

Television has transformed politics in the United States by changing the way in which information is disseminated, by altering political campaigns, and by changing citizen's patterns of response to politics

By giving citizens independent access to the candidates, television diminished the role of the political party in the selection of the major party candidates

By centering politics on the person of the candidate, television accelerated the citizen's focus on character rather than issues

Television has altered the forms of political communication as well

The messages on which most of us rely are briefer than they once were

The stump speech, a political speech given by traveling politicians and lasting 3/2 to 2 hours, which characterized nineteenth-century political discourse, has given way to the 30-second advertisement and the 10 second "sound bite" in broadcast news

Increasingly the audience for speeches is not that standing in front of the politician but rather the viewing audience who will hear and see a snippet of the speech on the news

In these abbreviated forms, much of what constituted the traditional political discourse of earlier ages has been lost

In 15 or 30 seconds, a speaker cannot establish the historical context that shaped the issue in question, cannot detail the probable causes of the problem, and cannot examine alternative proposals to argue that one is preferable to others



In snippets, politicians assert but do not argue

Because television is an intimate medium, speaking through it require a changed political style that was more conversational, personal, and visual than that of the oldstyle stump speech

Reliance on television means that increasingly our political world contains memorable pictures rather than memorable words

Schools teach us to analyze words and print

However, in a word in which politics is increasingly visual, informed citizenship requires a new set of skills

Recognizing the power of television's pictures, politicians craft televisual, staged events, called pseudo-event, designed to attract media coverage

Much of the political activity we see on television news has been crafted by politicians, their speechwriters, and their public relations advisers for televised consumption

Sound bites in news and answers to questions in debates increasingly sound like advertisements