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Review of *Videostyle in Presidential Campaigns: Style and Content of Televised Political Advertising* By Lynda Lee Kaid and Anne Johnston

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Videostyle in Presidential Campaigns: Style and Content of Televised Political Advertising. By Lynda Lee Kaid and Anne Johnston. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group Inc., 2000. xii + 226 pp. \$65.00.

American elections have increasingly become candidate-centered campaigns in which solitary aspirants for office bear the primary responsibility for generating their own money, issues, imagery, and support. Candidates present themselves through televised advertising appearing as social tribunes instead of representatives for political and governmental institutions. News media respond by depicting campaigns as ongoing battles among individual combatants and direct much of their

attention to the question of who is winning and who is not.

In an important book addressing these electoral features, Kaid and Johnston focus on the personal style candidates develop through television advertising. They claim a candidate's style is revealed initially through a general communication style, a pattern of behavior that is apparent, consistent, and recurring. Videostyle, composed of verbal, nonverbal, and film/video production techniques, is their term for this pattern.

The writers draw their conclusions from 1,204 televised ads, obtained from the Political Commercial Archive in the University of Oklahoma's Political Communication Center, employed by the nominees of the two major parties in the presidential elections of 1952 through 1996. They do not review the ads of unsuccessful candidates for nominations or standard-bearers of minor parties. The exhaustive nature of their work, however, suggests these additional ads would provide few, if any, new insights.

Kaid and Johnston offer results that frequently challenge conventional wisdom. They find, for example, that ads focus more on issues than images and tend to be positive toward candidates. The conventional opposite notion, they believe, derives from news media interest in images and negative messages. Their work supports conventional wisdom in other instances, showing, for example, that most ads last for less than one minute. In addition, they contrast videostyle components and methods of proof (logical, ethical, emotional) between incumbents and non-incumbents, Democrats and Republicans, winners and losers, as well as the unique styles of individual candidates. Other chapters look at negative advertising, communication ethics, and videostyles in other nations.

The writers of this well-researched, easy to read book present extensive data to support their conclusions about one of the more significant aspects of contemporary American political life. Scholars and practitioners of political communication can gain valuable

insights into the workings of mediated information, particularly when generated by the candidates themselves, in a time when most voters have few other sources of information upon which to base their choices.

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