Performing Popular Misogyny

Male Influencers, Gender, and Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how male influencers can contribute to the spread of misogynistic discourses on social media in Norway. Through an analysis of the social media content produced by Norwegian influencer Sebastian "Baris" Brevik in 2022 and 2023, it explores how misogynistic and reactionary gender discourses are embedded in lifestyle content, humor and irony. Drawing on Banet-Weiser's (2018) analytical framework that highlights *popular misogyny* as a structural force, the article illustrates how misogyny is entrenched in influencer personas on mainstream social media. It emphasises how influencers like Brevik can act both as ideological entrepreneurs and intermediaries, who help reactionary discourses reach a wide audience by weaving them into formats that are suitable for social media platforms. The analysis reveals how strategic ambivalence makes misogynistic discourses more culturally acceptable. Furthermore, by situating Brevik within the broader context of the "neo-manosphere," the article seeks to understand how misogyny and reactionary gender discourses are performed and negotiated in contemporary digital culture.

KEY WORDS

POPULAR MISOGYNY, GENDER, MASCULINITY, SOCIAL MEDIA, MANFLUENCERS

INTRODUCTION

In December 2022, Norwegian influencer and fashion model Sebastian "Baris" Brevik captured widespread attention with a provocative TikTok video, where he asserted that

> "there are only two genders" (Kingsrød, 2023; Krogh, 2022).

The video was delivered in a provocative and confrontational manner and became a focal point for public debates in Norway concerning gender, free speech, and platform moderation. While Brevik faced harsh criticism, the controversy also boosted his visibility on social media. As a result, TikTok removed the video and suspended his account. In an interview, Brevik commented that he was "cancelled" for speaking the "truth" and added:

> "There is a serious threat to democracy when one is attacked and excluded for stating something as ordinary as that there are only two genders. In 2022, this is classified as hateful ideology. The culture of offence has taken over, and freedom of speech is all but gone" (Nielsen, 2022, my translation).

Around the same time, Brevik was criticized for promoting reactionary views on gender, echoing influencers such as Jordan Peterson or Andrew Tate (Selmer-Andersen & Larsen, 2023; Tromp, 2023).

This article analyses how misogyny and reactionary gender discourses circulate on social media. A central research problem guiding this study is how male influencers use social media to perform and normalize misogynistic and reactionary gender discourses, and how these practices intersect with broader dynamics of visibility, audience engagement, and digital culture. Focusing on influencer Sebastian Brevik's social media posts from 2022 and 2023, as well as the reiteration of his content in mainstream media, the study explores how misogynistic ideas are strategically adapted to the logics of digital culture. Drawing on scholarship on *popular misogyny* (Banet-Weiser, 2018) and influencer culture, it considers how irony, humor, and ambivalence function as strategies through which reactionary gender discourses are performed. By situating Brevik's case within a wider cultural and mediated context, the article aims to shed light on how popular misogyny circulates and is being negotiated within contemporary digital culture. The research question for this article is: *How does Sebastian Brevik mobilize his influencer persona to perform popular misogyny on social media?*

POPULAR MISOGYNY, IDEOLOGICAL ENTREPRENEURS AND INTERMEDIARIES

A key arena for disseminating misogyny and reactionary gender discourses is the online ecosystem known as the *manosphere*, a discursive space where anti-feminist beliefs are widely shared (Ging, 2019; Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021). In today's digital landscape, such discourses increasingly influence social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram, where they are reformulated through entertainment, self-help and lifestyle content. This has enabled manosphere discourse to reach new audiences and adapt to diverse cultural contexts (Hopton & Langer, 2022; Papadamou et al., 2020). Scholars have recently begun describing the emergence of a "neo-manosphere", relating to the increased commercialization of the manosphere, the rise of a new influencer culture and new platforms for the mainstreaming of misogyny (Gerrand et al., 2025). "Manfluencer" Andrew Tate exemplifies the appeal of this ecosystem today, blending misogyny with success-oriented self-branding, while using social media to promote a hyper-masculine persona (Haslop et al., 2024; see also Haslop & Ringrose, 2025). Other male influencers such as Joe Rogan or Jordan Peterson, are instrumental in legitimizing "anti-woke" and "anti-feminist sentiments" within mainstream culture (Simmons, 2025, p. 209). Thus, misogynistic discourses are not limited to fringe communities, but deeply embedded in the logics, infrastructures, and economies of

mainstream digital culture (Jane, 2017; Salter, 2018).

Banet-Weiser (2018) argues that such *popular misogyny* must be understood as a networked phenomenon. She defines misogyny as "a systematic devaluing and dehumanizing of women" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 2), and emphasises how misogynistic discourses are rooted within and amplified by popular culture. By framing misogyny as a structural force, Banet-Weiser demonstrates how digital technologies can amplify its reach, often in unexpected ways.

As such, "popular misogyny in its networked forms" needs to be looked at "as a whole, and not independently at its individual parts" (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016, p. 173). Within a contemporary context some figures gain prominence through their role in sustaining reactionary ideologies. Finlayson (2023) defines such *ideological entrepreneurs* as individuals who strategically create and promote certain frameworks to shape public discourse and influence social norms. Popular misogyny creates cultural conditions where this concept is particularly relevant, as these figures are often "male, anti-feminist, and hyper-masculinist" (Banet-Weiser & Kay, 2025, p. 6). A notable example is Tate, whose global digital presence has established him as a significant player in the mainstreaming of manosphere ideology (see Roberts et al., 2025).

While figures like Tate exemplify high-profile ideological entrepreneurs, the broader dissemination of misogynistic discourses also depends on actors who operate within everyday digital practices. Arnesson (2023) emphasises that *ideological intermediaries* are influencers that don't necessarily promote explicit political agendas. Instead, they circulate lifestyles and ways of being that embed ideological meaning in culturally resonant and accessible forms. Content creators can contribute to the normalization of misogyny by embedding anti-feminist messages into everyday content, such as workout videos or motivational advice (Thomas-Parr & Gilroy-Ware, 2025).

In a recent review of literature on the manosphere, Gerrand et al. (2025) highlight that there is a need for research on the spread of manfluencer culture to non-English-speaking countries. A Swedish study (Renström & Bäck, 2024) emphasises how exposure to manfluencer culture may increase misogyny among young men. Previous research from Norway has analyzed how young men can negotiate with misogynistic discourses originating from the manosphere (Langeland et al., 2023). But there is a lack of knowledge about how such discourses are mediated by influential public figures. This article addresses this gap by examining how a Norwegian male influencer uses different strategies to circulate and normalize misogynistic and reactionary gender discourses relating to the manosphere within the media landscape.

EMPIRICAL DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Sebastian Brevik is a 26-year-old Norwegian white, male influencer who gained national attention in late 2022. Brevik has been active on different social media platforms (TikTok, Twitch, Instagram), and has posted on Instagram as "@barisbrevik" since 2015. In November 2022, Brevik appeared as a guest on the popular podcast/YouTube channel *Kontoret* (*The Office*), hosted by fellow influencer Westerlin and sidekick Snorre Klanderud (Kontoret, 2022). By the end of 2023, he had acquired over 40,000 followers on Instagram. Before TikTok suspended his account in 2022, Brevik had also amassed over 70,000 followers (Nielsen, 2022).

Around the same time, Brevik's presence on social media gained significant attention in one episode of the factual entertainment TV series *Norske Beefer* (*Norwegian beefs*), which aired on the Norwegian broadcasting service NRK a few months later in 2023. This series was hosted by Anika Momrak and explored different conflicts and rivalries within the Norwegian influencer scene (NRK, 2023). The episode featuring Brevik highlighted several of his TikTok posts from 2022/2023, along with the responses they generated. It thus provides an account of some of the influencer disputes that characterized the initial stages of Brevik's rise to fame in Norway.

Given that Brevik's TikTok account got suspended during this period, the episode also stands as a record of his social media account at that time, as well as the surrounding controversies.

The dataset included in this study consists of Brevik's appearance in the *Kontoret* show and the episode featuring him in *Norske Beefer*, as well as the complete set of 25 Instagram posts shared by Brevik throughout 2023 (see Fig. 1). This sampling strategy allows for a detailed exploration of how text and images contribute to the construction of his public persona, and how popular misogyny was performed and negotiated by the influencer in this period. In selecting the empirical material for this study, I first immersed myself in Brevik's social media content from 2021 to 2023. After examining Brevik's social media posts during this period, 2023 emerged as a particularly compelling year to analyze, especially considering the controversies surrounding his public statements on gender in December 2022. Instagram, with its emphasis on lifestyle and visual aesthetics, seemingly stood out as a counterpoint to the more ideologically charged public statements he made through platforms such as TikTok.

The study makes use of a combination of a case study approach and content analysis (see Lewis, 2020). In the coding process I applied a combination of inductive and deductive coding schemes, defined as an abductive approach (see Reichertz et al., 2014). I initially focused my coding process on four overlapping themes inspired by a framework developed by Moloney and Love (2018), in an analysis of what they describe as a "masculine persona", that are important in reproducing "online misogyny": (1) the creation of a homosocial and heterosexist environment, (2) the sexualization of women, (3) the construction of a heterosexual male body as a site of identity and value, and (4) the strategic use of humor as a tool of exclusion or oppression. Moloney and Love's (2018) qualitative analysis of a series of tweets specifically, also methodologically complements Banet-Weiser's (2018) investigation of popular misogyny operating across cultural and mediated contexts. These four themes structured the coding process and guided the interpretation of the visual and textual material, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns of popular misogyny by Brevik in his social media content from 2022 and 2023. As the analysis progressed, I became increasingly aware of the self-branding strategies used by Brevik, and the ways in which he constructs his style and self-presentation. I therefore incorporated these aspects into the coding process to capture how his online persona is performed. I draw on literature concerning lifestyle influencers to explore how Brevik could foster a connection with his audience in the construction of his persona on social media (see Arnesson, 2024; Duffy & Hund, 2018; Marwick, 2013; McRae, 2017), thereby situating his performance within broader trends in online celebrity culture.

This article is situated within a feminist research tradition that understands misogyny as a structural phenomenon within contemporary digital culture (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Jane, 2017). As Brevik is a public figure whose content is openly accessible on mainstream social media platforms, the analysis focuses on already widely circulated cultural texts. Analysing this kind of material makes it "impossible to maintain the anonymity of influencers while simultaneously drawing out necessary insights and including relevant quotations" (Lewis, 2020, p. 6). Engaging critically with such highly visible online actors may also render the researcher potentially exposed to unwanted attention. As Berger-Correa et al. (2025) notes, there are few established strategies for managing potential risks or protecting academics from harassment and coordinated backlash by antifeminist groups. Thus, particular attention has been paid to considerations of researcher safety, such as proactive measures to ensure that the digital footprint remains limited and carefully assessing how the findings are communicated in public and academic arenas.

FINDINGS

The analysis in the following identifies several interrelated strategies through which Brevik mobilizes

his influencer persona to perform and popularize misogynistic discourse. These include drawing on aspirational lifestyle representations and forms of the "bro" to construct a desirable masculine identity; combining elements of hustle culture with anti-"woke" rhetoric; foregrounding the idealization and disciplining of the male body as a marker of status and self-control; using humor and irony as communicative devices that allow misogynistic messages to circulate in more socially acceptable forms.

ASPIRATIONAL LIFESTYLE AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE "BRO"

This section shows how Brevik combines lifestyle content, crypto culture, and "bro culture" on Instagram to project an aspirational yet relatable persona, balancing wealth and status with camaraderie and authenticity. Brevik's activity on Instagram in 2023 was dominated by what can broadly be described as "lifestyle content". Travel emerged as a recurring theme, with posts from iconic urban destinations such as Paris, New York, Hong Kong, and Dubai (Brevik, 2023a, 2023c, 2023d, 2023f). Social gatherings were also central, exemplified by a lively New Year's party photo in which Brevik is pictured wearing a red MAGA cap, capturing his celebratory mood (Brevik, 2023a). On Instagram, among the more personal posts was a tribute to his mother's 50th birthday, expressed through affectionate language and a heart emoji (Brevik, 2023h). During the Christmas season, Brevik engaged his audience with a post portraying himself as Santa Claus distributing new iPhones (Brevik, 2023k). Collectively, these posts construct an influencer persona that merges wealth and global mobility, social visibility and personal storytelling, qualities that potentially appeal to a broad and diverse audience. Instagram encourages idealized and aspirational self-representations (Duffy & Hund, 2018). Through the curation of daily life and personal branding, Brevik's Instagram feed predominately features an "idealized lifestyle to be inspired by, and aspire to", something that is common to lifestyle influencers (Arnesson, 2023, p. 530).

His use of the word "cryptobro" in his Instagram bio adds to the image of an aspirational lifestyle. The term "crypto" implies an affiliation with a digital subculture centered on speculative finance. In online contexts, the label "cryptobro" refers to individuals who actively promote cryptocurrencies and investment strategies, often embracing entrepreneurial values and anti-establishment rhetoric. This also reflect ideals such as autonomy, ambition, and boldness (Cassino, 2023). Brevik's identification with crypto culture establishes a connection to a male-dominated influencer ecosystem, with aspirational narratives of financial independence and technological empowerment. This alignment is underscored by his participation in international cryptocurrency networks, as seen on his Instagram. One notable post features a meeting with Changpeng Zhao, founder of the cryptocurrency exchange Binance, at a Binance-branded event in Paris (Brevik, 2023d). The image appears designed to highlight Brevik's rising status within the crypto sphere. By aligning himself with Zhao, Brevik engages in what Marwick (2013, p. 122-123) terms *aspirational production*, a visibility practice through which individuals seek to position themselves within high-status social networks.

However, his feed also reflects a form of authenticity commonly associated with lifestyle influencers. As McRae (2017, p. 14) notes, influencers are often "curating a persona that is aspirational, but ordinary, attracting followers with the narrative that the extraordinary lifestyle being presented can be achieved by the average person". This sense of ordinariness is established through his connection to what can be described as "bro culture". A typical "bro" occupies a space shaped by athleticism, male camaraderie, and a relaxed vibe (Lascity, 2021). Brevik's feed frequently emphasises physical fitness and a laid-back attitude (Brevik, 2023h). His alignment with bro culture is reinforced through posts featuring him among fellow male influencers such as Oscar Westerlin and Henrik Viken. The use of the term "boys" in one of the captions (Brevik, 2023j), underscores this sense of camaraderie, signaling (stereotypical) male bonding expressed through laddish

slang and in-jokes. This kind of language resembles a form of working-class and down-to-earth masculinity with a broad appeal in a Norwegian context (see Langeland, 2011). Thus, by positioning himself as both a recognizable "bro" and a lifestyle content creator, Brevik balances a tension between an aspirational lifestyle and authentic self-presentation; bonding with his peers while participating in a lifestyle dominated by leisure, travel, and visible markers of affluence. This duality is a central aspect of his persona on social media, and can be seen as a part of an "everyday politics" (Arnesson, 2023, p. 530), where influencers communicate certain values and social norms through the curation of their daily life.

HUSTLE AND ANTI-WOKE

This section shows how Brevik uses his "hustler" persona, gender-essentialist views, and anti-"woke" rhetoric to generate controversy and circulate popular misogyny on Norwegian social media. In the *Kontoret* show, Brevik defined himself as a "hustler" who earns money through various ventures. In 2023 he was described in Norwegian media as a "hustle-bro", a term commonly used to characterize young men who leverage social media to promote a lifestyle centered on wealth accumulation, entrepreneurial ambition, and the ethos of self-made success. This label reflects a broader trend among Norwegian male influencers who supposedly adopt an American-style optimism, and neoliberal values, often presenting financial success as easily attainable through personal branding and digital hustle (Møller & Drønen, 2023). Brevik's invoking of the hustler also echoes Andrew Tate, who is infamous for his "Hustler's University", an entrepreneurial training program that, as noted by Haslop et al. (2024), capitalizes on men's insecurities for profit. By embracing the "hustler", Brevik strategically aligns himself with a position that emphasises the connection between hypermasculinity and digital self-promotion. This highlights his participation in a discourse where men's anxieties about social status, economic insecurity, and authentic masculinity are both commodified and monetized. It is also important to note that Tate's strategic deployment of an online "hustle culture" is deeply intertwined with what Stoner (2024) describes as "a sinister appeal to deeply misogynistic values". Brevik was thus criticized in Norwegian media for being a proponent for a "Tate-narrative" (Jacobsen, 2023).

He also faced criticism from young female influencers who reacted to his views on gender (Bergersen, 2023). Some of these controversies that occurred on social media received wider attention in mainstream media and were highlighted in NRK's *Norske Beefer*. One of the TikTok videos featured in the program was a follow-up to his initial post on gender that caused controversies in 2022. In the second video, Brevik said that: "Yesterday, I posted a video where I said that there are only two genders. Today, the video was removed for hateful behavior. Tell me, how is *quoting science* considered hateful behavior?" (NRK, 2023, my emphasis). Tudor (2023) argues that a crucial part of misogyny lies in "essentializing gender identity" and points out that it is important to dismantle the "essentialist assumption of the normativity of the sex/gender congruence" (p. 295). They argue that addressing misogyny directed at gender-diverse and transgender individuals is particularly urgent in today's sociopolitical climate. Bachaud & Johns (2023) contend that within the manosphere "evolutionary research" is invoked to legitimise gender hierarchies and are "interpreted through judgmental and misogynistic lenses", reinforcing exclusionary and hostile understandings of gender diversity (p. 13). Brevik's statements on gender, draws on gender essentialist rhetoric, reinforcing binary and biologically deterministic understandings of gender, and thereby contributing to the marginalization of trans and non-binary identities. His TikTok posts, along with the reiteration in *Norske beefer*, also exemplify how gender essentialism and popular misogyny circulates within digital influencer culture.

The episode also illustrated a notable "beef" between Brevik and Sonja Iren Ebbesen Johnsen, a Norwegian influencer and plus-size model. This controversy stemmed from their differing views on weight and

health on social media. Ebbesen Johnsen, an advocate for body positivity, actively promotes the message of body acceptance while challenging traditional beauty standards (see Ebbesen Johnsen, 2021). In contrast, Brevik had asserted on TikTok that being overweight poses significant health risks and claimed that the process of losing weight is fundamentally straightforward, simplifying it to the equation of, what he describes as "calories in and calories out" (NRK, 2023). Ebbesen Johnsen responded by critiquing Brevik's perspective, arguing that his message was overly simplistic, and failed to consider the complex factors that contribute to weight management and individual health. This disagreement sparked a conflict on social media platforms, where both parties and their supporters voiced their opinions. The response from Brevik referenced above is characteristic of what Banet-Weiser (2018) describes as the "reactive" nature of popular and networked misogyny. She points out that popular misogyny emerges in response to feminist expressions such as "female body positivity," and that often manifest itself through fat-shaming and body-shaming comments online.

Conversations about women's appearances and bodies not only normalize objectification and body-shaming but often encourage group cohesion among male audiences who engage in shared excitement through these discussions (Haslop & O'Rourke, 2025). The episode underscored how Ebbesen Johnsen became a target of spiteful online attacks from Brevik's followers, named as "Breviks soldater" ("Brevik's soldiers"). Such reactions are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of resistance to feminist visibility online. This incident highlights how conflicts among influencers can escalate into harassment campaigns, particularly against women who challenge dominant beauty standards or advocate for body positivity. These interactions serve to reinforce existing gendered power dynamics and stand as an example of how "popular feminism and popular misogyny battle it out in the contemporary cultural landscape" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 2).

In the *Kontoret* show, Brevik adopted a bird's-eye perspective on his involvement in various social media conflicts in late 2022, framing these conflicts within a broader critique of what he described as "woke" culture. He proclaimed: "We need a counterpoint, man. There are so much these days that has just gone too far. Woke culture. I feel like it is kind of my responsibility to say what people don't dare to say" (Kontoret, 2022). Brevik's "anti-woke" views echo those of influencers Joe Rogan or Jordan Peterson, who have similarly voiced criticism regarding "progressive gender politics" and what they deem the excesses of "woke" ideology (Simmons, 2025, p. 119). This aligns with what Tromp (2023) describes as the *contrarian-industrial complex*, an ecosystem with male influencers that thrives on dissent against "political correctness" (p. 42). Brevik further escalated his stance by portraying himself as being "attacked from all sides by the woke crowd". He contends that what began as an initiative to challenge and disrupt societal norms, has transformed into a rigid moral framework that exhibits a pronounced intolerance for dissenting opinions. He underscores this point by claiming, "Now you can't say anything without getting punished", drawing attention to what he perceives as the unjust silencing of divergent voices like himself. In his rhetoric, "woke culture" is not only irrational but also authoritarian (Kontoret, 2022). Brevik's provocative statement on gender and critical remarks on "woke" are not an isolated occurrence, but rather a reflection of a transnational trend in which male influencers can gain visibility by embracing essentialist views on gender and use the critique of "cancel culture" into "a recipe for online engagement" (Simmons, 2025, p. 16).

THE IDEALIZED MALE BODY

This section shows how Brevik uses his muscular physique on Instagram to enhance his digital persona, linking bodily display to social capital, aspirational lifestyle, and ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Alongside the lifestyle content on Instagram, a notable aspect of Brevik's digital persona is the strong emphasis on his physique. His feed frequently

features photos that highlight his body, and emphasise his athletic build (Brevik, 2023h). In one of the posts, Brevik poses wearing only shorts, with his upper body exposed (Brevik, 2023e). By focusing on the male torso as an object of display, Brevik participates in an influencer economy where the male body serves as both content and capital. His self-presentation reflects a shift in which the male body is no longer merely a symbol of strength or utility but is viewed as visually appealing and marketable. This transformation corresponds with the development of consumer capitalism, wherein bodies are exhibited and exchanged as commodities within the digital economies of attention (Coad, 2008). Thus, his body becomes a crucial part of the aspirational lifestyle that is displayed on Instagram. Several of Brevik's Instagram posts from 2023 also feature images that seemingly were taken during his professional modelling work (see for example, Brevik, 2023b). Such photographs are highly stylized, carefully composed, and professionally lit, displaying the distinct characteristics of commercial fashion photography. For Brevik, this means utilizing his physical appearance and emphasising the body in ways that align with Instagram's focus on aesthetics, fitness and attractiveness.

Banet-Weiser's (2018) concept of the *economy of visibility* offers a critical lens for understanding this phenomenon. She argues that "the visible body is also the commodifiable body" (p. 23), suggesting that visibility, especially in digital and influencer cultures, has a lot to do with marketability. In the context of social media, visibility is frequently conflated with "trending", which underscores the dynamics by which bodies accrue value through public exposure. In this sense, visibility, measured by likes, comments, and followers, functions as a form of capital, making the body a key site of cultural and economic value. The influencer body can be mobilized as both spectacle and strategy, linking physical display to the economies of visibility and self-branding. In Brevik's case, the emphasis on the body is reinforced by the way he presents himself on social media. "Check out that stomach" comments Westerlin as Brevik takes off his T-shirt in the *Kontoret* show. He continues, "You're naturally broad-shouldered, right?" to which Brevik casually replies, "Yeah, maybe". Brevik's nickname "Baris", a colloquial Norwegian term referring to a shirtless male body, highlights how bodily display, particularly the exposed male torso, operates as both a signifier of identity and a vehicle for accruing social capital in contemporary Norwegian digital culture.

The double use of "Baris" as both a nickname and a recurring visual motif on social media, signals a form of confidence, where the display of the male torso becomes a central element in the construction of a digital persona. This visual appearance of his body sharply contrasts with the kinds of bodies that he criticizes in his attack on "body positivity" on TikTok. While such "soft bodies" are devalued or ridiculed by Brevik, he himself embodies and highlights what Susan Jeffords (1994) refers to as a "hard body", a body that symbolizes strength, control, and authority. The way Brevik's body is depicted on Instagram has similarities with the evaluative gaze he directs toward others, revealing a convergence between his persona on social media and critique of certain bodies. This emphasis on muscularity, discipline, and bodily control also aligns with what Connell (1995) conceptualizes as *hegemonic masculinity*, an idealized form of manhood that secures its dominance through physical strength and assertiveness. By elevating his own physique while ridiculing non-normative bodies, Brevik reproduces a hierarchy of masculinities that privileges "hardness" and marginalizes gender nonconformity.

HUMOR AND IRONY

This section shows how Brevik uses irony, provocative symbols, and humor to engage audiences, normalize controversial attitudes, and circulate misogynistic and anti-feminist content across social media. Brevik's content on social media employs different strategies aimed at maximizing engagement and visibility across different platforms. In one Instagram post, Brevik and Westerlin appear together, posing with a certain hand gesture that has become

emblematic of Andrew Tate (Brevik, 2023f; see also Langeland, 2025). This was the most viewed post on Brevik's Instagram account in all of 2023 (see Fig. 1). This gesture is frequently used by Tate in his online appearances and has become a reference point for the controversial "manfluencer" in international media (Corby & Domin, 2022). By adopting this gesture, Brevik signals an alignment with a recognizable trait of the "manfluencer", a figure marked by hypermasculine aesthetics, entrepreneurial rhetoric, and strategic self-branding in digital spaces (Haslop, 2024). The post is imbued with an unmistakable sense of edginess and provocation, as the hand gesture alludes to an influencer renowned for "invoking antifeminist and misogynistic rhetoric" (see Roberts et al., 2025, p. 3). Through such a visual reference, Brevik engages with symbolic elements associated with the "neo-manosphere" (see Gerrand et al., 2025). By doing this, Brevik potentially helps normalize a specific symbol, embedding it within a seemingly apolitical context of lifestyle and "bro-culture" on his Instagram account. This highlights how content can circulate far beyond the original context. The hand gesture might be interpreted as what Miller-Idriss describes as a *traveling image*, a symbolic form that crosses cultural and national boundaries, adapting to new contexts while maintaining its ideological significance (Miller-Idriss, 2018). Such practices exemplify how certain symbols can be used to cultivate both personal branding and audience engagement.

However, the image stands in stark contrast to the lifestyle-oriented content that otherwise dominates Brevik's Instagram. This contrast signals a potential, albeit momentary, break with the platform's usual content. While the post references a symbol associated with Andrew Tate, the viewer, likely familiar with Instagram's visual vernacular, is invited to interpret it as a joke, or a playful engagement with a controversial symbol. Part of the humor in the image arises from the exaggeratedly "serious" facial expressions adopted by the two influencers as they display the symbol, creating a contrast between the seemingly solemn pose and the playful context. The "serious" facial expressions of the two influencers suggest that the image is intended *not* to be taken seriously. Thus, the hand gesture potentially acquires a layer of irony to it. In this way, Brevik simultaneously draws on and parodies Tate, using ironic detachment in the invoking of the hand gesture. This form of irony permits influencers such as Brevik to interact with a contentious or reactionary symbol without necessarily explicitly endorsing it. His engagement with the reactionary symbol simultaneously reinforces and questions its meaning, suggesting a reflexive awareness of its cultural implications (see also Langeland, 2011). The post itself was also sufficiently innocuous to evade direct censure by Instagram, contrary to several of Brevik's TikTok posts from the same period.

Norske Beefer further exemplifies the way Brevik's content is enmeshed with irony and provocation. A TikTok post from 2023, referenced to in the episode, depicts Brevik within a brightly illuminated bathroom, his visage accentuated by conspicuously applied makeup. In this setting, he engages in playful self-interaction, adopting an intentionally exaggerated persona. While emitting erratic vocalizations, he declares, "I identify as a Black transgender." The video is intentionally comedic, relying extensively on stereotypical representations and caricature to construct a "queer" identity. It rapidly achieved viral status, disseminating widely across TikTok. According to the episode, audience responses to the video were polarized: some viewers interpreted the content as a satirical commentary on perceived "wokeness," whereas others regarded it as profoundly offensive and derogatory toward already marginalized populations.

This type of humor described in *Norske beefer* illustrate a broader culture of online trolling, which, as noted by Simmons (2025), plays a significant role in normalizing misogyny, both within male-dominated digital arenas and beyond. Brevik's performance seems to be emblematic of a kind of "digital trolling masculinity", that is often seen enabled by platforms within the manosphere (Díaz-Fernández & García-Mingo, 2024, p. 5354). In addition, by using this type of humor, Brevik adds an edgy tone to his social media persona, bringing "anti-woke" humor

– and a certain subcultural style – into the mainstream. Thornton (1997) notes that using forms of subcultural capital such as "slang" and specific cultural knowledge "confer status" on the speaker, while also creating a potential "distinction" from the mainstream. Thus, subcultural capital operates as a form of symbolic currency that both signals belonging within a particular group and demarcates its boundaries from dominant or commercial culture.

In this context, the boundaries between irony, provocation, and explicit hostility often become indistinct, facilitating the dissemination of attitudes that might otherwise be labelled unacceptable. Moreover, the TikTok post serves as an example of how Brevik's parody can belittle marginalized identities while simultaneously igniting attention, engagement, and controversy across social media platforms. It could also be read as a way to differentiate between different kinds of audiences, "those who take the bait", and those who "know the trolling game logic and keep the cool" (Díaz-Fernández & García-Mingo, 2024, p. 5342). Taken together, irony and parody function not merely as comedic devices but as strategic tools for reframing power relations and discrediting feminist and queer critique. Banet-Weiser (2018) argues that popular misogyny can exhibit a "mirroring effect" in relation to popular feminism, suggesting that feminist practices are frequently mimicked, co-opted, and transformed into bewildering new forms. Thus, the mirroring presented in Brevik's clip can be compared to a "funhouse mirror" dynamic, distorting reality while still offering a reflection. The parody acts as a tactic to undermine feminist and queer identities, all while providing the speaker a veneer of protection from criticism using irony and humor.

STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

The strategies identified in the previous sections illustrate how different influencer practices can contribute to the mainstreaming and normalization of popular misogyny in digital culture. In this last section I identify how strategic ambiguity enables multiple interpretations of Brevik's content and thereby potentially expand his appeal across different audiences. As I have exemplified in this article, one factor driving public interest in Brevik is his negotiation of popular misogyny within his social media performances. This individual-level dynamic, however, is only one part of a much larger picture. Scholars have emphasised a broader structural and transnational current, in which media technologies, platform logics, and cross-cultural networks of influencers help circulate and normalize misogynistic ideas well beyond their local contexts. Anti-feminist and misogynistic ideas are increasingly shared on social media, often disguised as humor, irony, or appeals to common sense. These dynamics enable misogynistic and anti-feminist discourses to move across different platforms and genres, making them more acceptable (Ashcraft, 2023; Banet-Weiser & Kay, 2025; Ging, et al., 2020). As Banet-Weiser (2018) observes, popular misogyny is sustained through visibility and repetition, continually shifting across cultural and digital nodes, manifesting in diverse forms and contexts. This illustrates how controversies surrounding gender and identity can accelerate in the influencer economy, enhancing engagement and deepening cultural divides. By performing popular misogyny, Brevik actively participates in the normalization and circulation of reactionary gender norms within the digital landscape.

While intersecting with a more antagonistic strand of gender politics circulating in fringe online communities, Brevik's self-presentation also draws heavily on familiar tropes of "lad culture". Brevik's case illustrates how laddish, lifestyle-oriented masculine displays, which rely on humor and camaraderie, can overlap with and reinforce the hostile, entitlement-focused norms of the manosphere, complicating the distinction between widely accepted digital masculinity and explicit misogynistic ideology. Seen through Banet-Weiser's (2018, p. 36) lens, Brevik's performance of misogyny occupies a middle position of a "continuum", where ostensibly playful or mainstream expressions of masculinity help legitimize and obscure the more overtly hostile forms of misogyny at the same time.

While these broader cultural currents mentioned above clearly shape his public persona, Brevik's activity on social media is not limited to ideological positioning alone. On the one hand, parts of his social media activity can be situated within the manosphere-adjacent content relating to the "neo-manosphere" (Gerrand et al., 2025), and what Haslop & Ringrose (2025) describe as a "post-Tate" moment, where male influencers skillfully navigate visibility, controversy, and misogynistic performances in the wake of high-profile international "manfluencers". Haslop et al. (2024, p. 2) argue that Tate represents a certain "neoliberal capitalist version of hegemonic masculinity" blending wealth, self-promotion, and dominance in ways that are rewarded within digital attention economies. Brevik seems to convert similar ideals into his own digital persona by foregrounding aspirational lifestyles, entrepreneurial ambition, and affiliation with high-status networks such as the cryptocurrency subculture, signalling both financial independence and social visibility. Thus, the performance of popular misogyny seems to exist within the neoliberalist version of masculinity that Haslop et al. (2024) ascribe to Tate.

Male influencers such as Brevik can be understood as navigating between two distinct yet overlapping logics that appear central to the construction of their persona online: one rooted in lifestyle branding and strategies, and the other focused on ideological positioning. In the latter mode, they can act as what scholars have called as ideological entrepreneurs (Finlayson, 2023). As ideological entrepreneurs they can promote specific misogynistic discourses such as gender essentialism, body-shaming and anti-woke sentiments. At the same time, they can also serve as ideological intermediaries (Arnesson, 2023), translating and amplifying broader discourses into formats that are more suitable for social media platforms. These dualities enable them to blend the intimacy of influencer culture with strategies reminiscent of political communication. He employs irony, double meanings, and playful provocations to attract a broad and diverse audience while maintaining deniability concerning his provocative statements. Thus, Brevik actively cultivates a sense of strategic ambiguity in his public persona to preserve deniability around his more provocative content.

When looking at Brevik's way of reproducing reactionary ideas about gender, it might be fitting to characterize him as a typical "manfluencer," drawing inspiration from Jordan Peterson or Joe Rogan. However, when examining Brevik's presence on social media, it seems overly simplistic to label him simply as one of many "masculinity influencers" who, in today's digital landscape, "prey on the insecurities of young men" (see Marcotte, 2024). Prominent influencers of today are often "celebrated as entrepreneurial role models" (Arnesson, 2023, p. 531), and Brevik fits this description quite well. Although he has taken a lot of critique for his controversial statements on social media, he has also been saluted as an entrepreneur and for establishing a presence across multiple social media platforms, including TikTok and Instagram, experimenting with various strategies to cultivate and expand his audience. He has also figured as an expert in Norwegian media on cryptocurrency, advising young people on making wise investments (Slotten, 2022). Brevik – as well as other young male Norwegian influencers – faced criticism in 2023 for promoting views that echo Andrew Tate's controversial ideas on gender and sexuality (Jacobsen, 2023). But Brevik's case illustrates how individuals can attract substantial public attention and elevate their profile by aligning themselves with misogynistic ideologies. Such visibility can be a powerful tool for young, aspiring male influencers looking to make a name for themselves in a "post-Tate" digital landscape.

CONCLUSION

The social media content of Sebastian "Baris" Brevik, exemplifies how popular misogyny is performed and made culturally acceptable by male influencers today in a Norwegian context. His content aligns misogyny with the aspirational narratives prevalent on social media platforms. His performances of misogyny

sometimes carry a playful or humorous tone, while drawing on ideas from the manosphere or echoing figures like Andrew Tate. But rather than overtly positioning himself within anti-feminist communities, Brevik adopts a persona that blends irony into the reactionary gender discourses. Brevik's roles as both ideological entrepreneur and intermediary, are instructive for understanding how such influencers operate in contemporary digital cultures.

The analysis shows how he mobilizes his influencer persona through five interrelated strategies. First, he draws on aspirational lifestyle representations and forms of bro culture to construct a desirable masculine identity. Second, he combines elements of hustle culture with anti-woke rhetoric, positioning himself as both entrepreneurial and oppositional. Third, he foregrounds the idealization and disciplining of the male body as a marker of status and self-control. Fourth, he uses humor and irony as communicative devices that enable misogynistic messages to circulate in more socially acceptable forms. Finally, he relies on strategic ambiguity, allowing for multiple interpretations of his content and thereby expanding its appeal across different audiences. Together, these strategies illustrate how influencer practices contribute to the mainstreaming or normalization of popular misogyny in digital culture.

These positions enable influencers not only to mediate, but actively to repackage and recontextualize polarizing worldviews into formats that are both acceptable and engaging for audiences on social media platforms. Moreover, this analysis illuminates the extent to which popular misogyny is deeply embedded within the logics of mainstream digital culture. The processes through which influencers like Brevik help circulate these discourses, are thus integral to the normalization of misogyny within the broader ecosystem of social media. Understanding these dynamics is essential for grasping how digital communities are mobilized, and how power relations around gender are continually redefined in an era of influencer-driven media.

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