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Prompt and Consequence: AI-Generated Music as 21st-Century Propaganda

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Abstract

This paper examines AI-generated music as a twenty-first-century form of propaganda, analyzing how synthetic songs shape collective identity and political belonging without top-down institutional control. Focusing on the viral AI-generated song "We Are Charlie Kirk" and its accompanying YouTube video, I trace how AI tools construct an in-group world of Christian nationalist imagery, drawing on ethnomusicological and media theory frameworks alongside historical precedents in fascist radio broadcasting, Nazi martyrdom songs, and Cold War-era country music and Hollywood film. Using reverse-prompt research on the commercial platform Suno, I show how a simple prompt can generate a fully realized martyrdom ballad, revealing the racialized and class-coded assumptions embedded in AI music generation. I further show how ironic remixes and covers of the Kirk song, rather than subverting its message, extend its circulation and reinforce in-group and out-group dynamics. A comparative case study of Iranian-produced AI Lego-animation videos targeting American audiences demonstrates how the same techniques can be weaponized from outside a political community. Together, these cases suggest that AI music generation has collapsed the cost of producing emotionally persuasive, identity-forming media, enabling a decentralized form of participatory mythmaking that parallels, and extends, twentieth-century propaganda infrastructures.

Keywords: AI-generated music; propaganda; collective identity; Christian nationalism; algorithmic culture

1. Introduction

In November 2025, the AI-generated song "We Are Charlie Kirk" went viral two months after Kirk's assassination. On the political right, the song was applauded for its framing of martyrdom. Critics, meanwhile, were either deeply uncomfortable with it or mocked it outright. Although seemingly generated by anonymous users using commercial AI tools rather than by any political institution, historical examples, such as government-sponsored country music songs promoting post-draft military recruitment, necessitate skepticism about presuming entirely grassroots origins (Thompson, 2024). This paper analyzes the influence of AI-produced music on collective identity through emotional messaging reminiscent of 20th-century propaganda, contending that synthetic media is already transforming perceptions of reality, beliefs, and feelings of belonging.

Drawing on music studies, media analysis, political theory, and historical comparison, I analyze how users circulate AI-generated songs as symbolic content. "We Are Charlie Kirk," created by the anonymous act Spalexma on an unidentified platform, encodes Christian and nationalist values that function as coordinated messaging even without top-down coordination. Using reverse-prompt research, close audiovisual reading, and observations of remixes derived from the Kirk song, I argue—expanding upon frameworks from ethnomusicologist Melissa Avdeeff (2025) and musicologist Pamela Potter (2005) — that ironic remixes can reinforce the narratives they appear to subvert. I situate this alongside the Nazi promotion of Horst Wessel's martyrdom through song (Strötgen, 2008) and country music's role in post-draft military

recruitment. Importantly, this comparison concerns how songs produce and circulate martyrdom narratives; it draws no equivalence between Kirk and Wessel.

I argue that AI music generation produces a new form of participatory mythmaking without direct state control, paralleling how 20th-century fascist governments fused political messaging with expanding radio infrastructure (Thomas and Palazzetti, 2021). In this strikingly similar position, today's AI industry leaders maintain close ties to the government while public funding accelerates the technology's reach. As AI music generation tools like Suno, AIVA, and Udio become normalized in classrooms and culture (Väkevä, 2025), debates over "responsible" inclusion obscure how AI is fundamentally reshaping the construction of our identity and reality.

2. The ViVo Tunes Video: Diegesis, AI Aesthetics, and In-Group Worldbuilding

The ViVo Tunes YouTube adaptation of Spalexma's "We Are Charlie Kirk" treats the song as existing within the patriotic and Christian-nationalist world the video constructs. The images feel motivated by the music itself: conservative figures, stadium concert environments, subject cut-aways, and thematic movements all respond to the song as if it were part of the scene. This approach embodies what film theorists describe as a "diegetic" use of music, where sound belongs to the implied world of the project. As Claudia Gorbman (1987) explains, diegesis refers to *the world the viewer mentally constructs* while watching a film or video.

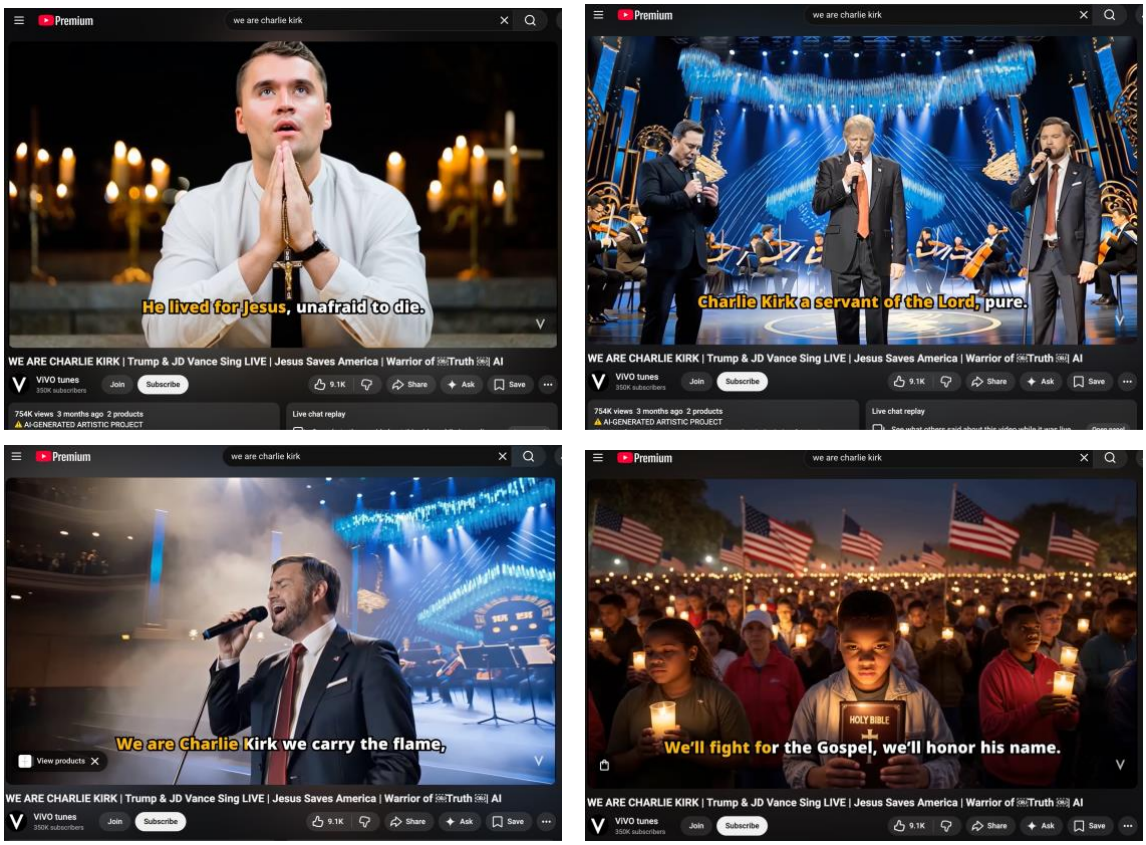


Figure 1. Stills from the ViVo Tunes YouTube adaptation of "We Are Charlie Kirk," showing the video's AI-generated stadium and megachurch concert

imagery, including AI-generated depictions of Donald Trump, JD Vance, Charlie Kirk, and Elon Musk (ViVo Tunes, n.d.).

What makes the ViVo Tunes video jarring is its use of machine-generated imagery to build this world. Figures including U.S. President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance, and tech giant Elon Musk appear in a mega-church concert space that looks familiar yet ridiculous, but consistent enough to feel like a coherent story. We see that AI acts as a tool for forming an idyllic in-group world, complete with pinnacles of neoliberal success and Christian symbols and text.

This strategy fits well with how music videos circulate on YouTube. As Tomáš Jirsa and Mathias Bonde Korsgaard (2019) note, YouTube has become the primary space where music videos are watched, shared, and monetized, turning them from television products into flexible digital objects. Music videos are no longer expected to be high-budget productions; they function as content designed to catch attention, encourage repeat viewing, and feed recommendation algorithms. AI-generated videos like the ViVo Tunes adaptation highlight this shift: by lowering production costs and accelerating creation, AI allows creators to publish compelling content more frequently. Therefore, the ViVo Tunes video is optimized for the propagation of contemporary online platforms, turning it into an even more effective piece of propaganda beyond its emotional framing.

To see this system at work, consider the chorus and bridge of “We Are Charlie Kirk.” The chorus is a collective identity declaration, using a rhetorical device common to patriotic anthems and Christian rock stadium choruses, in which a group absorbs the identity of a figurehead.

> *We are Charlie Kirk, we carry the flame / We'll fight for the Gospel, we'll honor his name / We are Charlie Kirk, his courage our own / Together unbroken, we'll make Heaven known*

"Flame" carries a dual resonance, evoking both the Pentecostal "tongues of fire" iconography that saturates Christian rock album art and the political imagery of generational continuity, the idea that each wave of activists receives and passes on something essential. This framing is common to both revival culture, where flame imagery signals the ongoing transmission of the Holy Spirit across generations of believers, and to movement conservatism, where it appears in the language of legacy, inheritance, and civilizational stakes. Phrases like "Together unbroken" and "make Heaven known" blend nationalist language with evangelical tropes so seamlessly that the two become indistinguishable.

The second stanza deepens this by adopting the spiritual warfare framework of contemporary Christian praise music, visually encoded in recognizable signifiers.

> *The battle is raging, the darkness will fall / We rise with his spirit, we answer the call / The truth is eternal, the Cross is our guide / With God as our Captain, we march side by side*

These phrases are drawn from evangelical hymn conventions (as generative AI is trained to do), but they also could be drawn from the harder, more sonically aggressive end of Christian rock—bands like Disciple, a Christian hard rock act whose sound and imagery are built largely around spiritual warfare (their 2010 album Horseshoes & Handgrenades, or 2014 album simply titled Attack), or War of Ages, a metalcore band working the same Apostle Paul armor-of-God themes. The grammatical ambiguity of "his spirit," which refers equally to God or to Kirk himself, elevates its human subject toward quasi-divine status in a way that Christian rock's

cult-of-personality worship culture has already made legitimate. Finally, "we march side by side," then casts political activism as holy warfare.

These genre choices are not incidental to the song's political function. Country and contemporary Christian music have long operated as sonic markers of white, rural, and working-class identity (Hubbs, 2014; Pecknold, 2007), and AI tools—trained on datasets that reflect and reproduce existing cultural stereotypes—replicate these associations. The resulting soundscape implicitly constructs a specific imagined audience: white, Christian, and economically aggrieved.

The song reveals how well AI can replicate the emotional logic shared by evangelical Christianity and MAGA political rhetoric—the sound of Christian rock and the visuals of patriot Christianity – while remaining familiar yet vague enough for many to attach their own meaning and to feel emboldened in whatever mission they find sacred.

3. "Empty Pews, Heavy Heart": Reverse-Prompt Research

To understand what AI music software can generate in politically coded contexts, I conducted reverse-prompt research using Suno, a leading commercial AI music generation platform. My first prompt was deliberately simple: "Emotional Christian rock band ballad, with a singer like Keith Urban who sings about Charlie Kirk." I went into this process blind, not anticipating that Suno would also generate lyrics, a title, and image based on the prompt.

The result was a song titled "Empty Pews, Heavy Heart," a stadium-sized modern Christian rock ballad built from piano swelling to guitars. The lyrics do not directly name Kirk; instead, they invoke someone inferred to be a figure of faith who has passed on—possibly a church leader. The song's bridge contains the lines: "When I am gone / Close your eyes / Sing out / The work goes on." The implication of martyrdom is unmistakable, even in its indirectness.

The song's rich male vocals fall into what Linda Williams identifies as the melodramatic "male weepie" register (Williams, 1991), creating a comforting space for projected grief that makes the song an effective vessel for political sentiment: emotionally and lyrically vague enough that any martyred figure can be inserted, underscored by the cultural weight of the singer I have chosen (more on this latter point later).

Crucially, these genre selections also carry racialized and class-coded meanings. I have already noted how country and contemporary Christian music have historically functioned as sonic markers of white, rural, and working-class identity (Hubbs, 2014; Pecknold, 2007). Consequently, this song's instrumentation, vocal timbre, and production collectively signal a theoretical extension of what Maultsby (1990) identifies as cultural ownership through sound, in this case, constructing an imagined audience as white, male, and Christian.

The image Suno generated to accompany "my" song reinforced this framing: a seemingly white man inside a modest church, arms raised in the aisle between pews, facing stained-glass windows. Another man stands to his left, raising what appears to be a book toward the pulpit.

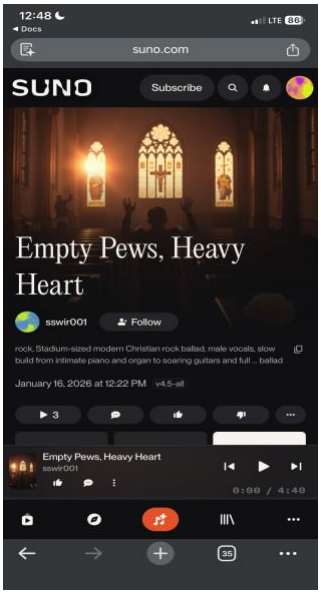


Figure 2. AI-generated cover image accompanying “Empty Pews, Heavy Heart,” the song produced during the author’s reverse-prompt research on Suno (Suno, 2026).

The visual coding of evangelical worship, coded through racial and atmospheric signifiers, follows the AI-generated song. These findings pose crucial questions about the limits of AI governance: how can platforms monitor gray areas in speech and music interpretation without being censored, and what prevents more overtly directive prompts from producing more explicit and problematic results?

4. YouTube as Archive: Irony, Remix, and the Propagation of Martyrdom

YouTube stores enormous amounts of video that users return to and treat as part of cultural memory, even though the platform is not designed to preserve or contextualize content carefully (Mangaoang, 2019). The opera-style cover of "We Are Charlie Kirk" by YouTube user Lady Venus demonstrates how the platform functions as an archive without formally being one.

The cover became popular despite being posted by a channel with fewer than 4,000 subscribers, and it accumulated over 350,000 views in a month. Its title, "'We Are Charlie Kirk' Opera Cover (No AI, 1 take, cold + 3:00 A.M. combo)" is paired with a photoshopped thumbnail reminiscent of YouTube's early aesthetic, demonstrating intimacy and vulnerability as markers of engagement (Desai-Stephens, 2022, pp. 457–458). Comments in the video's thread seized on the anti-AI framing: "No AI + shitty photoshop makes it so much better." "In 2026 WE are stealing AI's jobs." "Support queer art." The cover made the original song more shareable, more meme-like, and provided additional fodder for community engagement amid a cultural moment defined by reactions to AI.

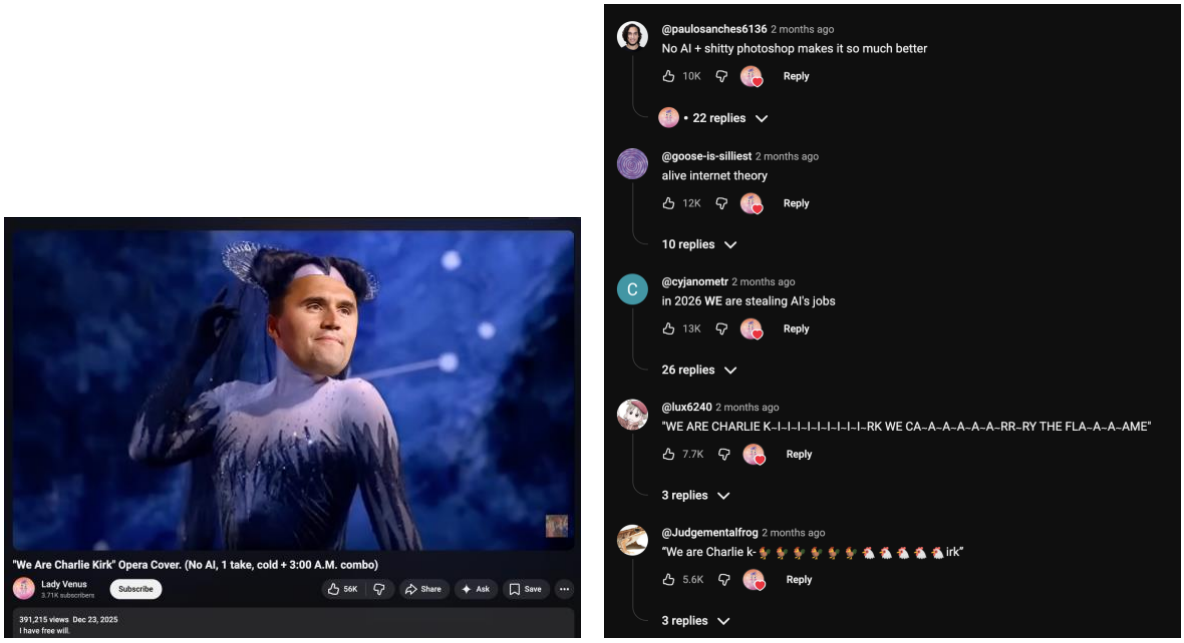


Figure 3. The Lady Venus opera cover of "We Are Charlie Kirk" and audience comments responding to its anti-AI framing (Lady Venus, 2025, 2026).

But irony does not neutralize propaganda. So long as critics are propagating a public narrative advantageous to an in-group, they will continue to be tolerated (Potter, 2005, p. 439). In this case, ironic remixes spread the sonic refrain "We are Charlie Kirk" across the internet while appearing to mock it; ironic content still repeats the central symbols, spreads the core narrative, reinforces in-group and out-group identity, and normalizes the mythic framing of its subject. Each remix slightly shifts meaning, but the overall impact is amplification. Furthermore, the in-group now has proof of the out-group's perceived intolerance, thus deepening American ideological divisions. YouTube ends up storing culture through constant evolution, which is integral to how moments like this go viral and are remembered. The architecture of many online platforms, such as YouTube, rewards this cycle.

5. Historical Precedent: Radio, Country Music, and Messaging Infrastructure

The dynamics described are not lacking in historical precedent. AI infrastructure today occupies a position strikingly similar to the advent of radio broadcasting under 20th-century fascist regimes. As Jonathan Thomas and Nicolò Palazzetti (2021) demonstrate, fascist Italy fused political messaging with the expansion of radio infrastructure, using music and sound as a vehicle for ideological transmission from the 1920s to the early 1940s. Additionally, following Horst Wessel's assassination in 1930, the Nazi Party transformed both their man and his song into martyrdom symbols, circulating them to consolidate group identity around sacrifice and nationalist purpose (Strötgen, 2008). The song became inseparable from the movement's mythology, heard at rallies and broadcasts across Germany in the 1930s.

Contemporary AI platforms share key structural pillars with this model. Big tech companies and their leaders maintain close ties to government officials, establishing contracts with agencies and the US military, while public funding empowers the technology's infrastructure and the tools themselves propel the rapid, low-cost production of emotionally compelling content that can circulate through platforms without requiring institutional coordination. This

arrangement—in which private industry functions as a conduit for state-aligned messaging without formal direction—also has clear historical precedent. Following the end of the draft in 1973, the country music industry effectively absorbed the role of military recruitment messaging, producing a wave of songs that celebrated military service, sacrifice, and patriotic duty at a time when the armed forces could no longer force enlistment (Thompson, 2024). A similar dynamic guided Hollywood's relationship with the Pentagon throughout the Cold War, in which the Department of Defense offered filmmakers access to bases, equipment, and personnel in exchange for script approval and favorable portrayals of military life (Robb, 2004).

The music and film industries retained creative and commercial autonomy, yet their output remained sufficiently aligned with state interests. Meanwhile, the benefits of that alignment — financial success, access, and cultural influence— were sufficient to function as propaganda. Subsequently, today's AI platforms are structurally entangled with state power, commercially incentivized to maximize reach and engagement, and culturally positioned as neutral tools even as the content they generate and amplify is often not.

As tools like Suno, AIVA, and Udio become normalized in classrooms and cultural production (Väkevä, 2025), debates over their "responsible" inclusion tend to focus on questions of academic integrity or copyright, obscuring the fundamental question of how these tools reshape identity construction. The fetishization of AI prompts, the algorithmically rewarded cycle of remixing and circulation, the emotional amplification of in-group narratives, and the structural parallels to 20th-century propaganda infrastructure all suggest that AI-generated music serves as a force for forming, contesting, and reinforcing collective identity in the 21st century.

6. Iranian Lego Videos as an Ongoing Case Study

This same dynamic extends beyond AI-generated audio into full AI-music-video propaganda, where music remains the primary delivery mechanism—and where the question of who constructs the imagined audience becomes even more urgent. The following case study, which draws on work produced during the Iran–United States conflict of spring 2026, illustrates how AI-generated music can be used to target and destabilize an existing community from the outside.

Explosive Media is an Iranian digital media firm that went viral in Spring of 2026 for producing AI-generated videos about Iran–United States relations. When the two countries went to war, the organization’s videos achieved widespread virality within a month of hostilities breaking out. Rather than pushing religiosity or the standard theocratic narrative, the videos were aimed squarely at Western audiences, tapping into a sense of global solidarity against U.S. aggression and exploiting domestic American divisions. They do not look or feel like state propaganda, despite a spokesperson for Explosive Media admitting to the BBC that the Iranian government is a client. The key to that disguise is the music. The AI-generated rap production on their viral song “Losers First” closely mirrors mainstream American styles—specifically Eminem and Macklemore—because Eminem carries cultural weight with the demographic the song is designed to reach: white, working-class, Rust Belt voters who may be having second thoughts. By imitating that sound through AI, the song borrows Eminem’s credibility and lends weight to its populist grievance messaging. Furthermore, one of Explosive Media’s creators told the BBC he used Lego animations because that is a “world language”— and the music works the same way.

> *Stealing from your own people / making them bleed / taking tax dollars / just to fund your own greed / They're waking up to the lies / the illusions have burst / You screamed America first / Nah, you put losers first*

The refrain opens with an economic accusation—"stealing from your own people, making them bleed, taking tax dollars just to fund your own greed." The monosyllabic rhymes (steal, bleed, greed) fall on the beat in short, clipped lines. It then moves into "they're waking up to the lies, the illusions have burst." The slogan flip lands next: "you screamed America First, nah, you put losers first." Inverting the slogan produces a line built to be clipped and reposted.



Figure 4. Still from Explosive Media's "Losers First" Lego-animation video, posted to the AI IRAN YouTube channel (AI IRAN, 2026).

> *Make Israel Great Again / Your government is run by pedophiles / They ordered you to die for Israel x2 / They lied to you all*

The second half escalates. "Make Israel Great Again" is a four-word MAGA parody built to function as a standalone meme. Then the chorus hits with its most direct line: "your government is run by pedophiles"—blunt, and targeted squarely at the unresolved Epstein files, which remain a genuine point of anger across the American political spectrum. That's followed by "they ordered you to die for Israel," repeated twice. The repetition is a basic propaganda technique.

> *You talk real big for a man with tiny hands / tiny hands, tiny things, tiny everything / We saw everything*



Figure 5. Still from “Losers First” depicting Lego Trump’s bruised hand, referencing a recurring mockery of Trump in his second term (AI IRAN, 2026).

This short passage works as a comedic interlude, but it carries integral weight in messaging. It opens with “you talk real big for a man with tiny hands,” a direct callback to one of the most mocked moments of the 2016 campaign, when Trump’s hand size became a genuine news story. In the video, Lego Trump’s hand is bruised, playing into the current conspiracies surrounding the president’s health. Referencing both here signals that the creators are fluent in American political culture and know which insults already have traction. The second line, “tiny hands, tiny things, tiny everything,” is pure mockery structured as a taunt that spirals. The delivery mimics Eminem’s diss-track style, so it is entirely believable that someone at Explosive Media simply prompted a music generation tool to do this, similarly to what we saw in my reverse-prompt research. By imitating that sound through AI, the song borrows Eminem’s credibility and serves as a clear example of Iran using AI-generated music to weaponize American cultural identity and sow discord from the outside.

The music does a lot of the work here. The production closely mirrors mainstream American rap, which keeps it from sounding foreign or out of place. By the final line –“they lied to you all” – the listener has moved through economic resentment, political betrayal, and outrage in under a minute. Iran invented none of these grievances. They already exist in America. This is why I believe these pointed, raunchy lyrics were created by a person familiar with American grievances and fed into a music-generation prompt, while the “We Are Charlie Kirk” lyrics are complimentary and generic, obviously lifted from training material for an LLM (large language model). What generative AI made possible is the repackaging of songs cheaply, quickly, and with little accountability or transparency about who was behind it, making it one of the most effective tools for 21st-century propaganda. The song is ultimately a greatest hits of American populist grievances.

Remix culture appears here, too. YouTube shut down the Explosive Media channel in April of 2026, but that hasn’t stopped countless other channels from posting the music videos already created and making their own Lego videos saturated with anti-West sentiment. This creates a confusion chamber of competing mixes with no assurance of their origin. Is it a foreign actor? Is it a disillusioned American? Is it a grifter doing it for the ad revenue? There is no way of pinning down the motivations behind the messaging with certainty.

7. Conclusion

“We Are Charlie Kirk” and “Losers First” both use AI tools to compress the distance between political intent and emotional impact. The Kirk case works from the inside – the ViVo Tunes video fuses evangelical devotion with nationalist pride until the two become rhetorically indistinguishable, and ironic remixes spread the sonic refrain while appearing to mock it, compounding the narrative regardless of intent. “Losers First” applies the same logic from the outside, assembling American populist grievances and delivering them in an AI voice that sounds like Eminem, not like Tehran. In both cases, private industry maintains close alignment with state interests while the content circulates without institutional coordination, a structure the reverse-prompt experiment – which produced a full martyrdom ballad from a single prompt – makes plain.

Generative AI has collapsed the production costs of propaganda and masked the source. A movement, martyrdom, political grievance — these can now be scored, produced, and

distributed at a scale and speed that no prior technology matched, by actors ranging from anonymous users to state-adjacent media operations, with no clear connection between them.

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