

**Vibe Save America? Identity Marketing, Visual Branding, and Spreadability on Instagram**

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In an age where social media plays a primary role in political mobilization and the concept of self-actualizing citizenship is becoming the new normal, there is a demand for shareable political content that fits the aesthetic requirements of those who wish to share it. Social media, particularly Instagram, has shifted away from a casual sharing of images and updates to a curated page that showcases the essence of who a person is: the kind of music they like, the people they associate with, the clothes they wear, and most importantly, to the scope of this paper, where they stand politically. In a poll conducted in November 2024 by Emerson College, 59.9% of respondents indicated that at least “a little” of what they post on social media is related to politics. According to relevant research, “Instagram affords identity construction because ‘identities distinguish between self and society, individuals and groups, in-groups and out-groups, and they are fundamentally public ways of being known by others’” (Kreiss, 2018, p.15). This feature is unique to online presentation because of the intentionality it allows, unlike offline presentation (Siebel, 2019, p. 4). One’s political identity must fit into these spheres and align with the identity they have curated and presented online.

As political moments increasingly unfold online, many users feel a growing expectation to publicly acknowledge and engage with them. The act of posting about politics becomes less about spontaneous expression and more about aligning one’s digital identity with the values of their online community. A Pew Research study from June 2024 found that 70% of respondents who post about politics cite “feeling obligated” as a reason for doing so. This sense of obligation reflects broader shifts in digital identity formation, where personal expression is deeply intertwined with political signaling. Instagram, in particular, has become central in shaping how users construct their digital selves in relation to civic life. As Papacharissi (2018) explains, “In everyday cycles of self-presentation and impression formation, individuals perform on multiple

stages, and in doing so, they blend social spheres online that may have been separate offline, thus confusing private and public boundaries” (p. 209). The pressure to engage with political content reflects broader trends in identity marketing, which is defined as “efforts to establish clear links between their political brand image and the public’s personal principles, beliefs, and values that are undergirding their self- image, their “desired and espoused order and goals of society, and how they can be achieved”(Raynauld, 2025). It becomes crucial for people to express their political opinions because, as we have established, they feel obligated to do so within the identity that they have already presented for themselves on Instagram.

Digital platforms have revolutionized political messaging by amplifying content through mechanisms of spreadability, enabling political organizations to reach broader and more diverse audiences. Spreadability refers to the potential—both technical and cultural—for audiences to share content for their own purpose (DeMos, 2014, p. 1). Duggan (2020, p. 3) describes how strategically crafted content can enhance its spreadability, increasing its reach and engagement beyond its initial target audience. Unlike traditional broadcast media, where messages are disseminated in an organized, bureaucratic manner, Instagram allows messages to be driven by the self-motivated user. Content is shared, remixed, and repurposed within their personal digital networks. This spreadability necessitates a comprehensive understanding of both the technical capabilities of social media platforms and the motivations of digital audiences. Jenkins et al. (2013, p. 167) argue that mastering content creation's strategic and technical aspects is essential for maximizing its shareability and impact. This reinforces the role of Vote Save America’s highly curated Instagram presence, where bold colors, engaging typography, and emotionally resonant messaging create a seamless intersection between political advocacy and digital aesthetics. Political organizations like Vote Save America capitalize on this dynamic by creating

visually compelling, shareable content that resonates with their audience's aesthetic preferences and ideological beliefs. This increases the likelihood of engagement because these posts won't clash with the identity the audience has crafted online. They allow people to project their political opinions in a way that feels authentic.

The Vote Save America Instagram page features diverse content, including infographics explaining complex policy issues, man-on-the-street interviews capturing public opinion, and clips from *Pod Save America* and other Crooked Media podcasts. Additionally, the page shares breaking news updates and, at times, utilizes memes to engage followers in a more informal and relatable way. This mix of content reflects a strategic approach to digital political engagement: balancing education, entertainment, and action-driven messaging to mobilize followers. However, all of these posts have a uniquely identifiable aesthetic. There is a semi-retro, millennial chic aesthetic, characterized by primary colors such as red, yellow, and blue, along with a bold, trendy typeface. Aesthetics and branding are crucial in how political content is received and engaged with on Instagram. Using color, for example, can evoke emotions and help guide the viewer's attention to key messages, making political content more impactful and memorable. As Cohn (2020) notes, "Color can help evoke emotions in the viewer while also helping the viewer distinguish what's important or what should be emphasized" (p. 34). Beyond color, the overall design and visual appeal of political messaging influence engagement rates, as Hellberg (2015) explains, "to gain engagement, brands must understand what kind of content drives user engagement of the intended user audience" (p. 60). Instagram's unique affordances allow for a highly curated and intentional approach to visual branding, defined as "consisting of all the visual elements used to represent your business," enabling political organizations to craft messages that resonate on a personal and emotional level (Barker, 2022, p. 1).

Vote Save America effectively integrates these strategies by creating aesthetically compelling infographics and using straightforward, bold typography to enhance shareability. Additionally, the organization leverages behind-the-scenes content and personal narratives to humanize its messaging. As Hellberg (2015) points out, “This perceived transparency and openness from the brands was found to be important to the respondents, as it gave them a sense of knowing the brands on a personal level” (p. 64). By combining visual branding with authenticity, Vote Save America strengthens its ability to mobilize audiences and encourage political participation. The curated aesthetic of the page allows individuals to share infographics, interviews, and memes on their pages that align with the identity they have already crafted for themselves. This growing obligation to engage with political content on Instagram creates demand for informative and visually appealing posts, striking a balance between substance and shareability. Failing to post about major political issues may result in being perceived as complicit or uninformed. Vote Save America fills the psychological need to post about political issues while aligning with the visual brand identity that users have curated, making it easier to share without feeling out of place.

The central goal of Vote Save America is voter mobilization. Since its launch in 2018, Vote Save America has raised \$63.9 million for progressive causes and candidates, facilitated 278,700 volunteer shift sign-ups, helped over 940,000 people research their ballots, assisted more than 950,000 people in registering to vote or checking their registration, and recruited 30,000 poll workers (VoteSaveAmerica, 2025). Their Instagram content, which includes rapid-response updates on breaking political news, detailed issue-based posts, political memes, interviews, and engaging podcast clips, is crafted explicitly for shareability. This design ensures followers disseminate content widely across personal networks, significantly enhancing reach

and mobilization potential. Shaik et al. (2023) emphasize that infographics and multimedia content substantially contribute to mobilizing social movements by simplifying complex information and increasing accessibility (p. 12).

Furthermore, Instagram's multimedia capabilities encourage "connective action" (p. 18), defined by Bennett and Segerberg (2012) as a model where traditional organizational structures yield to flexible, expansive social networks driven by individual participation and digital connectivity (p. 9). Vote Save America's use of Instagram exemplifies connective action through its strategy of creating content specifically designed for viral spreadability. Followers become pivotal nodes within an expansive, fluid network, actively sharing multimedia posts within their circles, thus organically amplifying voter engagement and mobilization. This phenomenon leverages the decentralized nature of connective action, where influence does not solely depend on traditional organizational hierarchy but on individuals' connectivity and engagement level.

In this digital landscape, shareable multimedia content acts as a catalyst, fueling collective engagement while preserving individual autonomy within social movements. Thus, Vote Save America's digital strategy illustrates how effectively harnessing Instagram's multimedia affordances and the logic of connective action can substantially amplify political mobilization and collective participation. Vote Save America has been successful in its voter registration and donation campaigns because it understands the elements that make spreadability natural and organic. Incorporating memes, infographics, and short-form videos increases the likelihood of digital participation (Kaufman-Reeves, 2022, p. 7). By providing various types of informative content, there's an option for everyone to choose the type of media they feel most comfortable sharing, whether that's an infographic or a humorous political meme.

To analyze Vote Save America's Instagram presence, the organization's account was manually reviewed and logged over a two-month period. This study focused on the grid posts and reels available between February 1 and April 1, 2025. Each post was recorded and categorized in an Excel spreadsheet by type—infographics, memes, interviews, rapid-response updates, and podcast clips—and categorized by topic covered. Vote Save America's Instagram analytics were never publicly available, so engagement metrics, such as likes, comments, and views, could not be accurately recorded. Among the 189 posts, the most frequent formats were infographics (27) and podcast clip reels (27), reels explaining issues (20), podcast clip reels (19), and quote posts combined with video (15). Top topics included the Wisconsin Supreme Court Election (24 posts), Medicaid Cuts (20), DOGE (16), Elon Musk (11), and Trump's address to Congress (10). Follower growth was also tracked during the same period. On February 1, 2025, the @VoteSaveAmerica account had 291,000 followers, and by April 1, 2025, it had grown to 324,000 followers—an increase of approximately 33,000. This rapid surge in growth is notable when compared to the preceding six months (July 2024 to January 2025), during which the account gained a total of 32,000 followers.

The Democratic Party is in the midst of a favorability crisis. Only thirty-seven percent of voters approved of the party in March, a slight increase from 36 percent in February. The latest approval ratings for the party are the lowest since March of 2018, according to an NBC national poll. That same poll found that “A majority of voters (55%) say they have negative views of the party, including 38% who say those views are ‘very negative’ (NBC, 2025). There is a crucial need to make the Democratic Party cool again. In this context, there is a crucial need not just for better messaging but for a rebrand that makes the Democratic Party culturally relevant and accessible. This is where Vote Save America excels. Their strength lies in combining accessible

political information with sleek, visually curated content. Rather than relying on garish colors or overly complex graphics, they use a consistent visual identity that is both digestible and shareable. Their content isn't purely drab or exclusively educational. It's aesthetic. This blend of clarity and style invites users to share political information as part of their own digital identities, subtly embedding civic participation into everyday social behavior. In doing so, Vote Save America helps rehabilitate the image of political engagement itself. Their approach counters apathy and cynicism by reframing activism as current, meaningful, and community-driven. On a platform like Instagram, where users often seek connection and visual appeal, this strategy positions progressive politics as essential and socially attractive. They avoid bold or neon colors, opting for a trendy typeface that's easy to read. They've created something visually appealing and politically actionable, which has helped the organization succeed in its mission of tangible political mobilization. Their straightforward, engaging, and aesthetically pleasing infographics make them more likely to be shared. Instagram, as their platform, has the advantage of fostering an environment where users feel more personally connected to causes (Hellberg, 2015, p. 58).

Additionally, there is a distinct uniformity to the posts on the Vote Save America grid. All of their posts that are not reels feature the Vote Save America logo in the corner, making it easy to identify these posts as part of their network. The shades of yellow, blue, and red are consistently used throughout the entire feed, and they do not deviate from the handful of different typefaces that align with the brand's presentation. Weekly, they post a series of "good news" headlines highlighting progressive victories at the state and local levels, all of which are marked by their "good news" logo and a smiley face. A post from Vote Save America is instantly identifiable. According to Forbes, "Repeated and consistent exposure to these branding elements builds the brand's values and reinforces its identity in consumers' minds" as well as "consistent

use of your color palette and typography reinforces brand recognition”(Wong, 2024, p. 1). This is especially beneficial when considering that the content on the Vote Save America page is designed for viewers to share with their personal social networks. This consistency enables viewers outside of the initial Vote Save America following to easily identify the source of this post, especially with the inclusion of the corner logo, which invites new audiences to engage further by visiting the page and exploring additional resources. In a crowded digital landscape where countless political accounts compete for attention, this type of visual continuity doesn't build brand awareness.

While Vote Save America's Instagram page primarily targets a national audience, it also makes a concerted effort to spotlight hyper-local and state-level issues, especially those with broader democratic implications. The most frequently covered topic on their page during the past two months was the Wisconsin Supreme Court election held on April 1, 2025. A total of 24 posts were dedicated to this race, including short-form reels, interviews with organizers and surrogates, and infographics breaking down the stakes of the election. These posts focused on Democrat-backed candidate Susan Crawford’s successful campaign to defeat conservative challenger Brad Schimel. Her victory preserved the court’s 4–3 liberal majority, a balance that holds major influence over rulings related to reproductive rights, gerrymandering, and voting access. Vote Save America utilized this race to underscore the significance of state-level elections, which often receive little national attention despite their high stakes. The content also drew attention to Elon Musk’s massive financial involvement in the race. He contributed over 20 million dollars to Schimel’s campaign, prompting Vote Save America to circulate posts featuring the tagline “Brad is bad.” This phrase simplified a complex electoral concern into a catchy, easily shareable message designed to resonate with younger, politically engaged users. Just as

important as the messaging was the amplification itself. The official @CrawfordforWI account has a modest following of 16,500. By sharing content with its own audience of over 300,000 followers, Vote Save America helped elevate a local campaign that might not have otherwise gained national attention. In doing so, they demonstrated the power of digital organizing to connect national movements with down-ballot candidates whose victories can shape the future of policy and justice in their states.

Medicaid and other Welfare cuts made up a combined 26 posts during the two-month period of data collection, including a series of posts calling for viewers to “Fire them in 2026,” referring to their republican members of Congress who had voted in favor of Medicaid Cuts. Many of these posts included chart-style infographics that listed the names of Republican members of Congress, their districts, the number of constituents in each district on Medicaid, and their most recent margin of victory. Others used superimposed statistics over video screenshots of these lawmakers discussing budget cuts, drawing a stark contrast between political rhetoric and its actual impact on people. The use of “Fire them in 2026,” a bold, declarative language, emphasizes the individual's capability in political action and acts as a simple call to action. These posts share a common purpose of making localized policy decisions feel immediate and personal to followers, and using the national audience of Vote Save America to amplify them. While major news outlets may report on final vote counts or policy decisions, the actual vote breakdowns are usually not covered. The individual would have to search for that information on their own, and making it readily available on Instagram, in a simple infographic, increases awareness. Drawing attention to this kind of information is especially relevant, given the rise of Instagram as a source of political news. According to NBC News, 1 in 5 U.S. adults gets their news from social media(NBC News, 2024). By integrating hyper-local political data into visually

compelling content that aligns with their brand identity, Vote Save America empowers users to stay informed about what is happening with their specific state representation, a gap often overlooked in traditional media. It also brings attention to local issues for people who may not necessarily live in that state or district, but potentially know someone who does. Someone in Massachusetts, for instance, may not be directly affected by Medicaid cuts in Texas or a Supreme Court election in Wisconsin, but they might know a friend, sibling, or former classmate who is. The user can share this with friends and family, exposing them to the entire Vote Save America network. In this way, localized content is transformed into a national tool, drawing on the earlier discussed concept of connective action. This enables solidarity to be built across geographical boundaries through the dissemination of content across individual social networks. It cultivates a digital culture of mutual investment, where users are not only educated about their civic landscape but also invited to engage with what is happening elsewhere. This reinforces the idea that threats to democracy or social safety nets in one place can serve as bellwethers for others. Through this approach, Vote Save America transforms state-specific political developments into nationally relevant stories, building a networked community of informed and activated users who are encouraged to both vote and mobilize others to do the same.

However, there is room for criticism when considering the gap between digital political engagement and actual political engagement. These aesthetically pleasing infographics risk being perceived as shallow, and those who share them may align with that perception. “The United Nations defines slacktivism as when people ‘support a cause by performing simple measures’ but are not necessarily ‘engaged or devoted to making a change.’” (Fillet, 2023, p. 1). It highlights the shallowness of how important self-curation has become on Instagram, where even political opinions are often shared only when they fit the user’s personal aesthetic and are performed out

of a sense of social obligation. Social media-based political communication often prioritizes shareability over depth, leading to the oversimplification of complex issues. When political identity becomes part of the performance of self online, the priority shifts from distributing accurate, educational information to the expression of self. While Vote Save America effectively merges aesthetics with mobilization, it remains essential to critically assess whether visually driven activism translates into substantive political action or merely reinforces an individual's digital self-presentation.

Since the Vote Save America Instagram page kept its analytics private, no specific recommendations can be made based on content engagement alone. Without access to metrics such as reach, impressions, shares, saves, and engagement rate (including likes, comments, and clicks), it's impossible to determine which content formats or topics most effectively drive user interaction. This lack of transparency means that any evaluation of content strategy must rely on qualitative observation rather than quantitative performance. While patterns such as frequent post types (e.g., reels, infographics, interviews) and recurring themes (e.g., voting access, threats to democracy, state-level races) can suggest strategic priorities, it is challenging to assess whether these approaches are successful in increasing visibility, engagement, or follower growth.

Vote Save America's strength lies in its ability to create a unified and aesthetically pleasing brand image. Their use of colors, font, catchy slogans, and informal language makes political information easily digestible and, in turn, spreadable. Users are more likely to share posts that align with their personal aesthetic and political values, turning Vote Save America's content into a form of digital word-of-mouth. In doing so, the organization leverages visual identity as a mobilization tool and produces content that ties into the philosophy of connective action. However, that same philosophy of consistency is not reflected in their topic or the types

of content they produce. Save for the “Good News” weekly headlines, they do not have any other regular series that follow that formula. During the two-month period of data collection, an Instagram reel was posted entitled “Congress’s Coward of the Week,” but that series never reappeared. Vote Save America can continue to build on the consistency it has established through its visual branding aspects, particularly in content strategy, by continuing to post series like this one. It would also build on the strengths they have established in bringing local issues to the national stage. If a user saw their legislator featured as “Coward of the Week,” it would likely encourage them to share it with their own network, disseminating that information among people who are also likely constituents of that state or district. In this way, series-based content not only increases brand cohesion but also enhances the grassroots spreadability and accountability function central to Vote Save America’s mission.

Additionally, the primary voices on the Vote Save America Instagram page are either individuals from their network, primarily former Obama staffers, or politicians themselves. Podcast Clips tied for first place with 27 different reels dedicated to them alone. This insider perspective reinforces the brand’s credibility within progressive circles and aligns with its founding identity as an offshoot of Crooked Media. However, it has the ability to create an echo chamber effect, where information is filtered through the lens of political operatives rather than the people most directly affected by the issues being discussed. A study from Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) demonstrated that “personal experiences bridge moral and political divides better than facts (Kubin et al, 2020, p. 7). Vote Save America should leverage this by including more voices from average constituents and voters, combined with information from experts. Northwestern University researchers found that “persuaders emphasized their political knowledge and engagement, traits that can be seen as

off-putting and lead to negative results” and that “we tend to feel less hostility toward out-party citizens than out-party elites” (Kulke, 2025, p. 1). These findings can be leveraged to increase credibility and mobilization power. This concept was best illustrated in a specific post, where interview screenshots of Republican legislators expressing their support for tariffs were combined with interview screenshots of actual farmers discussing how much it would harm their livelihood. By pairing political rhetoric with firsthand accounts, the post delivered a nuanced, emotionally resonant critique that likely held more persuasive power than abstract data or partisan talking points alone. This strategy of combining lived experience with policy analysis has the potential to foster empathy, broaden appeal beyond politically engaged audiences, and drive higher levels of content sharing across diverse networks. Moving forward, Vote Save America could expand on this successful formula by regularly incorporating testimonials from constituents and frontline communities directly impacted by the policies they spotlight. Introducing more non-institutional voices would diversify their messaging, strengthen authenticity, and position the account as a platform for civic storytelling.

In conclusion, the convergence of identity marketing, visual branding, and spreadability on Instagram has transformed the way individuals engage with political content. As traditional activism shifts toward digital expression, platforms like Instagram offer new opportunities to merge civic engagement with personal identity. Vote Save America demonstrates how this can be done effectively by combining curated visuals with strategic political messaging, making participation feel both accessible and socially relevant. This paper’s case study of Vote Save America’s Instagram presence between February and April 2025 highlights how visual cohesion, content diversity, and emotional messaging contribute to the platform’s effectiveness in mobilizing users. By manually logging and categorizing posts for two months by format and

topic, the analysis provided qualitative insight into the brand's digital strategy, rather than relying on engagement data due to privacy settings. This method revealed clear trends in branding consistency, thematic focus, and platform growth, reinforcing the organization's role in shaping the visual culture of political participation. However, a gap remains between digital political engagement and tangible political action. While Vote Save America effectively merges aesthetics with mobilization, it is essential to consider whether visually driven activism leads to deeper civic participation or primarily serves as a form of digital self-presentation. Further research should investigate how different audiences interact with this type of content and how platform algorithms affect exposure to diverse perspectives. As digital political communication continues to evolve, assessing the long-term impact of accounts like Vote Save America on civic behavior, voter turnout, and democratic trust will be essential.

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