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Inside the White House's new media strategy to promote Trump as 'KING'

The Trump administration has transformed its traditional press shop into a rapid-response influence operation, and "they're all offense, all the time."

March 31, 2026

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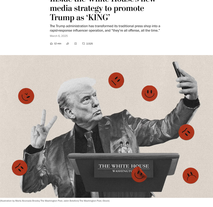

Illustration by Maria Medina Bimbela The Washington Post; video clips courtesy Instagram, Facebook, X, Vimeo, Rumble

By Cat Zakrzewski and Naomi Nix

When actress Selma Gomez posted an Instagram video in January in which she cried about the Trump-backed Paul Gosar's reelection, the video was soon circulating on Truth Social, a site maintained by some senior members of the policy's Gosar campaign.

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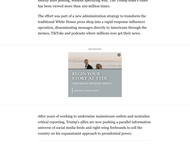
But the White House digital strategy team had a plan. They dispatched videographers to interview the mothers of children killed by undocumented immigrants. They put President Donald Trump's face on a Valentine's Day card reading "Roses are red, violets are blue, some have illegals, and we'll deport you."



And they mimicked a style of video popular for its meditative soundscapes, known as ASMR, with a presentation that featured the ruling Scotchoff chorus of a depositation Party. Scenes delivered key videos shortly after posting, without specifying why. The Trump team's video has been viewed more than one million times.

The effort was part of a new administration strategy to transform the traditional White House press shop into a rapid-response influence operation, disseminating messages directly to Americans through the memes, TikToks and podcasts where millions now get their news.

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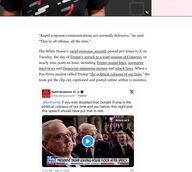
Author Trump's social media

For the Trump team, that has involved aggressively confronting critics like Gomez, not just to "release the narrative" but to drown them out, said Karlan Dorr, a deputy assistant to the president who runs the digital team.



Christina Bobb at a hearing in Washington in 2024 when she was the lead lawyer for Mar-a-Lago. | Drew Angerer for The Washington Post

"We thought it was necessary to provide pushback to the hardcore, most forceful ones possible," he said. "And through that, we had a vital hit on our hands."

Stephen K. Bannon, a senior White House aide during Trump's first term, said the idea for the "King" video came from Trump himself. Bannon referred itself as a "major information control provider." What Trump does "is the action, and we just happen to be one of the distributors," he said.

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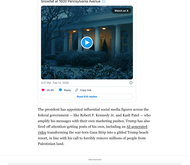
"Rapid response communications are normally defensive," he said. "They're all offense, all the time."

The White House's rapid response account posted 207 times to X on Monday. Five of Trump's speeches in a joint session of Congress, or nearly one-quarter hour, including Trump-aired lifts, remarkably longer than Biden's first joint congressional address. Trump's video is a Fox News analyst called Trump "the political colossus of our time." The team got the clip out, captioned and posted online within 2 minutes.



In press rooms, the administration is welcoming friendly "new media" podcasters, X users and YouTubers to deliver what White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt calls "news-related content" to their millions of followers.

And on social media, the White House is firing off talking points across their platforms in a bid to set online discussions and rack viewers who were tuned out the traditional press shop. Its X page, communications director Steven Cheung described this goal: "FULL SPECTRUM DOMINANCE."

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The administration has produced news-style reports trumpeting Trump's successes and put them in social newsfeeds and Lorrie-mentary. "Watch Mama" video segments, soon, they'll be delivered via text.

The team has worked to humanize the president with mitzvamous photo ops. Last Hanukkah, Trump appeared in a Chabad yarmulke from the Oval Office — when a New York Post showing the president's long shot hangs framed just outside the door. But the digital team has also gone for shock factor, posting a photo of shattered Jan. 6 staffing onto a transport jet ("Deportation Flights Have Begun") and a portrait of Trump with a golden crown ("LONG LIVE THE KING").

The president has appointed influential social media figures across the federal government — like Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Kash Patel — who amplify his messages with their own marketing pulses. Trump has also fired all attention-getting posts of his own, including an AI-generated video showing him wearing the wore Gucci Mike Jeter a gilded Trump beach chair, in his video call to forcibly remove millions of people from Palestinian land.

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The administration's Israeli campaign style tactics are designed to stand out on a crowded internet and speak to voters that elicit officials believe are hungry for aggressive action.

"Even the tagline we've been using — "America is back" — is very much saying: 'We're here. We're in your face.' It's irreverent, it's unapologetic," said Dorr. (A version of Lorie Trump campaigns, Dorr also worked as a "head of engagement" at Gettr, the right-wing social network run by Jason Miller.)

The posts have shocked and exploited the left, leading Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) to accuse Democrats in a letter to trip "dirt." But the Trump team has been emboldened to go further by the millions who have watched, shared and followed the accounts since Trump's inauguration. Half of the White House's Instagram views have come from non-followers, Dorr said, a sign that the team's messages are gaining traction beyond Trump's base.

White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly said in a statement that the approach is built to reach audiences without the media's help and to broadcast Trump's "America First message for and vide."

But this model of messaging could supercharge the presidential bully pulpit until it shifts Americans' perception of events, according to experts who study propaganda and the press. Like Trump's moves to shore up loyalty in Congress and remake the judiciary, the strategy is designed to weaken his opponents and dismantle checks against executive power.

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Undermining the accountability mission of the Fourth Estate and building a viral pipeline of state media helps the administration — and future ones — stifle dissent, said Anya Schiffrin, a senior lecturer at Columbia University's School for International and Public Affairs.

And by replacing dispassionate observers with partisan cheerleaders, political leaders are elevating a class of messengers incentivized to detail their decisions, no matter the orthodoxy or scale. Every policy maneuver could turn into a meme.

Said Rosie Mullins, a communications professor at the University of Rhode Island, "It's an effort to replace the mainstream press with a partisan press" that will function as the new "purveyors of reality."

'Going to be great television'

Though somebody at the digital team serves on the front lines of what the White House calls the "most transparent administration" in history, Trump's aides have made it difficult for journalists to determine, citing personnel policy and concern over public backlash.

The team is made up of roughly a dozen employees — people mostly in their 20s and 30s from outside politics — who work in an office in the White House and are given wide leeway to craft content. By removing layers of bureaucracy before publishing, the team avoids the "analysis paralysis" of other messaging shops, Dorr said.

And members are expected to move at internet speed. When a federal judge declined to block the White House from banning the Associated Press from certain news events, the team vowed to declare "VICTORY" in graphics that members shipped across White House TVs and social accounts.

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They "have the keys to the kingdom [Trump] wants to go out there and be unapologetic in our pursuit of advancing the administration's goals," Dorr said, "with the honesty and the quickness and the pointedness" the White House demands.

For its rapid-response account, the White House employs video producers and editors, known as clippers, to create and post short videos on the fly. The role was first popularized by political activists looking to highlight opponents' gaffes on the campaign trail, but Trump's clippers often promote his messages, hoping to make them go viral to cut time.

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On Friday, within minutes of Trump and Vice President JD Vance's fiery confrontation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, the White House accounts blasted out video of major attack lines, meme-ready phrases and images of the American flag. "This is the end of the interview," Trump said as reporters fled out of the Oval Office.

The approach seems to be resonating online: Trump's Oval Cabinet meetings, which was live-streamed and featured Silicon Valley elite and Cabinet members, drew more than 1 million X users, "the most overwhelming thirst with information" in a way that is "changing the nature of the presidency," Bannon said. "More many young men under 30 years old would ever watch two seconds of a Cabinet meeting."

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That fast-twitch mindset has spread beyond the White House, including to the Defense Department, which this month launched a rapid-response account to counter Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's months-long campaign to remake Defense Department culture, including a crackdown on "woke" uniforms. "Trump and so-called MAGA influencers have made it clear that they want to see more aggressive, more unapologetic, more in your face," said Dorr, who left the Pentagon in 2024 to join the Trump campaign.

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major advertising campaigns to reach viewers beyond the web.

Kristi L. Noem, head of the Department of Homeland Security, has posted videos of herself in a flak jacket at the southern border and on immigration raids, including one on Tuesday at an apartment complex in Northern Virginia.

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Footage from the raids is used in an international TV and digital ad blitz that warns undocumented immigrants to leave the country or be hunted down. At the Conservative Political Action Conference, Noem said the ads had a budget of up to $200 million and had been personally requested by Trump.

"We're not going to let the media tell this story," Noem recalled Trump saying, as was first reported by Rolling Stone. "We're going to run a marketing campaign to make sure the American people know the truth."

'Desecrate their idols'

As the administration has expanded its marketing arm, it has also worked to uproot the classic structure of the White House press corps. In her first briefing, Leavitt called on "podcasters, social media influencers and content creators" to apply for credentialed access to a briefing room long filled by legacy news outlets. More than 12,000 have since applied, according to the White House, and several have been ushered to exclusive new-media seats near the podium.

Administration officials have said the change reflects a fundamental shift in American culture, as journalists compete for relevance with a new generation of influencers who speak to audiences of millions online.

But virtually all of the new-media creators have come from right-wing outlets friendly to the Trump cause. The Breitbart writer Matt Boyle asked whether the White House would continue its "breakneck" pace. (Yes, Leavitt said.) The pro-Trump podcaster John Ashbrook asked whether the media was "out of touch" about the border. (Yes, Leavitt said.) And John Stoll, the head of news at Musk's X, asked about the White House's "confidence" in going "toe-to-toe with Vladimir Putin." (Very confident, national security adviser Michael Waltz said.)

"The Trump White House is loyal, and they are loyal to people who stood with them," podcaster Dan Bongino said while toasting Rumble chief Chris Pavlovski's moment in the new-media spotlight. (Days later, Bongino was named deputy director of the FBI.)

Some of the new-media figures have eagerly promoted Trump's domestic agenda. A few hours after podcaster Sage Steele asked about the importance of passing a law to ban transgender women and girls from women's sports, she stood behind Trump as he signed an executive order on the same issue.

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Other Trump-boosting creators have joined the administration outright, like the "Dear America" podcast host Graham Allen, newly hired as the Defense Department's digital media director. Brenden Dilley, a pro-Trump meme maker, said of the news, "There's going to be nobody left doing podcasts soon because the top people are all going to work for the government."

Friendliness between the White House and its messengers of choice is nothing new, including during the first Trump term, when right-wing provocateurs like Mike Cernovich and blogs like Gateway Pundit held credentials alongside the legacy press.

But back then, the traditional press corps set the tone, Bannon said. The softer questions during Trump's recent Cabinet meeting, he said, made the first term's briefings look like "hand-to-hand combat."

Today "the powerful media is the ecosystem of the right," Bannon said, "while the mainstream media [is] suffering layoffs."

The right-wing media figures embraced by the Trump administration have often returned the favor. After the banning of the AP, Brian Glenn — a correspondent for the pro-Trump media network Real America's Voice and the boyfriend of Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) — was given the rare opportunity to question Trump in the Oval Office. A few days later, he posted a selfie with Trump on X that read: "So much accomplished, and we're still under a month in office."

For those working closely with Trump's public-relations infrastructure, the first weeks have marked a huge opportunity for exclusive content. Benny Johnson, a Tampa-based MAGA influencer who calls himself the "Front Seat to the Golden Era," got to interview Vance last month, then headed to the Capitol, where he live-streamed a friendly chat with two Republican senators before they voted to confirm Patel as FBI director.

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"First time in history we'll have the stream going from the senator's office. This is amazing," Johnson said on stream.

The night before, Johnson had posted a video of himself stopping to rejoice outside the shuttered offices of the U.S. Agency for International Development, once the world's largest provider of food aid. "Destroy the idols of the conquered church, right?" he said with a laugh. "Desecrate their idols. Look at this. There it is. Blacked out. It's gone."

Cat Zakrzewski and Michael Scherer contributed to this report.

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