

The spread of manosphere ideology to a Norwegian audience through ironic spectatorship: A qualitative analysis of influencer engagement with Andrew Tate

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I analyse the processes through which extremist discourses are mainstreamed via social media influencers, with a particular focus on the Norwegian context. Drawing on insights from feminist scholarship, extremism research, and media and communications theory, I investigate how young male influencers reproduce, adapt, and negotiate ideas and symbols associated with Andrew Tate and the manosphere. The study concentrates on 2023, when Tate's visibility surged internationally and became a prominent topic in Norwegian mainstream media. Through qualitative analysis of ten YouTube and Instagram posts produced by Oscar Westerlin, Norway's most prominent male influencer, both explicit references and more subtle incorporations of manosphere-related ideas are identified. A key argument in the article is that Westerlin acts as an "ironic spectator", a figure who strategically brings extremist content into the mainstream to attract attention in today's digital media landscape. Situated within the Norwegian society where gender equality is highly valued, the article contributes to an understanding of how influencer culture can facilitate the normalisation of extremist ideologies in a specific context.

KEYWORDS: Oskar Westerlin, Andrew Tate, the manosphere, social media, extremism, mainstreaming

Introduction

During the VIXEN Awards 2023, a prestigious event recognising the most significant influencers in the Norwegian industry, 25-year-old Oskar Westerlin was honoured as “Entertainment Influencer of the Year” (VIXEN Awards, 2023). The young Norwegian influencer had rapidly gained hundreds of thousands of followers across platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, and had supposedly garnered a “powerful influence” over a “new generation of boys” (Selmer-Anderssen & Larsen, 2023). In recognition of his impact, he was even invited to the Norwegian Parliament in the fall of 2023 by Prime Minister Erna Solberg from the Conservative Party, to encourage young men to vote in the upcoming election, emphasising his importance as an important role model (Ali & Henden, 2023). Shortly after, Westerlin was referred to as Norway’s “biggest male influencer” (Hvidsten, 2024).

Westerlin had carved out his niche in social media by engaging in humorous and “controversial” stunts that often played on deep-rooted male chauvinistic stereotypes. In 2022, he created the highly popular podcast and YouTube channel “Kontoret” [The office] featuring a laddish style where he mostly engaged with male friends and other upcoming influencers. During 2022 and 2023, he portrayed the “manfluencer” Andrew Tate in a series of provocative social media posts that garnered attention and provoked discussion (Westerlin, 2022a, 2023). As his content circulated widely, media outlets frequently labelled him an “Andrew Tate wannabe”, bringing to light the increasing visibility of Tate within the Norwegian public discourse during this same period. In the Norwegian context, where gender equality constitutes a central element of the national imaginary, and is widely endorsed by both men and women (Kitterød & Teigen, 2021; Larsen et al., 2021), Westerlin, alongside fellow influencers such as Sebastian Brevik and Abid Waez, faced significant criticism for promoting views echoing Tate’s beliefs (Selmer-Anderssen & Larsen, 2023).

This article provides an analysis of how ideas and symbols associated with Andrew Tate and the manosphere have spread across different contexts and social media platforms. Particular emphasis is placed on the content produced by Westerlin during 2022 and 2023, and I examine how he and other young male Norwegian influencers engaged with and reproduced such symbols during this period. The article outlines how Westerlin deploys a set of tools that enable him to strategically mainstream extremist content, reframing fringe ideas in ways that resonate with broader audiences. Central to this process is his position of an “ironic spectator”, a figure who deliberately introduces extremist content into mainstream spaces to attract attention in today’s media landscape (see Hyzen & Van den Bulck, 2021). By scrutinising Westerlin’s approach, I aim to illuminate the broader implications of social media interactions in shaping public perception of extremist content. This engagement not only highlights the complex dynamics of online communication but also underscores the risks of normalisation, raising wider questions about the role of digital media in circulating extremist content.

First, I explore various extremist online communities known as the manosphere, which provide much of the backdrop for what Andrew Tate represents. Next, I discuss the mainstreaming of extremism in a contemporary media context, before examining how Oskar Westerlin engages with and reproduces the ideas and symbols related to Tate and the manosphere.

The manosphere, Andrew Tate, and “manfluencers”

The manosphere refers to a loose network of digital communities centred around misogynistic discourses and “extreme views against women” (Han & Yin, 2023). It comprises diverse groups that sometimes conflict or overlap, such as men’s rights activists (MRAs), men going their own way (MGTOWs), incels (involuntary celibates), and pick-up artists (PUAs) (Ging, 2021). These groups also often share a common belief that men are oppressed victims of feminism (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023: 1392). A recurring theme in the manosphere is misandry, where men view themselves as the true victims in a world perceived to favour women (Sugiura, 2021). Many actors within the manosphere promote a “traditional masculinity” characterised by conservative gender roles (Hermansson et al., 2020: 172).

According to Cassam (2021), “conspiracy thinking” plays a crucial role in shaping an extremist mindset in the manosphere, particularly among groups like incels, who exhibit characteristics of aggrieved entitlement and a victim mentality (see also Kimmel, 2017). A central concept in the manosphere is “the red pill”, a metaphor taken from the movie *The Matrix*. This term describes an epiphany about the so-called “unpleasant truth of reality”, where individuals realise that society is unfairly “feminised”. Although this realisation may be painful, it is believed to be more accurate than living in what they consider “delusions” (Hermansson et al., 2020: 168). This mindset is often described as being “disconnected from reality”, because it is based on a perceived persecution that either does not exist or is directed at societal groups not responsible for their marginalisation (Cassam, 2021: 119). Overall, the manosphere is a multifaceted online ecosystem that is in constant flux (Ging & Murphy, 2021).

For instance, it has been suggested that platforms like Urban Dictionary, a crowd-sourced online dictionary of contemporary slang, contribute to the spread of negative discourses related to gender and sexuality, thereby allowing “toxic misogyny” from the manosphere to percolate into mainstream culture (Ging et al., 2020). In recent years, the manosphere has increasingly intersected with mainstream social media. Today, content associated with the manosphere is distributed via platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and X. Memes and other content are spread through social media algorithms, reaching an even larger audience (Hopton & Langer, 2022; Papadamou et al., 2020).

A central figure in the contemporary spread of manosphere-related content is Andrew Tate, a 38-year-old British-American male, a “kickboxer-turned-influencer”, who has also been faced with criminal charges over rape, assault, and human trafficking (Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025: 2). With a net worth of millions of dollars, Tate is a notable “hero of the manosphere”, who has made it to mainstream popular culture. Tate represents an ideal that men become wealthy “alpha males” through hard work, stoicism, muscle training, cryptocurrency speculation, and maintaining traditional gender roles (Baker et al., 2024; Haslop et al., 2024). It has been claimed that he normalises misogyny as he caricatures feminists as villains and that there is a strong connection between his misogyny and right-wing politics (Katz, 2023).

According to Haslop and colleagues (2024), there are four prominent discourses reflected in Tate’s content across various social media platforms: 1) the notion that men are “naturally” dominant, suggesting an inherent superiority; 2) the portrayal of women as subservient and obedient to men, reinforcing traditional gender roles; 3) the weaponisation and naturalisation of gender stereotypes, which perpetuates societal norms that box individuals into restrictive categories; and 4) the concept of male victimhood and aggrieved masculinity, presenting men as victims in a changing world. Overall, Tate’s content is steeped in “extreme sexist stereotypes” (Haslop et al., 2024: 11).

In their analysis of the ways in which third-party videos have creatively “(re) constituted, (re)distributed, and (re)encountered” Tate’s persona on TikTok, Thomas-Parr and Gilroy-Ware (2025: 237) have argued that a significant amount of this content revolves around themes of empowerment and self-esteem (Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025: 233). These concepts are often constructed through the lenses of consumerism, the emphasis on physical aesthetics as a form of personal improvement, and the drive for entrepreneurial upward mobility, which collectively depict a vision of success that is deeply entwined with material wealth and personal branding.

Roberts and colleagues (2025) have analysed Tate’s written discourses appearing on his website and on his Telegram messaging platform. They argued that his focus on self-help advice directed at boys and men subtly reinforces problematic ideologies. By glorifying essentialism – the belief that specific traits and roles are inherently tied to gender – alongside promoting gender hierarchy and individualism, Tate constructs an ideological framework that is both insidious and pervasive. This framework not only legitimises misogyny but also encourages young men to embrace these attitudes as they navigate a societal landscape in which traditional norms that once privileged them are increasingly being challenged. As a result, Tate’s rhetoric serves to normalise and perpetuate harmful beliefs about gender roles, impacting the way young men perceive their identities and relationships in a rapidly evolving social context.

Mainstreaming, ideological entrepreneurs, and ironic spectators

The term mainstream refers to what is commonly accepted, “normal”, or conventional in a society. In contrast, extremist ideas are often marginalised and held by smaller groups or individuals who lack broad societal acceptance. However, over time, these extremist ideas can gain traction and become more widely accepted through various channels, such as media coverage, political rhetoric, or social movements. This process, known as mainstreaming, occurs when “extreme ideas become normalized as part of the acceptable spectrum of beliefs within democratic societies” (Miller-Idriss, 2020: 46). For example, shifts in societal conditions – such as economic uncertainty, political instability, or cultural anxieties – can create an environment in which people are more receptive to radical solutions or unconventional narratives.

The mainstreaming process can lead to a “proliferation of specific topics” that “push the boundaries of the speakable”, ultimately contributing to a broader societal shift toward more radical positions (Schwarzenegger & Wagner, 2018). Rothut and colleagues (2024) identified several “mainstreaming factors” that facilitate the introduction of extremist content to a broader audience. These factors include the use of humorous and entertaining communication formats, such as memes, which can “test out discriminatory thought patterns by recreating similar ‘jokes’” (Rothut et al., 2024: 55). Additionally, the role of visual content is crucial; certain “forms, elements, and mechanisms of visual communication” can significantly help normalise radical and extremist ideas (Rothut et al., 2024: 55). The visual appeal of such content often makes it more engaging and shareable, effectively amplifying its reach. In her seminal 2018 book, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany*, Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2018) examined how extremist ideologies have increasingly infiltrated mainstream culture. She emphasised the role of commercialisation in making far-right symbols and messages more accessible and attractive, particularly to younger demographics, who are more likely to consume media on platforms such as social media and streaming services.

The rise of influencer culture on social media has also been pivotal in making extreme ideas more mainstream. Influencers, who often boast substantial followings, wield considerable influence over public discourse by introducing and legitimising radical viewpoints within their content, effectively reaching vast audiences (Baker, 2022: 5). In this context, Hyzen and Van den Bulck emphasised the vital role played by “ideological entrepreneurs” in this process of mainstreaming “that play a key role in ideological change and thrive in times of upheaval and alienation” (Hyzen & Van den Bulck, 2021: 182). Among these ideological entrepreneurs, Hyzen and Van den Bulck mentioned well-known and often controversial personalities like Alex Jones and Jordan Peterson. However, it is important to note that Andrew Tate also aligns well with their characterisation of an ideological entrepreneur.

Ideological entrepreneurs actively disseminate provocative political ideas and analyses by skilfully leveraging the platforms of social media, where their messages can resonate with and captivate large audiences. Moreover, Finlayson (2023: 36) has asserted that such entrepreneurs strategically “manufacture and sell” extremist ideas, capitalising on the economic incentives and celebrity dynamics inherent in social media engagement that demand attention and provoke reactions. This highlights a trend where sensationalism and controversy are often prioritised over authenticity and factual integrity, further entrenching extreme views within the public sphere.

Hyzen and Van den Bulck have provided a distinction between two distinct categories of participants in the dissemination of extremist ideas: ideological entrepreneurs and what they have termed “ironic spectators”. Ironic spectators occupy a complex position; they do not actively endorse or oppose the ideas championed by ideological entrepreneurs; yet, they are “both instrumental in and part of the mainstreaming” of extremist ideas (Hyzen & Van den Bulck, 2021: 186). This diverse group encompasses a wide array of individuals, ranging from everyday citizens intrigued by sensational claims to public figures, such as the comedian and podcast host Joe Rogan. Rogan, known for his willingness to engage with a variety of controversial topics, often navigates the intricate space between acceptance and rejection, sparking conversations without fully committing to any viewpoint (Hyzen & Van den Bulck, 2021: 186). This dual role of ironic spectators not only complicates the dialogue surrounding these ideas but also serves to blur the boundaries between acceptance and critique, thereby fostering an environment where extremist ideologies can more easily proliferate in contemporary discourse. As such, an ironic spectator can be a complex and ambivalent figure, confidently navigating a landscape filled with competing narratives. Hyzen and Van den Bulck (2021: 186) emphasised the need for an extended conceptual and methodological “toolbox” to understand how extremist content is pushed from the fringe to the mainstream by influencers in today’s digital landscape. In this article, I expand on their analysis of the ironic spectator as a mechanism through which extremist discourse circulates and gains legitimacy. Thus, the study contributes to previous research by situating ironic spectatorship within the specific context of Norwegian influencer culture, demonstrating how Andrew Tate and manosphere content are adapted and negotiated in a local context.

Empirical content and analytical approach

In this article, I analyse how ideas and symbols associated with Andrew Tate were represented by Oscar Westerlin from 2022 to 2023. Westerlin is a social media influencer who gained recognition on TikTok during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, he has expanded his presence to other social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. Together with fellow influencer Snorre Klanderud, Westerlin also created the popular podcast and YouTube

channel called Kontoret in 2022, released music, and participated in programmes produced by traditional Norwegian media outlets such as the national newspaper VG and the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK. Westerlin's popularity in the Norwegian media surged in 2022 and 2023. Thus, he was transformed from a micro-influencer to a macro-influencer (Baker, 2022: 7). I focused my analysis on Westerlin's social media posts from mid 2022 to mid 2023, based on the first mentions of Tate in the media, and the significant interest around Tate in Norwegian media during this period (see, e.g., Jarstad, 2022).

My initial work started with a search that used the keywords "Oscar Westerlin" and "Andrew Tate" on Google, allowing the selection of specific dates from 1 June 2022 to 1 June 2023. This search yielded three YouTube videos posted by Westerlin during this time, each featuring "Andrew Tate" in the title or description. I then examined his Instagram posts more closely and identified another three posts that included explicit visual or textual references to Andrew Tate for the dataset. The videos were selected based on explicit references to Andrew Tate in their titles or descriptions, comprising the entirety of Westerlin's posts during the period that directly engaged with Tate as a cultural figure. Additionally, I found several videos in which Westerlin engaged in dialogue with other influential young male influencers known for their conservative views on gender, including Sebastian Brevik, Henrik Viken, and Adib Waez. These posts had a podcast format, allowing for a deeper exploration of certain topics. In this selection, I have included posts from Westerlin's personal social media accounts as well as content posted under the name Kontoret. From this sampling, I included four posts in the dataset. In total, the final dataset consists of ten social media posts, from both YouTube and Instagram, and it also features a podcast from Spotify that is not available on the YouTube Kontoret channel. While additional posts from Westerlin's content on social media could have been included, the dataset was deliberately narrowed to prioritise analytical depth over breadth and should therefore be understood as a strategic sample rather than an exhaustive mapping of Westerlin's output. While I acknowledge the limitations of this qualitative approach in providing a fully representative overview of Westerlin's extensive bodies of work during 2022–2023, the complex discursive nature of this social media content justifies a closer analysis of a smaller, influential sample.

Table 1 Overview of the social media posts analysed

Date	Content creator	Social media	Title	Male influencers involved/depicted
14 August 2022	Kontoret	YouTube	100 shots of beer, 500 million streams, Andrew Tate, and a villa in Madeira [100 shots øl, 500 mill streams, Andrew Tate og Villa i Madeira]	Westerlin, Klanderud, Ringnes-Ronny
29 August 2022	Kontoret	YouTube	Living 1 Day as Andrew Tate [Lever 1 dag som Andrew Tate]	Westerlin, Klanderud
30 October 2022	Oskar Westerlin	Instagram	My unmatched perspicacity coupled with my sheer indefatigability makes me a feared opponent in any realm of human endeavour.	Westerlin
27 November 2022	Kontoret	YouTube	Barisbrevik on obesity, income, and crypto [Barisbrevik om overvekt, inntekt og krypto]	Westerlin, Klanderud, Brevik
04 December 2022	Kontoret	YouTube	Betting 60K på blackjack with Henrik Viken [Better 60K på blackjack med Henrik Viken]	Westerlin, Klanderud, Viken
18 December 2022	Kontoret	YouTube	Is Adib Waez (Mr. Dubai) a fraud? [Er Adib Waez (Mr. Dubai) en svindler?]	Westerlin, Klanderud, Waez
08 February 2023	Oskar Westerlin	YouTube	Living 1 Day as Andrew Tate (Again) [Lever en dag som Andrew Tate (igjen)]	Westerlin, Klanderud,
08 January 2023	Oskar Westerlin	Instagram	Go bald or go home	Westerlin
20 February 2023	Kontoret	Spotify	Barisbrevik and Henrik Viken on TikTok drama, toxic masculinity, and Jodel [Barisbrevik og Henrik Viken om, TikTok-drama toxic masculinity og Jodel]	Westerlin, Klanderud, Brevik, Viken
02 May 2023	Oskar Westerlin	Instagram	The weekend briefly summarised [Helga kort oppsummert]	Westerlin, Viken

The methods employed for interpretation of this material followed Rose’s (2003) suggestion to immerse researchers in visual texts through repeated viewing before committing to a more formal codification. In the codification process, I first identified every instance of discourse related to Andrew Tate and the manosphere and categorised each instance thematically. The thematic analysis entailed a systematic coding of recurring patterns across the dataset, which were

subsequently organised into broader thematic categories to capture underlying structures of meaning. Further on, I based the approach on what previous research (Haslop et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2025; Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025) has identified as central themes in relation to Tate's social media content: 1) misogyny/gender stereotypes; 2) male victimhood/aggrieved masculinity; and 3) entrepreneurial upward mobility. The quotes and behaviours discussed in the empirical sections represent examples placed within these categories. Following Miller-Idriss (2018), I was also interested in exploring the movement of certain traveling images in relation to Tate and the manosphere. Miller-Idriss (2018: 136–137) described traveling images as “a plethora of symbols, images, icons” as well as messages “in text form” that are important in the mainstreaming of extremism, noting that certain images “that are produced at a particular moment in a specific political, national, or cultural context”, often become “iconic through repeated appropriation and deployment in contexts often wholly removed from their origin”, thus “taking on nonnational, pan-national, or global meanings and statuses”.

Analysis and findings: Parodying Tate and travelling images

Westerlin plays a prominent role on his social media account and acts as a host on the Kontoret YouTube channel, where he engages in dialogue with other male influencers. The selections from Westerlin's social media posts convey a sense of camaraderie and playfulness, behaviour that is characteristic of his interactions with male friends, along with other influencers and celebrities. It is particularly evident that Westerlin's content is aimed at a young male audience, frequently addressing them directly with the term “boys”, which solidifies this connection. A defining aspect of his content is the notable absence of women: Most of his guests and companions seem to be exclusively other men, creating a space that is distinctly male-dominated.

Much of Westerlin's content in 2022 and 2023 engaged directly or indirectly with the ideas and symbols championed by Andrew Tate. Certain videos vividly exemplify the overt parody of Tate's persona, reflecting a broader trend in which ideological entrepreneurs are represented within popular culture; this representation often manifests through a variety of expressions, including satirical parodies (Hyzen & Van den Bulck, 2021: 186). In two YouTube videos titled (in English) “Living 1 Day as Andrew Tate” and “Living 1 Day as Andrew Tate (Again)” (Westerlin, 2022a, 2023a), Westerlin immerses himself in the distinct routines, attitudes, behaviours, and opulent lifestyle that Tate promotes. Throughout both pieces, he vividly embodies Tate's hypermasculinity. The tone of these videos is unmistakably ironic; for instance, the second video opens with a tongue-in-cheek disclaimer emphasising that the content is purely for entertainment and intended as satire.

In the first video, Westerlin meticulously imitates the daily habits and extravagant activities typically associated with Andrew Tate: maintaining a strict

gym routine, speeding through the city in a sports car, smoking cigars, drinking alcohol, eating steaks, and immersing himself in nightlife. He elaborates on Tate's routines by presenting a hyperbolic set of "DOs and DON'Ts", while also mimicking Tate's aggressive laugh, frequent use of profanity, and domineering attitude toward others. Across both videos, Westerlin adopts a deliberately abrasive persona, shouting at and mocking peers, while visually reinforcing Tate's image through symbolic markers such as a shaved head, beige suit over a tight black T-shirt, dark sunglasses, and other emblems of luxury and excess. There is a car scene where he explains that he needs a "fat cigar in my mouth" to fulfil the image of the "Top G". Symbolic references to Tate are also visible in an Instagram post, where Westerlin and influencer Sebastian Brevik poses with a characteristic hand sign that Tate also frequently uses (Westerlin, 2023b). In this manner, the symbols associated with Tate are recycled into "traveling images" within a Norwegian mainstream media context, all wrapped in a mix of playful irony.

References to symbols associated with Tate and the manosphere appear in other parts of the analysed content as well, where Westerlin does not imitate Tate in the same satirical manner. In a YouTube video featuring influencer Adib Waez – referred to as "Norway's Andrew Tate" – he shares his experience of spotting Andrew Tate in a boxing ring in Dubai (Kontoret, 2022c). According to Waez, the event drew a large crowd, with thousands of attendees shouting "Top G". Westerlin responds with "Fuck" and "That's crazy", clearly affirming the idolised image of Tate that Waez presents. The term "Top G" serves as a nickname for Tate (Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025) and has become a widely recognised term associated with him online. Tate himself describes his status by stating that he is a "strong, huge, brilliant Top G of Earth" (Roberts et al., 2025: 12). However, "Top G" is not just slang; it also serves as a brand under which Tate promotes himself and various products through his website (merch.topg.com). This brand includes a wide range of merchandise, from clothing to lifestyle products, all designed to enhance the image and values linked to being a "Top G". Tate's ability to leverage his online icon status to market products under the Top G brand exemplifies what Miller-Idriss (2018: 8) has analysed as the "growth of the extremist commercial market". In this context, extremist individuals or groups effectively utilise commercial branding techniques to promote their ideologies, often selling clothing, music, and other merchandise that reflect these views (Miller-Idriss, 2018: 8). Thus, the references to the concept and brand "Top G" in the videos potentially introduce this symbol to a predominantly young male audience in Norway.

Another significant reference to Andrew Tate appears in an Instagram post from August 2022, which highlights the following quote: "My unmatched perspicacity coupled with my sheer indefatigability makes me a feared opponent in any realm of human endeavour" (Westerlin, 2022b). At present, this statement serves as the headline for Tate's X account, also known as Cobratate, and has become a cornerstone of his personal branding strategy. However, when Westerlin shared this quote, the context was particularly turbulent.

In 2022, Tate was facing widespread removal from multiple social media platforms due to escalating concerns regarding his extreme and controversial viewpoints (Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025: 231). In August of that year, major platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok took decisive action to ban his accounts, citing significant worries about the potential adverse influence he exerted over millions of followers (Holpuch, 2022). Consequently, Westerlin's use of the Tate quote during this highly charged period adds an additional layer of controversy and intrigue. Accompanying the quote is a line – “Lived a day in the life of Andrew Tate; link to the video is in the bio” – which points to a video where Westerlin humorously impersonates Tate. This post functioned as clickbait, intended to attract viewers to the YouTube video Westerlin had uploaded. The combination of Tate's words and Westerlin's satirical parody potentially invited audiences to engage further with the content while potentially also reflecting on the broader implications of Tate's controversial persona on social media.

Entrepreneurship and upward mobility

The videos present several discussions on the professional journey of becoming an influencer. They emphasise the distinct challenges and opportunities within this digital realm, as well as strategies for achieving “accelerated upward economic mobility”, a theme frequently echoed in Tate's social media content (Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025: 243). Tate emerges as a prominent figure in this conversation, symbolising a notable success story in the realm of influencer economics. For instance, during a conversation about the fringe website Rumble where Tate frequently publishes his content, the following exchange occurs:

Viken: Is it Tate who built it up, or...? [referring to Rumble]

Westerlin: Yes, I think so. I guess he owns a large percentage too. He talks about it on every podcast he's on.

Klanderud: Did Tate actually create it?

Westerlin: No, he didn't create it. There was a CEO and others involved before. However, he has started posting on it and is in excellent communication with the CEO. He has likely invested several million dollars into it.

(Kontoret, 2022b)

This exchange highlights the complexities of influencer involvement in emerging platforms, highlighting how individuals like Tate navigate the intersection of entrepreneurship and social media. Such portrayals are also significant because they contribute to normalising figures like Tate as entrepreneurial innovators rather than solely as controversial or extremist actors.

Similarly, Waez, describing his own business model, stated:

I am selling a course to a beginner who wants to start an online business where they can learn digital marketing, sales, management... Everything. About my journey. For example, I have built myself up over four years. I have learned how to sell, how to conduct meetings... All this knowledge I have packaged into a course. And I can show you how to start an online business from scratch. (Kontoret, 2022c)

This could be interpreted as a strong alignment between self-driven education and entrepreneurial success, emphasising the transformative power of personal experience in the world of online business. Waez appears to reflect Tate's entrepreneurial spirit as he outlines his own journey in creating a business. Tate is recognised by these young male influencers for his approach to digitally enabled entrepreneurship. A notable example of this is his monthly paid subscription website, which primarily targets men. On this platform, he shares various strategies and methods for self-improvement and personal development (Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025). Waez also dipped into the intricate world of entrepreneurship, sharply criticising the restrictive tax policies imposed by the government. He warned: "Instead of genuinely supporting you and proclaiming their backing, we will treat you like a criminal. You will encounter opposition from all directions". Within this framework, Waez urged young men to awaken to the harsh realities of state interference that could thwart their entrepreneurial dreams. He called on them to navigate the tangled and often oppressive landscape created by government actions that stifle innovation and ambition. This discourse echoes a recurring theme found in Tate's videos, where he fervently argues that men must unlock their "financial potential" by uncovering the "truth" embedded within the intricate economic structures that underpin their societies (Haslop et al., 2024: 5).

Male victimhood

A recurring theme in the various YouTube videos analysed centres around the question of censorship experienced by male influencers, and how this affects these young men in a negative way. In the video titled "Betting 60K on Blackjack", Henrik Viken reveals that he received a "permaban" on TikTok for discussing controversial subjects (Kontoret, 2022b). During a conversation with fellow content creators Westerlin and Klanderud, Viken laments, "You can't say anything at all; you just get shut down". He specifically points out that his account was suspended for addressing topics like "fat-shaming", an issue that also features prominently in the video featuring Brevik (Kontoret, 2022a). In an ongoing discussion about what can be openly discussed on social media platforms, Klanderud emphasises the considerable influence of TikTok and Instagram: "Through TikTok and Instagram, they decide much of what people are allowed to say". This highlights the power these platforms wield in shaping public discourse.

Baker (2022) explored how alternative health influencers used social media to promote conspiracy theories during the Covid-19 pandemic. She argued that “social media is conceived as both an alternative to, and rejection of, the mainstream media”, positioning influencers to reject the perceived corruption of traditional narratives (Baker, 2022: 11). However, for the collective voices of Westerlin, Brevik, Viken, and Klanderud, platforms like TikTok and Instagram operate more like traditional mainstream media, as they often censor or limit the expression of unconventional viewpoints. Much of their conversation revolves around strategies to navigate these restrictions while still addressing contentious issues. The “they” mentioned by Klanderud likely refers to the powerful technology companies that dictate the terms of acceptable speech on social platforms, effectively silencing young male influencers and curtailing their freedom of expression.

The influencers also position themselves against a society that seemingly cultivates fear around “freedom of speech”, on “controversial” topics such as “fat-shaming”. Brevik underscored this commitment: “I feel it’s a bit my responsibility to say what people don’t dare to say”. Viken highlighted the case of former YouTuber “SteveWillDoit”, a popular member of the YouTube collective NELK Boys, who faced a ban from YouTube due to his controversial content. He posited that “SteveWillDoit” “probably ended up on Rumble alongside Tate”, posing the thought-provoking question: “Maybe that’s where we should go – Rumble?” Adding to this dialogue, Westerlin expressed, “I have actually considered posting YouTube content on Rumble. Why not do it?” Rumble has emerged as a vital “fringe video-sharing platform”, functioning as a refuge for those deplatformed by the more dominant social media giants. Within this ecosystem, figures like Andrew Tate have harnessed the power of Rumble to disseminate their messages, uploading hundreds of videos since their bans from major platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook in 2022 (Sayogie et al., 2023). Potentially transitioning to Rumble – “alongside Tate” – not only supposedly “liberates” these influencers from a restrictive system that stifles their voices but also empowers them to confront critical societal issues, advocating for views that seemingly are often deemed controversial or taboo in mainstream discourse.

The discussions about “censorship” resemble a narrative from the manosphere, where men claim to be the true victims in a society that suppresses the “truth” (Haslop et al., 2024: 3). Brevik pointed out that people “aren’t so fond of hearing the truth”, expressing his frustration by stating: “People are like sheep today. They do what the authorities think we should do”. Westerlin resonated with this sentiment, quipping, “Yeah. Fucking Matrix”, referring to the film that symbolises the struggle against an illusory reality. Tate often invokes “The Matrix” to suggest that many men remain oblivious to the “truth” of the societal mechanisms governing their lives (Haslop et al., 2024). This viewpoint aligns closely with the “red pill philosophy” which asserts that only a select group of men have the insight to recognise the supposed truth: that women are not genuinely oppressed today (Dickel & Evolvi, 2023: 1394). By drawing on ideas associated with Tate and the manosphere, this perspective reinforces a narrative that positions men

as victims of censorship, conformity, and systemic bias, thereby potentially also reframing critiques of gender equality as struggles for freedom of expression and authenticity. Such framing not only challenges mainstream understandings of gender relations but also fosters a sense of male camaraderie built around shared grievances and resistance to perceived societal injustices.

Misogyny and gender stereotypes

As previously noted, a striking aspect of Westerlin's social media content from 2022 and 2023 is the absence of female representation, which is evident throughout his videos. Despite the occasional mention of having a "girlfriend" (this reference appears tangential), the overall atmosphere is male-centric. Women are depicted only in limited roles, which diminishes their presence and influence in the narrative. However, in the video titled "Living a Day as Andrew Tate (Again)" there is a specific scene featuring an anonymous woman with long, flowing brown hair (Westerlin, 2022a). She is dressed in a dark bathrobe, which contributes to a casual yet intimate ambiance as she serves Oscar coffee. The moment is casual, yet it carries undertones of familiarity and expectation. As she presents the drink, Westerling enthusiastically exclaims, "Nice" and adds, "Cigar too" indicating a level of comfort in this dynamic. Shortly thereafter, she hands him a cigar, which he casually places in his mouth. She then strikes a match and lights it for him, illustrating a traditional dynamic that reinforces outdated gender roles. Westerling's portrayal of women in this context perpetuates "regressive stereotypes of feminine passivity" (Haslop et al., 2024: 5) and implies that "women must take a traditional, submissive and subservient position to men" (Roberts et al., 2025: 16). Such depictions contribute to a broader cultural narrative that tends to minimise the role of women, often framing them as supportive figures whose primary function is to cater to male desires rather than actively participate with agency and autonomy.

Alongside this portrayal is an echo of misogyny associated with Tate, particularly through a showcase of "toxic masculinity". The introduction of the video is dominated with clips of the real Andrew Tate, who is seen shouting, "Shut up bitch – sex!" in a manner that conveys aggression and dominance. In a subsequent restaurant scene, Westerlin blatantly ridicules the staff, disregarding the waiter's recommendations with an air of condescension. He asserts, "Andrew and I, we don't listen to men we can kill", while pointing a knife directly at the camera, further signalling a confrontational bravado. He adds, "I am here for the steak", asserting his entitlement. As he cuts himself a piece of steak, he chews with exaggerated relish and begins to laugh boisterously, lifting his sunglasses and staring intensely into the camera. This performance serves to amplify the themes of aggressive masculinity and passive femininity presented throughout the video. In embodying the character of "Andrew Tate", Westerlin not only reinforces problematic gender dynamics but also perpetuates a narrative that valorises toxic behaviours while diminishing the representation and significance of women.

In these videos, several examples illustrate discourses that perpetuate images of “traditional masculinity” (Hermansson et al., 2020: 172). The video featuring the influencer Waez is particularly revealing in this context (Kontoret, 2022c). Waez articulates: “I am a man. I manage the finances. You manage something else. If we both work and stress, there won’t be anything left in the bedroom”. With these statements, he reinforces traditional gender roles by emphasising a division of labour where his partner is assigned different responsibilities, thereby positioning himself as the primary financial provider. Furthermore, the imagery in some scenes depicts men as instinctive warriors, perpetually engaged in combat. In the video, Waez proclaims:

I am a soldier. I go out and fight. I am at war. I get shot. For example, media storm. This and that. Do you understand? When I come back home, I want to see something beautiful. Beautiful. Do you understand? Because love is a lot of energy. I get up days after battles. But if we both fight, it will be chaos, man. Then we switch roles down there, and it will be chaos.

This rhetoric evokes a narrative of masculinity where men are viewed as champions battling external and internal conflicts, thereby reflecting societal expectations of strength and dominance. Waez’s sentiments resonate with Tate’s notion of masculinity being idealised as a constant state of being “at war” (Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025: 243). This suggests that traditional masculinity is inextricably linked to the need to be engaged in ongoing struggles – whether they are emotional, social, or physical – thereby mirroring a relentless pursuit of power and resilience. Yet, this binary perspective on gender roles is contested by Westerlin in the video, who argues for a more equitable relationship dynamic. He expresses that he is comfortable in a partnership where a man does not feel pressured to assume a dominant role over his female partner, thereby challenging the stereotypes associated with traditional masculinity. This contrast highlights the evolving discourse around gender roles and the complexities of modern relationships.

Westerlin as an ironic spectator

Ashcraft (2022: 178) has explained how extremist ideas that were once considered fringe are now becoming mainstream, with the manosphere serving as an “incubator” for these beliefs. Banet-Weiser and Kay (2025: 5) have pointed out that in contemporary digital media, “ideas are eminently recursive and (re-)circulated; they travel from one part of the Internet to another, routinely and at speed”. This means that ideas and content are not simply shared once; they are often revisited, reinterpreted, and reshared. The recursive nature of digital content allows it to evolve and take on new meanings as it circulates. Westerlin’s implicit and explicit references to Tate clearly exemplify this phenomenon. His references to Andrew Tate received considerable media attention, and during one interview in June 2023, he was confronted about his views on the British-American influencer:

Westerlin: I agree with much of what he [Tate] says about training. That good mental health leads to good physical health, and that meat is natural food. But there is also a lot I don't agree with.

Journalist: Like that feminism has gone too far?

Westerlin: That's political, so I don't engage with it.

(Selmer-Anderssen & Larsen, 2023)

As we can see, Westerlin prefers not to share his thoughts or respond to inquiries concerning Tate's perspective on feminism, choosing to maintain a neutral stance on the topic. This exchange highlights Westerlin's nuanced position, where he embraces certain aspects of Tate's perspective while distancing himself from the broader political implications of his assertions.

In this context, his role as an ironic spectator emerges as particularly significant. According to Linda Hutcheson (Hutcheon & Valdés, 1998), irony "is not something in an object that you either 'get' or fail to 'get': irony 'happens' for you [...] when two meanings, one said and the other unsaid, come together, usually with a certain critical edge". Irony, in this sense, is not merely a fixed characteristic of an object that one can either grasp or overlook; rather, it emerges in a rich interplay between multiple meanings – one that is explicitly stated and another that lies beneath the surface, often conveying a contrasting idea. This interaction typically carries a certain critical edge, provoking thought and reflection. When examining the normalisation of extremist views advocated by conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, Hyzen and Van den Bulck observed that certain social media influencers "do not necessarily believe in or oppose" his ideas; rather, they derive entertainment from his rants and take pleasure in satirising his hyper-masculine persona (Hysen & Van den Bulck, 2021: 186). This characterisation is equally applicable to Westerlin's approach, as he navigates and interacts with the controversial ideas and public persona associated with Andrew Tate. Westerlin's engagement highlights a complex interplay of irony and negotiation, integrating extremist narratives into the mainstream. It can also stand as an example of how third-party representation of Tate function as "agents of their own online engagement" (Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025: 241).

In examining Westerlin's portrayal of Tate, it is crucial to recognise the broader context of Norwegian and Nordic societies, where gender equality is not only highly valued but is also considered a foundational aspect of the welfare state's identity (Danielsen et al., 2013; Midtbøen & Teigen, 2019). Research conducted by Kitterød and Teigen (2021) indicates that there is now widespread support for equality among both men and women in Norway. Thus, the criticism directed at Westerlin in Norwegian mainstream media (Bauge, 2023; Selmer-Anderssen & Larsen, 2023) may reflect a broader cultural unease with the emergence of hyper-masculine ideals in a society that has long cultivated a gender-egalitarian ethos. However, a recent national survey uncovered another trend: Approximately one in four young men believe that the movement toward

gender equality has overreached. Moreover, only 21 per cent of male respondents expressed the view that further advancements in gender equality are necessary (Kristiansen, 2024). This viewpoint contradicts what appears to be the prevailing societal attitude, yet it resonates strongly among certain groups of young men, particularly within Westerlin's target audience. This dichotomy highlights the complex dynamics at play in contemporary discussions of gender and equality. Likewise, a recent Norwegian study shows that boys are frequently exposed to male influencers in social media who promote a "glorification of conservative gender roles" and "distorted masculinity" (Analyse og Tall, 2024). Additionally, one in four social media posts directed at boys in a Norwegian context contains animated violence, alcohol, or scantily clad (female) bodies (Medietilsynet, 2023). Westerlin's strategy of both reproducing and negotiating the ideas and symbols linked to Andrew Tate and the manosphere potentially serves a dual purpose. It allows him to effectively engage with a specific demographic of boys and young men who may resonate with these themes. Simultaneously, this approach enables him to navigate a wider public sphere that increasingly prioritises gender equality as a fundamental cultural and political principle. By striking this balance, Westerlin not only appeals to his target audience but also adapts his messaging to align with contemporary social values, thereby broadening his potential reach and acceptance across diverse groups.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the mainstreaming of extremist ideas and symbols in a Norwegian context. With a close analysis of Oskar Westerlin's social media content from 2022 to 2023, the study illuminates how the influencer reproduces and negotiates ideas associated with traditional masculinity, misogyny, and male victimhood. The analysis reveals that Westerlin's engagement with Tate's persona and the manosphere is layered and multifaceted. On one level, he fervently adopts and amplifies the contentious themes advocated by Tate, creatively employing irony and humour to capture attention and engage the imagination of a young male audience. Conversely, Westerlin skilfully navigates the expansive public sphere, where the principles of gender equality hold significant cultural and political weight, managing to balance his content to remain palatable and acceptable to a broader spectrum of viewers. This study underscores the critical role of social media influencers, who can embody the role of ironic spectators in the digital landscape. By wielding irony and satire as their tools, they can interact with extremist ideas without offering unwavering endorsement, thereby playing a significant part in their gradual acceptance within contemporary discourse. By examining the ways in which influencers like Westerlin engage with and perpetuate extremist ideas, this study provides insights into the broader cultural and social mechanisms that influence public perception and the acceptance of such ideologies, underlining the urgent need for awareness and critical engagement in an increasingly digital world.

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