

‘Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste’: Religion, Performativity, Outrage, and Andrew Tate

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Abstract

While it might be true to say that media have always provided opportunities for individuals to achieve notoriety it is also true that the nature of that notoriety has significantly changed in recent years. People and topics that were scandalous twenty years ago are now acceptably mainstream. There has been a steep and rapid rise of extreme partisanship, misinformation, and deliberate deceit. And one key locus of mediated provocation, disruption, and notoriety – religion – has been particularly connected with the mobilisation of patriarchal and reactionary goals and ideals.

One particularly notorious example here is that provided by Andrew Tate, the ‘king of toxic masculinity’ (Sinmaz), who first reached the public eye as a contestant on Big Brother in the UK in 2016. Tate quickly built a strong following online in the so-called manosphere, and his influencer persona leveraged into a multi-platform self-help / self-improvement movement for men. An often-overlooked component of Tate’s persona, however, is his use of religion and religious cultural markers. While there has been some analysis of and commentary on his conversion to Islam and how that links with other aspects of his persona, to date there has been little enquiry into the techniques and tools Tate uses, and the meanings that audience members make of his messages. This article aims to address this gap and will use both thematic and rhetorical analyses to demonstrate how these beliefs and themes are deployed and discussed, and from there, how we might best critically understand this component of his appeal.

Introduction

The phrase “never let a good crisis go to waste” is usually attributed to Winston Churchill but was most recently popularised through its use by former White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emmanuel (O’Donnell). It speaks to a sense in which crises can be reframed as opportunities, and such reframing is near ubiquitous in self-help discourses and some sectors of the corporate world. It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the phrase as simple positive thinking.

Within the social media dynamics of contemporary communicative media, for instance, it can be mobilized to point to an underlying truth: controversy and (apparent) crisis are now necessary components for influencers rather than risks to be avoided.

At some level, most people who interact with others online accept this: who has not clicked on a listicle because they want to be shocked by number seven even if they know it will take several clicks and provoke several pop-ups to reach that item? In this context, this article postulates that a person in Andrew Tate's position (highly controversial influencer / content creator / right-wing provocateur) would only take drastic and potentially polarising actions (like publicly and proudly converting¹ to Islam) if those actions formed part of a deliberate communication strategy. Here, the sense of crisis has two meanings. At one level, it is objectively risky to embrace Islam within the alt-right² / far-right spaces that Tate typically operates within: these spaces are typically highly critical of Islam if not blatantly Islamophobic. At another level, with the timing of Tate's arrest in Romania on charges including sex trafficking and rape, a public conversion could be seen as a distraction tactic and an attempt to flood the zone with an alternative news story.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to explore - however tentatively - the ideas, ideologies, and interactions Tate and others utilise and deploy on X, the social media platform where Tate's messages have had the most salience within wider popular culture. No matter the degree to which the crisis or sense of crisis was deliberately engendered or manufactured, there is no doubt that choosing to highlight his religion and religious beliefs at the time that he did was a significant risk for Tate. There is at least a strong possibility that choosing to engage with religion in this way represents further evidence that Andrew Tate

¹ I acknowledge that the terms used within Islam that correlate with 'convert' include 'revert' and 'aslama', and that these could be used instead of the western-centric 'convert'. For clarity and simplicity, however, in this article I will employ 'convert' and 'conversion'. Readers are encouraged to substitute whichever term is appropriate for them.

² The term 'alt-right' is increasingly problematic, especially within a critical academic frame. Given that it was initially formulated to obscure the relationship between the contemporary far right and overt fascism historically, anyone using 'alt-right' could be criticised for continuing that obfuscation. The term is also overly descriptive and groups together distinctive and sometimes contradictory positions. There is a clear argument, therefore, to choose more precise ways to label those people, groups, and ideas that fall under the "alt-right" umbrella (see, for instance, Hill). For my purposes, however, using *alt-right* / *far right* to describe Andrew Tate has two benefits. First, it situates him and his ideas in online and offline spaces in a way that broadly aligns with his own position statements. Second, it links to the everyday lived experiences of those who communicate with and about him – whether in support or in opposition, alt right or far right seem to be accepted as conveyors of a complex and developing set of cultural and mediated meanings.

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is a sophisticated and highly skilled communicator, however difficult and disturbing the messages he communicates may be.

Andrew Tate – A Perspective of Critique

Initial analytical or critical engagement with Andrew Tate and his socio-cultural significance first appeared in the liberal popular press. In the context of the United Kingdom (where newspapers in particular are overtly identified with given political positions, if not political parties), it is no surprise that the first meaningful article of this kind was published in *The Guardian*. Journalist Shanti Das’ 2002 article both introduced Tate to a wider audience than that which he had developed on social media and outlined the key problematics of his persona, messages, and products.

Importantly, even at this early point, Das drew explicit attention to Tate’s *Hustler’s University* program. *Hustler’s University* was an affiliate marketing scheme that incentivized thousands of followers to flood social media platforms with deliberately controversial clips of him to drive engagement and earn commissions. This strategy was particularly effective on TikTok, where his content was pushed to young users by the platform’s algorithm, resulting in billions of views. As Laura Naegler, Gabe Mythen, and Jacob Astley conclusively demonstrate, critics in academic and popular media justifiably characterised this content as extreme misogyny because it included claims that women are a man’s property, that victims of sexual assault are to blame for their attacks, and several videos depicting him striking or threatening women.

Such content raised significant alarms among educators and domestic abuse charities, who argued that Tate’s rhetoric was radicalizing young men and boys by normalizing violence and misogynistic attitudes. As a result of this alarm and scrutiny, pressure on social media platforms led to Tate being banned from major social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok for violating policies on hate speech and dangerous individuals. Tate defended his online presence by claiming his videos were taken out of context and that he was merely playing a “comedic character” (Andrew Tate, qtd. in Das).

Senior journalist Emine Sinmaz’s 2023 article in the same newspaper further critiqued Andrew Tate within the mainstream media when she outlined the basis of his and his brother Tristan’s exploitation of women. Sinmaz described how investigators alleged the brothers employed the Loverboy Method, a manipulative tactic where women are lured with false promises of love or marriage before being coerced into producing pornographic content or undertaking sex work (Government of the Netherlands 3-5). These allegations

suggest an organized criminal operation that exploited the emotional vulnerabilities of women, forcing them to work extensive hours under strict schedules while the Tates allegedly kept the proceeds. In effect, this organized criminal operation functioned as a sex trafficking enterprise, which, Sinmaz notes, highlights the increasing intersection between digital influence, hyper-masculinity, and criminal allegations in modern popular culture.

The next major enquiry into Andrew Tate was published in *New Lines* (a liberal American magazine) in 2023. Importantly, Rasha Al Aqeedi's article highlighted Tate's then recent conversion to Islam (Tate announced his conversion in Oct. 2022), which raised complex questions regarding the intersection of religious identity and his existing branding as an Alpha Male. Ahmed notes how Tate's broader social media presence and his influence on digital subcultures that prioritize traditionalist or aggressive masculine ideals had faced significant pushback from mainstream society and technology companies, and how this led to being removed from multiple social media platforms due to misogynistic or harmful content. In the context of his legal troubles, most notably his arrest in Romania, Ahmed positions Tate as a symptom of a larger cultural shift where digital platforms allow for the rapid dissemination of fringe ideologies to a global audience. The argument is that, by branding himself as a successful, untouchable figure of authority, Tate leverages his lifestyle to validate his controversial worldview, creating a feedback loop that sustains his relevance even in the face of legal scrutiny and platform bans. Ultimately, she argues, Tate represents a confluence of digital celebrity, religious performance, and the radicalization of gender roles in the twenty-first century.

Sana Noor Haq enquired into the reactions to Tate's conversion to Islam in her CNN article. While the conversion polarized the Muslim community, Haq noted the strength of negative reactions. For example, Javad Hashmi of Harvard University identified Tate's tendency to focus on a version of the faith centring on male dominance and the ownership of women and how his public persona was further darkened by serious legal charges (qtd. in Haq 12). The legal allegations were mirrored, Haq notes, in personal testimonies from former associates, who describe Tate's manipulative relationship style and its real-world consequences for women. Haq's conclusion was that Tate serves as a critical subject for examining the intersections of digital celebrity, gender politics, and the global spread of traditionalist ideologies.

Similar cautionary analyses featured in further popular and academic publications in that same year. In her Master's thesis in Security, Intelligence & Strategic Studies, Megan Leeming clearly identified how Tate deliberately

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constructed modern liberal democracies and feminist agendas as existential threats to traditional manhood, often referring to this perceived societal control as the Matrix.³ By framing legal systems, taxes, and female empowerment as tools that the general populace uses to control men, Tate thereby created a sense of aggrieved entitlement and crisis among his followers. His solution for this manufactured insecurity was to promote a threat solution rooted in hegemonic masculinity, valorizing physical strength, stoicism, and the accumulation of wealth as tools for individual liberation. Importantly, this solution functions as a gateway drug to more extreme right ideologies, as his narratives utilize the same polarized dynamics and conspiracy-laden rhetoric found in white supremacist and incel movements.

Frans Sayogie et al. connect the publicity around Tate’s banning to the Streisand effect, a psychological and social phenomenon in which attempts to censor or suppress information result in its wider dissemination and the reinforcement of followers’ ideological convictions. They point to Tate successfully migrating his followership to the fringe video-sharing platform Rumble, where the majority of user comments expressed positive affect, judgment, and appreciation toward his content. This shows that, despite being confined to fringe spaces, Tate’s influence expanded beyond the manosphere, which highlights how social media can transform communities from locality-based to affinity-based, fostering a high level of trust in influencers over professional outsiders.

In the Australian context Stephanie Westcott, Steven Roberts and Xuenan Zhao produced the first academic work that specifically focussed on how Tate’s messaging had begun to permeate wider society. They found Tate’s tropes and ideology were increasingly used by boys to challenge the gendered authority of women teachers, often through luring them into so-called debates where the value of women is questioned or Tate’s alleged violent crimes are dismissed as conspiracies. A rhetorical climate of brazen entitlement, where boys demanded excessive labor and feedback from women teachers that is not expected of their male counterparts and emboldened boys adopting patronizing behaviors, such as gaslighting women as hysterical when they address disciplinary issues not only thereby reinforced a hierarchy that positions femininity as subordinate; it also fostered a sense of male victimhood, where boys perceive themselves as disempowered by feminism and use sexual

³ Influencers within the manosphere deliberately use terms like “red pill” and “the Matrix” (from Lana and Lily Wachowski’s 1999 film *The Matrix*) to argue that society has been deceived and manipulated by ideologies like feminism and equality to subjugate and marginalise men and masculinity.

harassment, misogynist slurs, and physical intimidation as tools to reclaim social power.

Westcott et al. also draw attention to the emergent yet profound psychological toll on women teachers where many identified diminished self-efficacy and some felt forced to resign from the profession. At the same time, this resurgent male supremacy often had a hugely detrimental effect on girls' freedom to learn; there was a massive increase in reported silencing comments and slurs, and many girls reported they felt it necessary to remove themselves from classrooms to avoid hostility.

In 2024, Veli Aydoner's Master's thesis re-engaged with Tate's links with Islam when he identified Tate's conversion as a pivotal moment in the emergence of Far-Right Islamic Conservatism (FRIC). FRIC, Aydoner argues, represents a unique synthesis where far-right political discourse is positioned as the actualization of Islamic identity. Here, Tate's ultra-conservatism was the logical starting point for his religious identification rather than an intrinsic growth from within the faith. From the perspective of Islamic political theory, Tate's influence represents the contemporary ideological trend in which far-right tenets can be used to dominate the communal and ecumenical traditions historically associated with the Ummah.⁴ Ultimately, Tate's role as a primary contributor of far-right thought within the Muslim diaspora shifted the focus of political engagement toward the active deterioration of leftist coalitions and the promotion of hierarchical power dynamics, neither of which, Aydoner argues, have any real connection to the material liberation of the global Muslim community.

Online commentary, such as Sajjin Gohel and Eve Register's 2024 blog hosted by the London School of Economics, tied Tate's conversion to a never-ending need to rebrand and refresh his online persona and noted the breadth of his supporters: both the far-right Tommy Robinson in England and the Taliban in Afghanistan publicly expressed support for Tate as a necessary voice against Western feminism. Tate further cements his ubiquity, Gohel and Register contend, through collaborations with the akh right bros,⁵ a collective of male influencers who promote a version of Islam rife with misogyny and patriarchal gender roles. By blending the misogyny of various extremist groups, Tate's platform became a conduit for a new, hybridized ideology that exploits digital

⁴ "Ummah" refers to the whole community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion. It is often parsed as "community" in English speaking discourses.

⁵ Akh right bros is a term that combines the Arabic word for brother (akh) with alt-right ideology.

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networks to normalize systemic gender-based intolerance and fill the void left by the disengagement of moderate voices.

This is not to argue that Tate was an unproblematic figure within Islam, however. Mira Menzfeld’s research within the Germanophone Salafi community identified widespread debate regarding whether Tate acted as a positive advertisement for the faith or if his influence constituted a religious misunderstanding. This debate revealed a distinct generational divide; younger Salafis, typically those under the age of twenty-five, often viewed Tate as possessing a high-profile status that could attract others to Islamic teachings and whose views on gender roles align with their own opposition to feminism. Conversely, older members of Salafism tended to reject him as inherently heretical, citing his involvement in internet pornography and the lack of emotional restraint as evidence of *zinā* (unlawful sexuality) and *bid’a* (sinful religious innovation). Some participants in Menzfeld’s study went so far as to argue that Tate’s persona leads followers toward shirk, or idolatry, by positioning himself as a lawmaker whose personal philosophy supersedes the authority of Allah (93).

Further evidence of Tate’s appeal to young men is identified by Craig Haslop et al. They showed how Tate’s messages were interpreted humorously or ironically and thereby provided a gateway for teenage boys to engage with and support his misogyny. Similar findings can be found in a number of studies: Stephen Roberts and Stephanie Westcott’s study of the relationship between online influencers and boys’ sexist behaviours in schools, Georgia Thomas-Parr and Marcus Gilroy-Ware’s elucidation of Tate’s ability to play the role of surrogate older brother, Sara Analoui’s Master’s thesis which demonstrated the move of the alt-right manosphere from the fringes of socio-political discourse towards the mainstream (for at least a large minority of disaffected young men), and Emma Bloomfield’s research that identified Tate’s emerging role as a “disingenuous scientist citizen” (207) promoting fringe and far-right health messages (such as being anti-vaccine).

Faced with data showing the very real appeal Tate has for many young men, several scholars (Collins et al.; Edie and Hoff; Etherington; Gottzén and Areschoug; Isaac; Keddie and Flood; Love et al.; Naegler et al.; Sandau and Cousineau; Siegel; Slaveykov; and Smith) argued that a new, systematic programme of digital literacy is necessary as the basis of any attempts to counter his growing influence. While this is undoubtedly correct, such studies often fall into a discourse where they repeat very similar descriptive accounts of Tate’s behaviour and its consequences without offering specific or focussed solutions. Of course, it is not possible to develop a comprehensive counter-hegemonic

digital literacy curriculum within the scope of a single academic journal article. It does a disservice, however, to the necessity for such a curriculum if there is little or no explication of the required work, however brief that explication may be.

The work of Hannah Scheffer-Wenz illustrates the enormity and urgency of this task. Her doctoral thesis, which engaged with Gen Z social media users ethnographically, conclusively demonstrates how active, pervasive, and influential Tate's messages remain. She shows that, while the majority within Gen Z (including the majority of young men) can identify the extremism of Tate's views, these views are nonetheless adopted without significant critical questioning. Scheffer-Wenz explains this within the framework of Trans-Parasocial Relationship (TPR) Theory. Here, the (perceived and real) connectedness engendered through collective reciprocity via social media platforms is significantly more valuable and powerful than a more critical engagement with the content of the messages. Tate can therefore operate to promote a radical, far-right traditionalist ideal of gender roles that, ironically, can be the site of rebellion for young people in more egalitarian, even feminist, family situations. This, she argues, illustrates Tate's capacity to transcend brand promotion and fundamentally alter the philosophical development of younger generations.

Methodology and Method

This research adopts a qualitative research design to best develop an intensive examination of a narrowly defined sample. Here, my objective is to develop interpretive insight into meaning-making within a specific context. Qualitative research places emphasis on "the richness of social phenomena involving human experiences and perspectives" (Lim 202). Social phenomena are therefore neither fixed nor externally observable. From a qualitative perspective, the key is to investigate the interpretive processes through which social worlds are constituted and understood.

This means the production of meaning is central, and the researcher actively participates in the analytic process (Charmaz; Denzin et al.). Meaning does not exist independently of interpretation but is understood as emerging through interaction between researcher, the focus of enquiry, and context. As a result, qualitative research requires explicitly acknowledging the researcher's role, assumptions, and positioning (Denzin et al.). This extends not only to the researcher but also to participants, or in the case of this article the people who conceive and communicate messages via social media, who must be understood

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as socially situated and continuously evolving rather than as static or “perfectly observable” entities (Bailey et al. 19).

In the context of this study, individual posts were not treated as isolated units of meaning but as situated communicative acts within broader exchanges. Single posts can form part of larger conversational threads, and these can of course be shaped by complex and overlapping personal motivations, intentions, and social contexts. These motivations may be only partially visible to an external observer, reinforcing the need for an interpretive rather than positivist approach. The qualitative design therefore enables analysis that remains attentive to context, relationality, and the contingent nature of meaning.

This article is therefore placed within the interpretive research paradigm (Denzin et al.). Interpretivism, as articulated by Burrell and Morgan, is concerned with the fluid, negotiated, and socially produced nature of reality. Researchers working within this paradigm seek to apprehend the social world subjectively by examining the ongoing and dynamic processes through which social interaction is produced and sustained (Burrell and Morgan; Mumby). Rather than seeking causal explanation or prediction, interpretive research aims to understand how social actors make sense of their experiences and how these sense-making processes shape social life.

Accordingly, I did not begin with predefined hypotheses regarding the meanings of posts. Instead, I worked inductively, allowing patterns of meaning to emerge through sustained engagement with the data (Boyatzis; Braun and Clarke). Posts were conceptualised as purposeful forms of social engagement with that part of the social world made accessible through X. This position aligns with Deetz’s assertion that “[...] talk and writing are [...] much more than the means of expression of individual meaning; they connect each perception to a larger orientation and system of meaning” (135).

Denzin et al. recommend the use of multiple methods as a means of triangulating findings and developing a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Accordingly, I have employed mixed methods, understood here not as a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches but as the integration of complementary qualitative analytic strategies (Testa et al.).

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis can be understood as a process of coding raw data to identify patterns that are substantial enough to be recognised as themes (Aronson; Attride-Stirling; Lacey and Luff). More specifically, a theme is defined as “a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the

possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis 4). Themes therefore function both descriptively and interpretively; data can be organised and engaged with critically.

Themes may be manifest, in that they are clearly and explicitly present within the data, or latent, in that they underpin the phenomenon and require interpretive work to identify (Boyatzis). In either case, thematic analysis requires systematic identification and classification of themes. As Braun and Clarke observe, thematic analysis provides a means “both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (81). This dual capacity makes it particularly suitable for analysing posts, which often combine explicit statements with implicit assumptions, affective cues, and contextual references.

A researcher is inevitably embedded within the analytic process: they bring prior knowledge, theoretical commitments, and experiential perspectives (Constas; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane). Self-reflexivity was therefore methodologically necessary. When coding, I made sure to note when and how my interpretive decisions may have been shaped by my familiarity with social media platforms, personal political views, and prior professional experience.

Crucially, the thematic analysis did not rely on a predetermined numerical threshold. Instead, themes were identified on the basis of the inclusion (or exclusion) of key words or phrases and the apparent purpose or affective force of the posts in which they appeared. This approach meant I could identify themes that were meaningful while avoiding reductive quantification. Of course, as Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss observe, “there are multiple interpretations that can be constructed from one set of data” (ix). I am therefore not arguing that this work presents the definitive account of the data but rather one plausible and defensible interpretation.

Close Reading

To deploy a rhetorical analysis, it was necessary to produce a close reading of the selected posts. This is because rhetorical typologies typically require fine-grained, sentence-level analysis, and these can obscure broader patterns of meaning if applied in isolation. Close reading, by contrast, approaches texts holistically and inductively, and moves from observation to interpretation (Jacobowitz and Lippe; Kain). Close reading is defined as “a mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings” (Brummett 3).

Monin’s framework, comprising a dominant reading focused on surface elements, a critical reading aimed at uncovering underlying assumptions and connections, and a reflexive reading that engages the researcher’s responses,

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provides a clear organisational structure. Here, I acknowledge that this three-stage model works less clearly in practice than it may appear on the page. It is, for instance, difficult, if not impossible, to engage with one’s responses without carrying the force of one’s assumptions. The framework remains useful, however, because, in highlighting the necessary artificiality of the research process, it allows a researcher to reflect on the effects and implications of the process and the artificiality.

Rhetoric and Rhetorical Analysis

While close reading provided valuable contextual and interpretive insight, it did not allow for systematic examination of how users sought to convince either people they were conversing with or people who were reading their posts. I therefore used George Cheney’s rhetorical identification typology.

Rhetoric operates through the use of symbols to shape audience attitudes and actions (Foss, Foss and Trapp; Hochmuth). As Kenneth Burke argues, rhetorical practices can reinforce social hierarchies and existing power relations (Cheney *Rhetoric of Identification*; *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society*). At the same time, rhetoric can function productively by building identification within social structures and enabling shared purposes and mutual interests (Crabbe).

Cheney’s *Rhetoric of Identification* typology was particularly useful because it is flexible and because it has capacity to isolate specific forms of identity work within texts. The typology has been applied across a wide range of organisational and mediated contexts (Adler; Ahmed; Chreim; DiSanza and Bullis; Turnage), which demonstrates its usefulness. While this typology allows a researcher to identify rhetorical strategies, it does not prescribe how that researcher, or the reader of their work, interprets the importance or significance of those strategies. Here, again, I draw attention to the need to employ self-reflection and self-criticism to make sure the data, and my interpretation(s) of the data are supportable.

‘The Man Himself’ and ‘The Man Everyone’s Talking About’: Thematic Analysis

Turning now to the first data set, I will now outline and discuss the themes that emerged when analysing posts connected to Andrew Tate and Islam. In doing this, I am mindful that, although this research is qualitative, it is useful to have some broad idea about the number and the volume of engagements, posts, reposts, and replies that form the corpus of these data. The Statista Research

Department investigated the relative popularity of Andrew Tate and Greta Thunberg on Twitter (X) in the immediate aftermath of their now-famous interchange where Tate tagged Thunberg into a post bragging about his fleet of cars and their emissions and she replied with “yes, please do enlighten me. email me at smalldickenergy@getalife.com” (qtd. in Solnit). Statista found that Thunberg’s followers grew from 5.28 million to 5.81 million between 29 Dec. 2022 and 11 Jan. 2023, an increase of 10.03%. Over the same period, Tate’s followers grew from 3.55 million to 4.52 million, an increase of 27.32%. These figures show that Thunberg was more popular than Tate before and after the controversy and, while both increased the number of followers, the increase for Tate was over 1.7 times that of Thunberg. (Statista Research Department). This suggests Tate was successful if his aim was to use Thunberg as a mechanism to gain more followers. Any success needs to be measured, however, against the ridicule he received as a consequence and the extra publicity this ridicule brought to his arrest in Romania (see Solnit).

In terms of the wider picture of Tate’s posts and posts about him on X, there is little available numerical data to hand. The most obvious reason for this is the ephemeral nature of the platform and the highly dynamic way in which conversations can progress. Nonetheless, when looking at the period between 1 Dec. 2022 and 31 Dec. 2025, it is possible to identify two key broad facts. First, there is a clear pattern between posts that mention Tate by name or by handle (@Cobratate) and posts that include his name or handle in a reply to a post where Tate was not mentioned or referenced by the original poster. That pattern is a ratio of approximately 2.125 to one in favour of the second category. In other words, “Andrew Tate” is over twice as likely to be introduced as part of a reply to a post where he is not originally mentioned than he is to feature in a post. This suggests his name (and brand) have significant positive or negative salience as cultural referents. It also suggests that even the most cursory reading of a sample of both original posts mentioning Tate and replies introducing Tate to a conversation would indicate he elicits strong reactions and those reactions are very often highly critical or negative.

A thematic analysis of Tate’s engagement with a specific focus on his conversion to Islam and its consequences shows the extent of the critical, negative, emotive, and emotional nature of these communicative acts. This is almost certainly intentional: the purpose of a controversialist is to be controversial, and Tate happily sits in a very divisive space on every social media platform where he is permitted access. To tease out the nature and implications of the communication, I have separated posts made by Andrew

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Tate from those made about him and identified two key themes within each category.

The Man Himself

The days and weeks following Tate’s announcement that he had converted to Islam in Oct. 2022 were overshadowed by news about and commentary on his arrest by Romanian authorities (Haq). I do not have the time or space to explore the relationship between the conversion and the arrest, nor the ability to make a judgement about whether, say, the conversion was made in anticipation of the arrest. Rather, for the purposes of this research, the arrest is a related event that forms part of the background to posts that mention, discuss, or criticise Tate’s conversion. Predictably, a large number of these were initiated from Tate’s account, which I have categorised as *The Man Himself*.

In this category, two dominant themes emerge. The first of these is ‘A noble sacrifice’. This theme focuses on the motivations and costs of Tate’s conversion as he presents them. He positions himself as a man who had no choice but to answer the call to convert, no matter the consequences for himself and his reputation. Careful not to ascribe to himself any status higher than believer (for example, Tate has never stated or implied he is a religious leader of any kind), Tate nonetheless deploys this theme to build and support the legitimacy of his calling. This is illustrated in Fig. 1, which shows how the noble sacrifice theme bolsters Tate’s already extant characteristics and qualities, implied here to be purity (of heart), family values, financial success, and strength. This theme also works to cement the idea that Tate is willing to undergo the trials and difficulties ‘they’ are attacking him with.

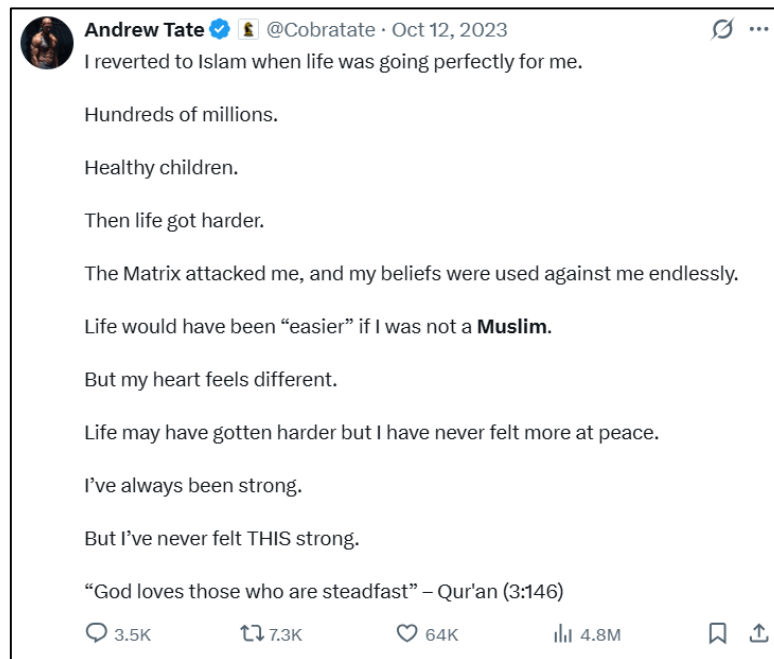


Fig. 1. Post by Andrew Tate on X (formerly Twitter), 12 Oct. 2023

The second theme that emerges from *The Man Himself* is ‘I have a warning’. At approximately the same level of visibility and frequency as ‘A noble sacrifice’, ‘I have a warning’ describes Tate’s use of X to provoke, stoke, and perpetuate hard right and / or alt-right social, political, and / or economic views. From the immediate aftermath of his conversion until late 2025, perhaps Tate’s strongest focus within this theme has been immigration. One reason here is that immigration, particularly when constructed around so-called illegal refugees and the threats they pose to the social fabric in the West. This is illustrated in Fig. 2. The original post depicts an AI-generated young brown man in an inflatable boat who is well clothed, wearing safety gear, carrying cash, and wielding a knife. This could not be more typical of the alt-right constructed threat of a sex-offender migrant. The text of the 5 Aug. post clearly invokes the trope of a sensible and committed citizen warning their fellow countrymen of the dangers they face.

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Fig. 2. Post by Andrew Tate on X (formerly Twitter), 5 Aug. 2024

The Man Everyone's Talking About

This is the second category of my thematic analysis, again in which two dominant themes emerge. This category encompasses posts on X that Tate did not initiate (and almost exclusively does not participate in a conversation with) but nevertheless use him, his name, or his X handle as a cultural signifier of either positive or negative denotation or connotation. I have labelled the first of these, the positive aspects of Tate, as ‘He’s the top G.’ This theme takes its name from Tate’s claims, initially on TikTok early in his career, that he is the Top G (with G being shorthand for ‘gangster’). ‘He’s the top G’ therefore is the theme applied to posts on X in which Tate is cited or referred to supportively, as illustrated in Fig. 3. The level of support for Tate, especially its unquestioning nature, gives an insight into his success at building his online brand and, crucially, in maintaining support as he navigated high profile legal trouble, considerable negative commentary, and his conversion to Islam.



Fig. 3. Post by Chibi Shinigami on X (formerly Twitter), 24 July 2025

I have labelled posts which mobilise Tate as a negative cultural referent as ‘The Hypocritical Fool’. Many people have little or no trouble, it seems, in using Andrew Tate as a marker of, and shorthand for, a highly conservative, misogynist, alt-right perspective. Posts like Fig. 4 are deeply critical of the man and the world view he advocates. Deploying Andrew Tate as a signifier in this way indicates he has reached a certain status as a cultural referent point. He is, however, by no means the only person who could be chosen to illustrate the issue of religious hypocrisy. Christian public figures like televangelist Joel Osteen or politician Sarah Huckabee Sanders would be equally effective examples.



Fig. 4. Post by Jonathan Kaisen on X (formerly Twitter), 29 July 2025

Constructing and Mobilising a Worldview: Rhetorical Tools and Techniques

To develop an initial understanding of the reasons for this high level of support, I now turn to the second data set, identified through the rhetorical analysis. Here, I do not suggest that the following section is exhaustive. Rather, it is designed to serve as an introduction to the most immediately obvious rhetorical techniques Andrew Tate has utilised in his posting on X, and to offer a broad schema that can be applied to other tools and techniques that can be analysed.

Cheney’s model of rhetorical identification, outlined in *Rhetoric of Identification*, is based on Burke’s idea that communication can help people overcome social divisions. Burke argued that when individuals communicate

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and work together, they can develop a shared sense of connection or oneness, created through cooperation and mutual understanding. There is an inherent assumption here that rhetors would normally want to achieve that shared sense of oneness with the largest proportion of the available audience. Andrew Tate does not, however, necessarily operate on that basis. As a controversialist, his communicative acts are not designed to convince every person who reads, hears, or encounters his messages. Instead, the messages he posts are framed antithetically to Burke’s position: rather than use communication to overcome social divisions, Tate uses it to justify, entrench, and deepen those divisions.

In other words, Tate only wants to help a certain subset of the population to communicate and work together and uses divisive and inflammatory tactics to achieve this. Excluding much, or indeed most, of the potential audience (women who do not fit his ultra-traditional views of their role, liberals, most of the LGBTQIA+ community to name but three groups) is the overarching strategy Tate employs to build and sustain a community of men who might otherwise be opposed to each other – conservative Christians and akh-right Muslim men would not normally find sufficient common ground to overcome their religio-cultural differences.

Identification Through Antithesis

Identification can be created relatively simply and easily by encouraging people to come together in opposition to a shared enemy. By highlighting a common threat, a communicator can motivate a group to unite, presenting its members as part of an in-group with shared values and goals. This in-group is defined in contrast to out-groups, which are portrayed as having lesser or opposing purposes. Identification through antithesis therefore works by provoking “an explicit dissociation from one target [which] implies association with another” (Cheney *Rhetoric of Identification* 153). For a controversialist like Tate, this tactic offers a conceptual and practical model for his polemic. Fig. 5 illustrates Tate’s use of identification through antithesis in the immediate aftermath of the opening ceremony of the 2024 Paris Summer Olympic Games.

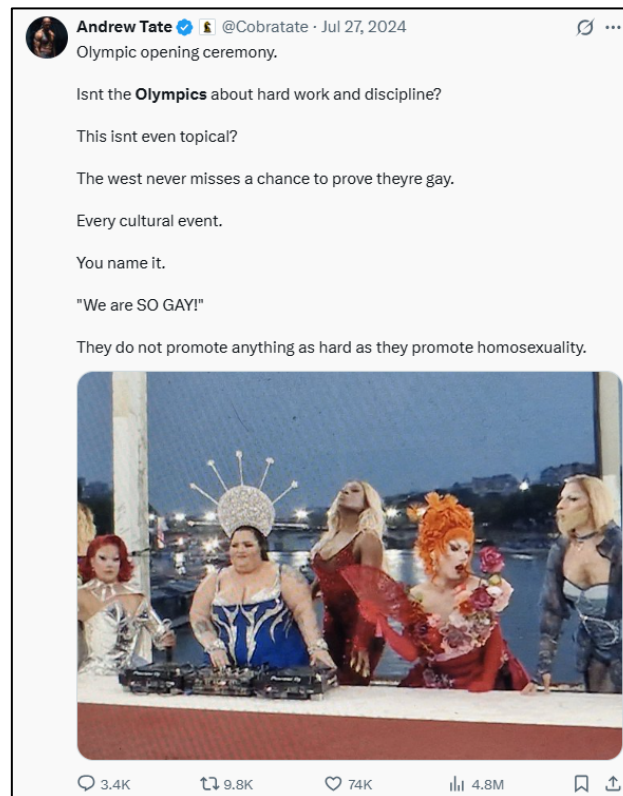


Fig. 5. Post by Andrew Tate on X (formerly Twitter), 27 July 2024

Tate explicitly positions 'hard work and discipline' and being 'so gay' in opposition to each other, and also frames the opening ceremony as the epitome of Western decadence and excess. Tate was not the only commentator to (mis)interpret portions of the ceremony as being anti-religious and pro-gay; others argued sections were offensive despite the organisers' statements that the scenes referenced the Dionysus and celebrated tolerance and inclusion (see, for instance Grohmann).

Setting aside the veracity of the competing interpretations of these scenes, I would argue Tate would have highlighted them in any event. Had the organisers come out and responded to the effect that "yes, this was controversial, in France there is greater tolerance for criticising religion than elsewhere", this would have only increased the power of his message. That is because the message draws on several key identifiers Tate has utilised and popularised to promote identification through antithesis from the beginning of his social media career. Key here is his hate for and rejection of any variation from the most traditional, submissive, heteronormative archetypes for women. Images not just featuring but indeed celebrating five people presenting themselves confidently and powerfully outside Tate's narrow ideals would be almost certain to be

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critiqued. Fig. 5 shows a high camp aesthetic with at least one apparently presenting plus-size cis-gender woman and at least three drag queens, one of the people is ambiguous on first reading as to whether they are a drag queen or a cis-gender woman. Whoever – or whatever – these people are, Tate suggests, they are not “us”.

Building Common Ground

Again, it may be counter intuitive on the surface to argue that Andrew Tate would look to employ rhetorical tools and tactics to build common ground. Normally this is taken to mean something akin to ‘reaching as many people as possible.’ Again, I argue that this is not necessarily the case in the clickbait / attention economy environment of social media. Instead, someone like Tate who wants to build a strong and united minority (with the aim of fighting for and claiming cultural hegemony) can be expected to utilise the tool of building common ground in the context of an overarching us and them rhetoric. My argument here reverses the normal stages of Cheney’s (*Rhetoric of Identification*) typology wherein the rhetor would typically look to build common ground first and then employ identification through antithesis. My claim is that inverting that order can operate just as effectively if the rhetor does not want to (and does not want to claim to) engage with everyone. Cheney identifies six tactics that can be employed to build common ground. They include (1) showing concern for individuals, (2) acknowledging their contributions, (3) emphasising shared values, (4) promoting the benefits of particular activities, (5) praise from outsiders and (6) the use of testimonials.

Together, these strategies represent a clear and intentional effort to positively shape how the audience understands its own identity in relation to a rhetor. Even an intentionally divisive rhetor like Andrew Tate can deploy these, as Fig. 6 illustrates. This eighty-four-word post is, despite its content, a sophisticated and multi-layered example of rhetorical skill. The individuals typified in the post as “good women with pure hearts”, “women who are constantly harping”, “whores”, and “virgins”, clearly fall into a traditional angel - slut dichotomy which I argue operates as metonymy. The women who fall on the positive side of Tate’s dichotomy are indeed shown concern. Their reward is to have Tate’s child, drive a luxury car, and enjoy his relaxed attention. At the same time, this post also addresses male readers who follow Tate’s thinking: the message divides women into two groups and reinforces the male reader who lionizes Tate’s lifestyle. In this respect, the post emphasizes shared values (not needing to marry) and promotes the benefits of particular activities (permitting women into your personal life if they behave appropriately – the right woman

can, literally, “drive my car”). And, although there is no evidence in this particular post, I would contend that the fifth and sixth tactics Cheney identifies would be fulfilled in the overall rhetorical climate of this post when followers reply supporting any component parts of the message or the message overall.



Fig. 6. Post by Andrew Tate on X (formerly Twitter), 19 Jan. 2026

Conclusion

This article has examined Andrew Tate’s public conversion to Islam as a moment in which religion becomes particularly highlighted within contemporary popular culture. Rather than approaching the conversion as a question of private belief or doctrinal commitment, the analysis has situated it within the mediated online circuits through which religion is increasingly encountered, performed, and contested. In digital popular culture, religion does not merely express faith; it functions as a symbolic language through which identity, authority, and belonging are articulated.

Read in this way, Tate’s engagement with Islam operates as an intentionally visible religious performance shaped by the very logics of social media. I argue that, within influencer culture, religious (self)identity can therefore be deployed as a form of cultural capital, and to confer moral legitimacy, personal depth, or oppositional positioning. Tate’s conversion draws on these dynamics, positioning Islam as both a source of meaning and a provocation, capable of intensifying attention precisely because of its innately contested status within the cultural spaces he occupies.

The argument here is that religion, in this context, is inseparable from crisis. Tate’s declaration of faith coincided with a period of intense scrutiny following his arrest in Romania on charges including sex trafficking and rape.

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Yet rather than being displaced to the margins, in this moment of crisis religion was amplified in its visibility and significance. Here, religion became a stabilising narrative resource, offering a language of morality, discipline, and order that resonates deeply within popular religious imaginaries, even as at the same time Tate was able to deploy certain religious ideals, tropes, and beliefs in support of his alt-right, traditionalist mindset.

This article has not sought to adjudicate the sincerity of Tate’s religious commitment; rather, the focus has been on how religion can circulate as a cultural signifier within social media environments. Meaning is produced less through religious doctrine than through repetition, conflict, and audience response. The conversion acquires significance through its mediation: through posts, reactions, memes, and counter-discourses that collectively reframe Islam as a site of struggle over masculinity, power, and authenticity.

Tate’s case illustrates how religion can be abstracted from its institutional contexts and reworked into a flexible, portable identity marker within influencer economies. In such settings, religious affiliation becomes part of an ongoing performance rather than a settled state and is therefore continually renegotiated through visibility and controversy. Importantly, however, I am not arguing that the performativity and renegotiation identified in this article only apply to Islam. Adherents of other faiths, and in particular the conservative or reactionary versions of those faiths, could likewise abstract religion as a versatile identity marker. Analysing the social media of and about Charlie Kirk, for instance, would be a very interesting comparison.

Tate’s case also suggests that religion remains a powerful and enduring resource within popular culture, especially when mobilised in unsettling or ethically fraught ways. People like Tate reveal how religious symbols and narratives can be repurposed within the attention economy, sustaining relevance by converting belief into spectacle. Future research might extend this inquiry by examining how other religious traditions are similarly reconfigured within digital celebrity culture, shedding further light on the evolving relationship between religion, media, and popular meaning-making.

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