

Andrew Tate's Muslim fanbase is growing. Some say he's exploiting Islam for internet popularity

By Sana Noor Haq, CNN

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Video: See Romanian police raiding Andrew Tate's home

not to report the full names of the women in this piece due to concerns about their privacy.

The Muslim couple had met at the end of 2020 and fell in love over their shared interest in travel, Iman said. They got engaged last year and Iman left her life in Britain to join her ex-fiancé in Dubai, where he'd found work. They set a wedding date for February.

But she says his controlling behavior escalated until he became “a completely different person.”

“I noticed myself becoming very, very passive and trying to avoid confrontation at any cost,” she said. “He started becoming very verbally abusive, insulting me or belittling me.”



...was feeling him and when I recognized him anywhere, she told him to get the hell out of my house, my sibling.

“He has turned extremely misogynistic, telling myself and my mum that our duty is to cook and if my mum doesn’t cook one day he calls her lazy,” Serena said via online messages. “I was telling him he was being manipulated and essentially groomed by Andrew Tate, in which he would respond that I don’t have an opinion and I should stop talking.”

Iman and Serena’s experience reflects a growing chorus of Muslim women online who say Tate – a British-American kickboxer turned-social media influencer – is indoctrinating Muslim men and boys with sexist rhetoric, while promoting a distorted version of Islam to justify his self-proclaimed misogyny and obsession with male dominance. He claimed to have converted to the religion in October.



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Now, as Romanian authorities investigate Tate and his brother, Tristan, for allegations of rape and human trafficking in connection with an organized criminal group, more Muslims are scrutinizing the effects of the internet personality’s unbridled influence on younger members of their community. Tate and his brother proclaimed their innocence after being questioned by Romania’s Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT).

In detention since their arrest on December 29, the pair are due back in court later this month. Andrew Tate was pictured in January carrying a Quran while walking into a court in Bucharest at which his appeal for release was denied, Reuters reported.

Iman says Tate's adoption of Islam makes her "very, very angry," adding: "I find it's very common in Muslim communities in general to use religion for their patriarchal, misogynistic agenda when actually it's not even what Islam says."

She and her ex-fiance broke up in January, after Iman says she found evidence he had cheated on her the previous month. Despite his determined efforts to dissuade her, she says, she found the strength to leave him and return to the UK.

'Disenfranchised' section of society

Andrew Tate shot to internet fame last year, racking up 11.6 billion views on TikTok while ranting about male dominance, female submission and wealth. Already known for a string of scandals, he was one of the most-Googled people in 2022, and his name appeared first for the "who is" category of the world's largest search engine.

Commentators say he's influencing young minds across communities around the world. In the UK, his influence on teenage boys of all backgrounds has prompted concern in schools and debate in Parliament.

In August, the influencer was banned from Facebook and Instagram for violating its policies, which prohibit "gender-based hate, any threats of sexual violence, or threats to share non-consensual intimate imagery," a Meta spokesperson told Reuters. TikTok also banned Tate in relation to its ban on "sexually exploitative content," the company said in a statement to Reuters. Elon Musk reinstated his long-shuttered Twitter account in November after taking over the company.



Sabin Cirstoveanu/Inquam Photos/Reuters

Andrew Tate, center, was pictured carrying a copy of the Quran in Bucharest, Romania on January 26, 2023. He claimed to have converted to Islam in October.

But being banned from major social media platforms did not silence Tate online. He continued to appear regularly last year on internet forums hosted by content creators including Mohammed Hijab and Myron Gaines – both of whom belong to a strand of Muslim male influencers known as “akh right bros.”

Taken from the Arabic word for “brother,” akh right bros situate themselves in opposition to so-called Western values in favor of a version of Islam that is rife with misogyny, according to Javad Hashmi, an Islamic studies scholar at Harvard University.



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They tap into audiences who struggle with their identity because they are socially and financially disenfranchised as a result of systemic Islamophobia and racism, and may be sexually frustrated due to a lack of success in the dating and marriage market, explained Hashmi. “You feel second class, and so because of this inferiority complex that you have, you’re looking for an ideology that can give you power and empower you,” he said of that audience.

In this space, akh right bros appeal to some Muslim men and boys because they are “defending their religion in a strong way,” while projecting the notion that women are the root of their social problems, he added.

Even though Tate has been linked to anti-Islam figures such as British far-right activist Tommy Robinson, he has been embraced by akh right bros because their prejudices coincide in the so-called manosphere – a digitized space that promotes male

‘They idolize him’

Tate claimed he had converted to Islam in October, shortly after a YouTube appearance in which he called it the “last true religion on the planet” went viral. References to Islam have appeared on Tate’s Twitter profile since his detention.

Former MMA fighter Tam Khan welcomed Tate’s induction into the faith in a video on Twitter, which has garnered 3.2 million views. However, others said Tate had embraced a warped version of Islam based on misperceptions of the faith – including the idea it permits violence against women.

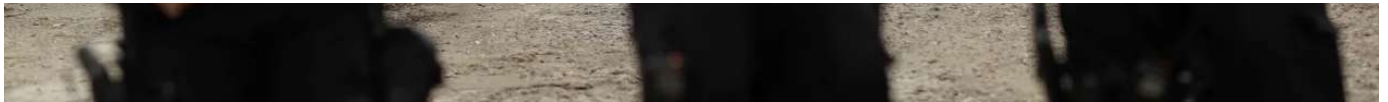
While appearing on a podcast with Hijab, a forerunner of the akh right community, Tate said he believed a husband is “responsible for protecting and providing” for his wife during marriage, and therefore she “belongs to him.” He also claimed that in cases of sexual assault, a woman should bear “personal responsibility” for a situation in which she “made it so easy for something bad to happen to her,” and that “the only thing that satisfies” women is “becoming a mother.”

The episode has gained 2.3 million views since it was uploaded to Hijab’s YouTube channel in October.

Hashmi says there is a symbiotic online relationship between akh right bros and influencers like Tate because they play into an algorithm that rewards extreme views, allowing them to gain virality and make money.

“They (akh right bros) are very anti-Western and anti-liberal, anti-modernity, anti-consumerism, materialism, is what they claim. But in reality ... they are on the platforms that are the creation of all of those things,” he said.





Octav Ganea/Inquam Photos/Reuters

Romanian officials transport cars seized from the Tate compound to an undisclosed storage location, from Voluntari, Ilfov, Romania on January 14, 2023.

Tate has a well documented record of flaunting his riches, with footage of him driving shiny sports cars and smoking cigars flooding his Twitter profile.

In January, Romanian authorities said they had seized nearly \$4 million worth of assets belonging to Tate, including motor vehicles, luxury watches and sums of money in several different currencies, as part of a sprawling investigation.

Meg, a 30-year-old Muslim teacher, said Tate's showy affluence attracted some of the young students at the Islamic school where she works in Melbourne in southeastern Australia.

"I can see why Muslim men whose parents migrated to Australia to have a better life and ... are now working low-paying jobs or are unemployed, would connect with this rich man who tells them that men are under attack and that they have dominion over women," Meg said.

"I think a big pull for them is that he is wealthy and that he talks so much about his wealth ... it really contributes to them admiring him. They idolize him. They want to be him."

'Normalizing' sexual violence

From starting a petition to using a hashtag, legions of Tate's fans have called for his release from detention in the wake of the human trafficking and rape allegations he faces in Romania.

a vile human being to women,” he said. “A lot of men are being miseducated about sex by porn. Similarly, a lot of them are being miseducated about interpersonal relationships through figures like Andrew Tate.”



Mihai Barbu/AFP/Getty Images

Men are being "miseducated" about relationships by figures like Andrew Tate, pictured on January 25, 2023, according to Muslim sex educator Habeeb Akande.

Both Akande and Hashmi believe the wider, unmediated “men’s rights” movement Tate occupies online must be addressed if his popularity is to be diminished.

“It would be very mistaken to think that you just end Andrew Tate, and that would be the end of it. Andrew Tate is one figure in this whole kind of movement. And one of the reasons for this movement is ... the online space has been left to these people with very

GROSS MISREPRESENTATION OF THE FAITH

Ayo Khalil, 26, is an NHS doctor and community worker who is trying to bridge the gap between Tate's fans and those who are openly critical of his platform.

Khalil believes Tate's rhetoric is creating "a gross misrepresentation" of Islam, because he "speaks brazenly about violence towards women" while his fans have "idolized him as a model Muslim male."

"I feel like Muslims have become very obsessed with ... public figures representing Islam, regardless of what they've said and done," he told CNN. "It's such a damaging and uncritical approach."

Khalil says he converted to Islam and "fell in love" with the faith, because "social justice and spirituality, discipline and submission were embedded in it."

Khalil ran an online workshop in January in order to start a critical dialogue about Andrew Tate, sexual violence and Muslim masculinity, after seeing the "dismissive way" members of his community addressed Tate's popularity.

"I have seen in real time what ... sexual violence and sexual abuse and other types of abuse can do to an individual," he said. "Men in this case have to take individual responsibility to really push back against ... the way other men behave towards women."

He believes that more imams, community leaders and teachers need to speak out against Tate and help young Muslim men re-evaluate how masculinity is defined within the parameters of the faith, including "being in touch with your emotions, showing kindness."

"Being moderate, this is what makes a man. Not going online, showing watches, boasting, smoking cigars and saying sensationalist things for views," he said.

"If you're a Muslim, it's not the example you should be following. Who do you worship?"

CNN's Abigail Brooks and Philip Wang contributed reporting.

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