Särmä, 2016). This entails collecting and considering relevant digital data by allowing it to organically converge towards the researcher over time through their continued digital ethnography. In our case, this also involved following similar threads of discussions on X and following links to adjacent platforms and spaces to become familiar with the online universe of the community, routinely listening to weekly podcasts, reading Substack articles, and zines. During this process, digital data was collected alongside hand-written observations in a fieldwork journal, which documented reflections drawn from being immersed in the day-to-day online culture of RWBB.

To collect the X posts for our study, we selected key RWBB accounts and the accounts of their followers. The selection criteria included user accounts that followed BAP and Sol Brah, regularly retweeted or replied to their content, and displayed clear signifiers in their account names, profile pictures, bios, or header images which indicated their allegiance to a RWBB influencer. Contextual understanding of these in-group signals was possible due to the netnographic approach. After selecting several follower accounts for analysis, additional relevant accounts were found while monitoring the central feed.

We observed the activity of 150 follower accounts continuously throughout each week of data collection from February to June 2024. There are two feeds on X: a “following” tab that allows users to scroll through posts of followed accounts chronologically, and a “for you” tab consisting of algorithmically recommended posts. On observation days, at least twelve hours of posts featured on the “following” tab were checked, followed by five to ten minutes of scrolling the “for you” tab for additional relevant content, manually collecting data that referenced BAP and Sol Brah. During this process, it became apparent that much of this data consisted of visuals, typically images posted alongside a caption to create memes (see Kingdon, 2021).

In total, we collected 320 images for analysis during this period, except for that depicted in Figure 1, collected in September 2024, which was included in the study as it serves as a model illustration for our analysis. The first dataset consisted of memes worshipping BAP or Sol Brah, either using their image or another icon that represented them, such as a book cover. The second dataset included aestheticised images that did not feature either influencer but referenced them in the accompanying text, such as posts promoting BAP's book, or memes crafted to troll rival influencers. Our final step entailed qualitative analysis of the data (Pink, 2020; Rose, 2022), with our field notes contributing to the interpretation of the visual data by providing broader context and

deeper insights into the community. This involved systematisation of the memes into categories of follower engagement practices, relating to either community-building or message uptake. Both authors independently analysed the data to ensure a shared understanding of the various modes of follower engagement, paying attention to recurring patterns in the data, which we present below. For ethical reasons, we do not reveal the accounts linked to the example images included in this article in Figures 1–6, so all citations include a generic description instead.

Analysis

In the following analysis, we highlight two core practices of follower engagement with masculinist influencers in the RWBB community. The first practice is related to community-building and centred around what we term a collective culting of BAP and Sol Brah, in which distinct follower communities are formed through the participatory nature of culting each influencer. We explore how culting is performed through the production of humorous memes venerating both the influencers and in-group knowledge.

The second practice concerns how users collaborate to facilitate “message uptake”, by reproducing and disseminating the message of influencers. We unpack two message uptake practices, which we identify as proselytisation – ritualistic in nature and consisting of user-generated content promoting the influencer’s brand and message – and mobilisation, characterised by defensive actions carried out by the follower community to uphold the credibility of their influencers by protecting them from attacks by rivals. In the analysis of this intertwined set of practices, we demonstrate that reciprocal dynamics between influencers and follower communities have important implications for our understanding of how influence operates online.

Culting and follower communities: Community-building around cults of personality

The dominant visual practice of these follower communities is what we term the culting of BAP and Sol Brah through the production and circulation of memes. Followers construct and maintain the cult of personality of both influencers through memes that express adoration, although typically incorporating a large degree of humour and irony, exemplified in the oft repeated phrase “Heil Sol Brah”.

Such ironic behaviours do not devalue the influencers but serve to strengthen them as focal points for the community. Hence, creating a cult of personality is less about uncritical worship, and more about communal identity and in-jokes. The collaborative effort of culting, often characterised by the style of humour typical of the online far-right, helps to foster community-building through shared laughter.

Mememes act as social bonding tools by establishing a common focal point that anchors the group together while reinforcing the underlying ideals, influence, and status of the influencers within the community (see DeCook, 2018).

Many of the mememes are meant to be esoteric. The visuals typically consist of niche references which require a deep familiarity with BAP or Sol Brah's content to understand; the mememes thus target a distinct in-group who possess the knowledge to understand obscure in-jokes. In this context, followers signal their insider status by sharing mememes with subcultural cues, and this is where our reverse snowballing approach enhanced our analysis, providing the broader context necessary to help make sense of the data and understand the closed-circle culture of the community. In the case of Sol Brah, one example of these coded references relates to the "unlimited energy" meme that circulated in March 2024 following his guest appearance on a self-help podcast. During the episode, he stated that shouting "I have unlimited energy" several times could help overcome fatigue, by manipulating the mind into feeling energised. A subtitled video clip of the segment gained significant traffic in the community, inspiring a trend of humorous mememes using Sol Brah's image and variations of the Gigachad meme (a meme of an attractive and physically fit man). These mememes were anchored in an in-group reference that served as a community in-joke with Sol Brah as its focal point.

BAP's follower community uses even more esoteric in-group language. Several accounts brand their entire online identity on X as followers of BAP, referencing him in their profile pictures, account names, or bios. Our analysis of mememes surrounding BAP includes archived screenshots of his old tweets, which were published outside of our period of sampling but have evolved to become community lore and continue to circulate. One example is his often-quoted "Ancient men conquered cities put them to the sword and fire, meanwhile you go to WINE BAR with 'gf' and enjoy tasteful banter... YOU ARE GAY!" Other examples include mememes referencing episodes of BAP's Caribbean Rhythms, such as video edits paired with clips from the podcast. This overall pattern is exemplified in a self-referential BAPist-produced meme called the "Bronze Age Iceberg" (see Figure 1), illustrating the many layers of community lore. These range from the aforementioned "YOU ARE GAY" tweet on the surface-level, to the most arcane references on the deepest level, like "green glove in Hong Kong", relating to a passage from the book *Bronze Age Mindset*.

Figure 1 Bronze Age Iceberg



Comments: This meme details a hidden world of niche references impenetrable to outsiders.
Source: Image captured from a follower account on X

Another practice of culting includes memes featuring the facial image of BAP and Sol Brah. Our data captures a period after their identity revelation (BAP in 2022 and Sol Brah in 2024). Therefore, our analysis accounts for the post-face reveal impact on cults of personality built on their earlier anonymous personae. There is a significant temporal difference between the identity revelation of BAP, which has had longer time for its impact to become more stabilised within the community, and that of Sol Brah, which occurred immediately prior to data collection. A cursory search indicates a significant growth in user-generated posts after Sol Brah’s face reveal. The transition from “anon” to public identity is an important context of our study because it highlights a significant influencer dynamic in an online subculture deeply characterised by anonymity. Revealing one’s identity in this space, which is characterised by an obsession with fitness and physiognomy, leaves individuals vulnerable as the credibility of the persona they have built can be diminished if their true identity or physical appearance does not match the expectations of the community. The dynamic of anonymity also sets dissident-right influencers apart from those covered in most studies of online influencers, in which authenticity as a performance strategy concerns strategically revealing personal information (Maddox, 2023; Marwick, 2015).

The importance of anonymity is allegedly for protection. Mark Granza, founder and editor of dissident-right online magazine *IM1776*, which has published many anons, including from the RWBB community, has described “being a dissident” as someone afraid to share their radical political views for fear of repercussions to personal life or career (Dreher, 2023). Anonymity thus serves a practical function, shielding users from the ramifications of racist or misogynistic posts, with anons going to great lengths to avoid being “doxxed” (i.e., having personal and identifiable information exposed online). The threat of doxxing particularly affects influencers with large followings and can come from political rivals within the far-right, antifascist activists, or journalists (Wilson, 2024).

BAP’s and Sol Brah’s identity revelations triggered movement-wide reflections in podcasts and articles by dissident-right authors on anonymity’s impact upon visibility. Additionally, the shift from anonymity to public identity reshaped how the follower community engaged with the personae of both influencers, while also demonstrating their sustained enthusiasm for both, as illustrated in the examples below. Even though Costin Alamariu has never confirmed being behind the BAP pseudonym, even re-activating a separate X account under his real name, BAPists have embraced Alamariu as an icon for BAPism. Few publicly available photos of Alamariu exist, yet the small handful of selfies in circulation is the basis for numerous memes and provides coded references for in-group discourse.

The memes semi-ironically worship BAP, such as one featuring Alamariu’s face superimposed onto Moses holding the ten commandments, with both of BAP’s books replacing the stone tablets (see Figure 2). Prior to BAP’s identity revelation, a long-running visual aspect of BAPist memes fixated on the book cover for *Bronze Age Mindset*. This trend continues in our data, but now also features the distinct yellow front cover of Alamariu’s self-published doctoral thesis titled “Selective Breeding and the Birth of Philosophy”. This text was published in 2023, after BAP’s identity became known, likely to leverage the recognition of his BAP persona and capitalise on the publicity of his identity revelation. The inclusion of “selective breeding” in these memes demonstrates the follower community’s continued admiration of BAP and a willingness to adapt to the evolution of his identity. Another key feature of BAPist memes is the use of Nazi iconography. In one image, a “gigachad” wearing a Nazi German military officer cap listens to the Caribbean Rhythms podcast on a phone with both books placed in front of him. In the background looms the Volkshalle, a proposed domed hall designed by Albert Speer, and a launching V2 rocket. These memes contain layers of coded references only understood by insiders.

Figure 2 BAPist memes



Comments: Images of Alamariu (BAP) created by his follower community in a post-identity revelation context.
Source: Images captured from follower accounts on X

In the case of Sol Brah, we observed memes spiking across the RWBB community after his face reveal (see Figure 3). Many expressed devoted loyalty in an ironic manner, while some deployed Sol Brah’s image in racist memes, such as likening his appearance to Asian phenotypical features. Notably, hype around Sol Brah has persisted for nearly a year after releasing his promotional video revealing his appearance and boosted the appeal of his persona. Like BAP, Sol Brah’s increased visual output following his face reveal has created a similar feedback loop, in which his follower community boosts their visual engagement in response to a greater supply of content.

For example, Sol Brah posted a short video on X of himself dancing. This inspired several remixed edits from followers, with one video editing his dancing figure in front of a painting of Hyperborea – an esoteric Nazi reference – while spinning sonnenrad symbols floated on either side of him. In another, his dancing image was multiplied and used to construct a large rotating swastika. Sol

Brah occasionally retweeted follower community memes and edits on his account, such as one calling for mass deportations, which featured his face edited with a “Dark MAGA” aesthetic and the message, “clear them out”. This type of interaction, in which influencers approvingly repost user-generated content, encourages further engagement from the follower community.

However, some reactions to Sol Brah’s appearance were less positive, illuminating possible challenges for anonymous influencers transitioning to a recognisable face. Several made racist claims that Sol Brah appeared Asian, which eventually developed into a community in-joke, a response in which detracting memes coalesced with those made purely for humour. By March 2024 – two months following his face reveal – a racialised caricature of Sol Brah exaggerating his alleged Chinese appearance merged with persistent claims made by some critics that Sol Brah was a grifter (an opportunist motivated solely by making money) when a fake company called BRAH SUPPS INT was advertised on X. The website, written in faux “Chinglish”, resembled a disreputable Chinese supplement company and promoted a cryptocurrency called \$Brah, a so-called meme coin (a cryptocurrency based upon a joke). A network of accounts produced photoshopped images, stickers, and videos of Sol Brah with Chinese features to promote the coin across X. This response underscores the preoccupation with race and physiognomy among the RWBB community. Similar reactions were observed after the doxxing of REN, for example, with some claiming his real appearance failed to resemble that of a true Aryan.

Figure 3 Sol Brah follower community memes



Comments: Images of Sol Brah created by his follower community following his face reveal.
Source: Images captured from follower accounts on X

The memes described above demonstrate culting as a practice of follower engagement that anchors a follower community around an influencer by providing shared in-group references. While previous studies of memes in far-right online subcultures note their importance in forums and chat rooms for sustaining a sense of community (see Ebner & Whitehouse, 2023; Thorleifsson, 2022), our findings identify users who, through the culting practices of meme production, create communities around individual influencers. User-generated visual content produced by the follower community after BAP's and Sol Brah's face reveals demonstrates a sustained enthusiasm for both personae. Interestingly, both influencers seized upon the opportunity to further monetise their brands following their face reveals, despite contrasting circumstances, with Sol Brah voluntarily revealing his identity and BAP's identity being discovered. The risk of losing credibility among followers in a largely anonymous subculture was not, in fact, undermined, but actually resulted in greater fanfare.

Uptake of message: Proselytisation and mobilisation

The first half of our analysis has illustrated that follower communities cohere around a cult of personality surrounding the influencer. In this section, we examine their second practice of engagement, which regards the message uptake of these influencers.

We identify two subcategories of follower engagement with message uptake as proselytisation and mobilisation surrounding BAP and Sol Brah. Proselytisation involves forms of visual engagement where the follower community promotes the influencers through community-driven advertising. The core characteristic of proselytisation is that it is ritualistic in nature, involving a structured set of communal behaviours representing deeper beliefs that are repeated often. Examples include posts in which followers collaborate to cultivate a distinct brand and aesthetic for BAP, posting stylised visual advertorials promoting his book, *Bronze Age Mindset*, in what has become a repetitive, ritualistic meme. Other examples are user-generated images showcasing purchased products from Sol Brah, including his book or branded supplements, like his range of Sol Salts Natural Electrolytes.

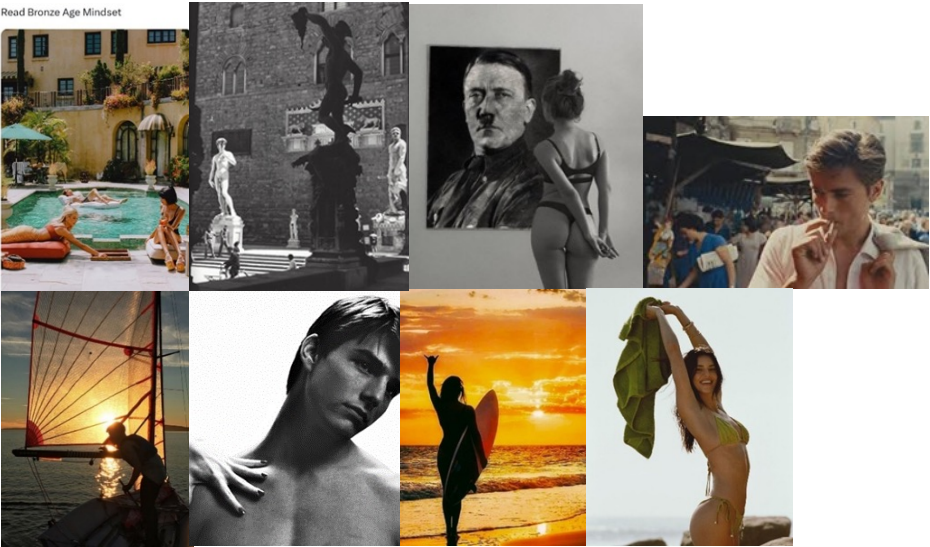
In addition to proselytisation, the follower community engages in mobilisation practices. This entails defensive efforts to shield and protect their figurehead from personal attacks carried out by adversaries. The dissident right landscape is characterised by feuding between multiple personalities, and in our conceptualisation of a distinct follower community revolving around cults of personality, this creates an environment rife for trolling attacks from other follower communities. In our analysis, an ongoing feud between BAP and Groyper leader Nicholas Fuentes shapes this pattern of behaviour. Here, message uptake encompasses posts upholding the credibility of BAP, such as efforts to debunk claims by his detractors, or delegitimising the credibility of Fuentes.

Proselytisation

The prevalence and consistency of message uptake through proselytisation elevates a sense of hype around the influencers and can promote visibility as well as spreading the community’s ideas. The most prominent example is a practice so ritualised it has become a hallmark of the community, involving BAPists posting “Read Bronze Age Mindset by Bronze Age Pervert” or “Listen to Caribbean Rhythms” alongside an image. These slogans originated following *Bronze Age Mindset*’s 2018 release, when BAPists began sharing photos of the book in unique locations or alongside their personal firearms and military uniforms. Calling upon others to read BAP’s book serves a proselytising purpose and has been the primary method of promotion for a self-published work that has successfully become an underground classic and the foundational text for the RWBB community. This messaging, which is persuasive in nature, is primarily aimed at uninitiated outsiders who have yet to read the book. The practice, which helped build an initial buzz around BAPism, has since developed into a trend of posting curated collections of aestheticised images that reflect a particular style and evoke certain emotions.

In our analysis, these posts played upon motifs within the book. One category (see Figure 4) revolves around bodily beauty or attractiveness and includes photographs of female bikini models, handsome men, picturesque Mediterranean scenery, and images of classical architecture and statues. Another recurrent category (see Figure 5) includes “masculinised” images conveying power or strength, such as wild predators, images of war, ancient warriors, and weaponry.

Figure 4 “Read Bronze Age Mindset”: Images showcasing attractiveness and beauty aesthetics



Source: Images captured from follower accounts on X

Figure 5 “Read Bronze Age Mindset”: Images showcasing power and strength



Source: Images captured from follower accounts on X

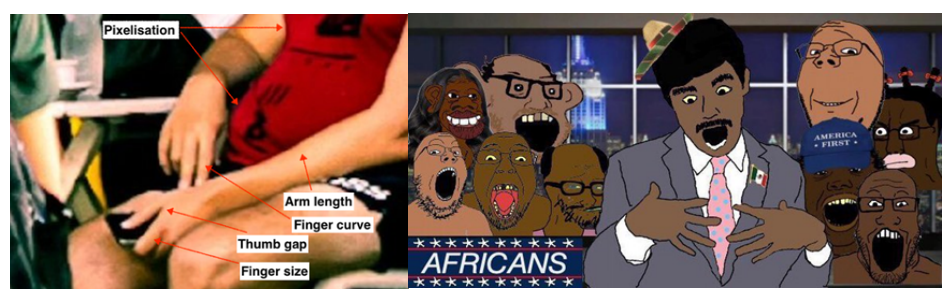
This practice of proselytisation also serves a secondary purpose as an in-group signalling mechanism for the follower community. A key aspect of this practice is that an initial post often triggers a chain of quote tweets on X. Each additional user repeats the same slogan, “Read Bronze Age Mindset”, alongside their own curated image, adding to the chain while maintaining a visual thematic consistency reflecting a shared understanding of subcultural cues and the essence of the book. This participatory practice reinforces the follower community identity and strengthens internal cohesion while also boosting the allure and appeal of BAP.

Mobilisation

Dissident-right influencers with political differences compete for the scarce resource of followers. As a result, disputes between subgroups are common, with feuding and trolling between rival influencers a daily interactive feature of follower communities. In our analysis, this is exemplified by the long-running feud between BAPists and Nicholas J. Fuentes, leader of his own follower community the Groypers. The dispute between Fuentes and BAP originated in 2019, sparked by a disagreement on strategy and movement-building tactics within the dissident right, but has evolved into regular personal attacks. Fuentes, who is deeply antisemitic, routinely attacks BAP for allegedly being Jewish. He uses this smear to delegitimise BAP, portraying him as part of a Jewish plot to sabotage the far-right. The Groypers often brigade (collectively attack) posts by RWBB users with antisemitic memes, mapping Alamariu’s alleged ties to prominent Jewish and pro-Israel figures. Mirroring the culting of BAP, the Groypers use Fuentes as an avatar in their attacks, posting images of Fuentes pointing directly at the camera, with the caption “You Are Jewish”, in replies to BAPist posts. In another line of attack, Groypers share images of an individual they believe is Alamariu, challenging his bodybuilder persona and thus aiming to undermine BAP’s credibility.

BAPists respond to these attacks against their figurehead through what we designate mobilisation posts that defend BAP or attack Fuentes and his Groyper (see Figure 6). Visual practices include challenging the authenticity of Groyper-posted images purportedly of Alamariu. Simultaneously, they undermine Fuentes by replying to Groyper posts with a barrage of memes composed of screenshots portraying Fuentes as unattractive, effeminate, or homosexual. Other examples include memes of Fuentes caricatured as a Mexican (given his Latino roots), and portraying Groyper as composed of Latinos and African Americans. Follower engagement practices such as these bolster support for BAP’s persona and brand by defending his message and credibility, while subverting the legitimacy of opponents.

Figure 6 Mobilisation memes by BAPists



Comments: Left: Challenging the authenticity of an image the Groyper claim is Alamariu. Right: RWBB meme depicting Fuentes and Groyper with racist caricatures.
 Source: Images captured from follower accounts on X

The engagement practices of follower communities who collectively participate in proselytisation and mobilisation offer new insights into how followers can play an active role in message uptake. They can assist with constructing an influencer’s brand by promoting their products, like BAPists do through their endorsement of *Bronze Age Mindset*, or bolster support by countering harmful narratives from opponents. While culting practices serve to idealise the personae of BAP and Sol Brah, message uptake illustrates the reach of this community, while also establishing boundaries.

Conclusion

Most research on (far-right) influencers is focused on the production, rather than reception, of their ideas, whereas with this article we seek to contribute to this field by examining user engagement as a significant dynamic towards understanding the success and appeal of these far-right influencers. Through netnographic and visual analysis of two prominent RWBB influencers – Bronze Age Pervert (BAP) and Sol Brah – we find that their followers engage in two key practices to sustain these figureheads.

Firstly, the follower communities of these masculinist influencers cultivate sites of community-building through what we describe as culting: They use niche references related to the influencer to construct an exclusive in-group identity. This practice typically relies on in-jokes, with layers of humour and irony incorporated into their expression of admiration. Our analysis focuses on follower engagement with two previously anonymous far-right influencers who have transformed into unmasked figures. BAPists have embraced Alamariu as an icon for their movement, incorporating his facial image into their media practices and thus demonstrating an acceptance of his real identity. In the case of Sol Brah, his transition appears to have boosted his popularity and further fuelled a cult of personality surrounding him, with the follower community creating edited content out of an increased supply of his visual content.

Secondly, follower engagement comprises message uptake. Followers who perceive themselves as a community help diffuse the influencers' message through what we term proselytisation of their content and brand. Similarly, there are acts of what we describe as mobilisation, in which follower community members uphold their influencer's reputation, and consequently their message, by defending their credibility from personal attacks by rival actors.

Overall, we find that followers of far-right masculinist influencers play a key function by, in a reciprocal relationship with the influencers, creating and sustaining online communities through practices and interactions that construct a strong sense of belonging. This belonging is characterised by a deeply revitalised, reactionary masculinity that aligns physical strength with social hierarchy in pursuit of an ideological vision. Yet, as we have pointed out, culting occurs around some influencers within this online subculture, while others with similar quantitative metrics appear to never achieve the same degree of engagement, thus inviting avenues for future research.

Acknowledgements

The first author's research in this article was supported by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Doctoral Network 'VORTEX' (project nr.101073440).

References

- Abidin, C. (2015). Communicative intimacies: Influencers and perceived interconnectedness. *A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 8. <https://hdl.handle.net/1794/26365>
- Anton, M. (2019). Are the kids al(t) right? *Claremont Review of Books*. <https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/are-the-kids-altright/>
- Askanius, T. (2021). Women in the Nordic resistance movement and their online media practices: Between internalised misogyny and "embedded feminism". *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(7), 1763–1780. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1916772>
- Askanius, T., & Keller, N. (2021). Murder fantasies in memes: Fascist aesthetics of death threats and the banalization of white supremacist violence. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(16), 2522–2539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1974517>
- Baker, S. A. (2022). Alt. health influencers: How wellness culture and web culture have been weaponised to promote conspiracy theories and far-right extremism during the COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 25(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494211062623>

- Betts, J. M., & Bliuc, A. M. (2022). The effect of influencers on societal polarization. 2022 *Winter Simulation Conference (WSC)*, 370–381. Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers. <https://doi.org/10.1109/WSC57314.2022.10015491>
- Borg, S. (2024). A ‘natcon takeover’? The new right and the future of American foreign policy. *International Affairs*, 100(5), 2233–2245. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae178>
- Bouvier, G., & Rosenbaum, J. E. (Eds.). (2020). *Twitter, the public sphere, and the chaos of online deliberation*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41421-4>
- Breland, A. (2023, October 2). Is the Bronze Age Pervert going mainstream? *Mother Jones*. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2023/10/bronze-age-pervert-costin-alamariu/>
- Bronze Age Pervert [@bronzeagemantis]. (n.d.). *Posts* [X Profile]. X. Retrieved March 9, 2025, from <https://x.com/bronzeagemantis>
- Bronze Age Pervert. (2018). *Bronze age mindset*. Self-published.
- Burnett, S. (2023). Healthy white nationalists: Far-right Selbstbilder in a digital age. In G. Brookes, & M. Chalupnik (Eds.), *Masculinities and discourses of men's health* (pp. 161–188). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38407-3_7
- Cocker, H. L., & Cronin, J. (2017). Charismatic authority and the YouTuber: Unpacking the new cults of personality. *Marketing Theory*, 17(4), 455–472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593117692022>
- Collins, J. (2024). The gift of gab: A netnographic examination of the community building mechanisms in far-right online space. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2023.2296514>
- Copland, S. (2023). Weak men and the feminisation of society: Locating the ideological glue between the manosphere and the far-right. In J. Goetz, & S. Mayer (Eds.), *Global perspectives on anti-feminism: Far-right and religious attacks on equality and diversity* (pp. 116–136). Edinburgh University Press.
- Alamariu, C. V. (2023). *Selective breeding and the birth of philosophy*. Self-published.
- DeCook, J. R. (2018). Memes and symbolic violence: #proudboys and the use of memes for propaganda and the construction of collective identity. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 43(4), 485–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2018.1544149>
- Devries, M. (2021). Mobilized but not (yet) recruited: The case of the collective avatar. In M. Devries, J. Bessant, & R. Watts (Eds.), *Rise of the far right: Technologies of recruitment and mobilization* (pp. 237–260). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Dreher, R. (2023, February 14). ‘Since the Hungarian project seems to have become very relevant for the right in the West, I thought it made sense for me to be here’ – An interview with Mark Granza. *Hungarian Conservative*. https://www.hungarianconservative.com/articles/interview/hungary_orban_conservatism_dreher_granza_interview_left_cancel_culture/
- Ebner, J. (2023). *The identity-extremism nexus in virtual groups: the impact of online group alignment on radicalisation towards violence* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, England].
- Ebner, J., & Whitehouse, H. (2023). Identity and extremism: Sorting out the causal pathways to radicalisation and violent self-sacrifice. In J. Busher, L. Malkki, & S. Marsden (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook on radicalisation and countering radicalisation* (14 pp). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003035848-8>
- Farrell-Molloy, J., & Leidig, E. (2022, October 10). *The emerging raw food movement and the ‘great reset’*. Global Network on Extremism and Technology Insights. <https://gnet-research.org/2022/10/10/the-emerging-raw-food-movement-and-the-great-reset/>
- Glatt, Z. (2024). The intimacy triple bind: Structural inequalities and relational labour in the influencer industry. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 27(3), 424–440.
- Hall, R., & Lozano, I. (2024, July 20). White nationalist bodybuilders and liberal elites: Here’s who JD Vance is following on X. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/jd-vance-twitter-x-following-fyp-trump-b2583022.html>
- Jurg, D., Vis, S., & Picone, I. (2024). Making sense of ambivalence: Audience perceptions and uses of Ben Shapiro as an alternative political commentator. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2024.2363910>
- Kingdon, A. (2021). The meme is the method: Examining the power of the image within extremist propaganda. In A. Lavorgna, & T. J. Holt (Eds.), *Researching cybercrimes* (pp. 301–322). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-74837-1_15
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*. Sage.
- Leidig, E. (2023). *The women of the far right: Social media influencers and online radicalization*. Columbia University Press.

- Lewis, R. (2018). Alternative influence: Broadcasting the reactionary right on YouTube. *Data & Society*. <https://datasociety.net/library/alternative-influence/>
- Maddox, J. (2023). More real, or just more surveillance? Panopticism and shifting authenticity paradigms in BeReal. *Convergence*, 29(5), 1183–1198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565231199987>
- Maly, I. (2024). *Metapolitics, algorithms and violence: New Right activism and terrorism in the attention economy*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003283379>
- Marwick, A. (2015). You may know me from YouTube: (Micro-)celebrity in social media. In P. D. Marshall, & S. Redmond (Eds.), *A companion to celebrity* (pp. 333–350). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118475089.ch18>
- Muller, S. M., Rooney, D., & Cerja, C. (2024). Long live the liver king: Right-wing carnivorous and the digital dissemination of primal rhetoric. *Frontiers in Communication*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2024.1338653>
- Munger, K., & Phillips, J. (2022). Right-wing YouTube: A supply and demand perspective. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27(1), 186–219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220964767>
- Nesbitt-Larking, P. (2022). Constructing narratives of masculinity: Online followers of Jordan B. Peterson. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 23(3), 309–320. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000394>
- Pink, S. (2020). *Doing visual ethnography*. Sage.
- Rose, G. (2022). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*. Sage.
- Schreckinger, B. (2019, August 23). The alt-right manifesto that has Trumpworld talking. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/right-wing-manifesto-that-has-trumpworld-talking-military-rule-bap-bapism-cult-book-bronze-age-mindset/>
- Sol Brah. [X Profile]. (n.d.). [X Profile]. X. Retrieved March 9, 2025, from <https://x.com/SolBrah>
- Sol Brah. (2024). *The Sol Way*. Self-published.
- Särmä, S. (2016). Collaging internet parody images: An art-inspired methodology for studying laughter in world politics. In C. Hamilton, & L. J. Shepherd (Eds.), *Understanding popular culture and world politics in the digital age* (pp. 175–188). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315673394>
- Tebaldi, C. (2023). Granola nazis and the great reset: Enregistering, circulating and regimenting nature on the far right. *Language, Culture and Society*, 5(1), 9–42. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lcs.00036.teb>
- Thorleifsson, C. (2022). From cyberfascism to terrorism: On 4chan/pol/culture and the transnational production of memetic violence. *Nations and Nationalism*, 28(1), 286–301. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12780>
- Tuters, M. (2019). LARPing & liberal tears: Irony, belief and idiocy in the deep vernacular web. In M. Fielitz, & N. Thurston (Eds.), *Post-digital cultures of the far right: Online actions and offline consequences in Europe and the US* (pp. 37–48). transcript. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839446706-003>
- Vandiver, J. (2021). Metapolitics, masculinity, and technology in the rise of “Bronze Age Pervert”. In A. J. McAdams, & A. Castrillon (Eds.), *Contemporary far-right thinkers and the future of liberal democracy* (pp. 242–263). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003105176>
- Wilson, J. (2024, May 14). Revealed: US university lecturer behind far-right Twitter account and publishing house. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/14/far-right-twitter-identity-revealed>
- Wood, G. (2023, August 3). How Bronze Age Pervert charmed the far right. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/09/bronze-age-pervert-costin-alamariu/674762/>
- Woolley, S. C. (2022). Digital propaganda: The power of influencers. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(3), 115–129. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0027>
- Åkerlund, M. (2020). The importance of influential users in (re)producing Swedish far-right discourse on Twitter. *European Journal of Communication*, 35(6), 613–628. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323120940909>