TV and Politics
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Note to politicians: If you want to reach many Millennial generation voters, television is the best way to get their money, but don’t expect it to get them to volunteer.

A new national study of 15-to 25-year-olds by a University of Dayton student found that the 37 percent who are heavy TV watchers — those who watch more than four hours a day — are more likely than light viewers to contribute to political campaigns but less likely to become actively involved in them.

"This is noteworthy because television is a major setting of modern political campaigns," said the report's author, Alex Orlowski, a junior sociology/political science major.

Orlowski investigated the relationship between television consumption and political engagement in the report published Dec. 11 by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.

"I was interested in this study because you always hear, 'TV is going to rot your mind.' You hear that from your parents. But I had never seen any hard numbers looking into that," Orlowski said.

He said his research revealed that high TV consumption has a negative impact on civic participation.

The report gauged participation in 19 different civic activities such as volunteering, raising money for charity, signing a petition, contacting public officials and boycotting.

Millenials who watched less than two hours of TV a day were involved in 27 percent more of these activities than those who watched four or more hours, according to the report. It did show exceptions, however, with heavy watchers more involved in contacting the media, voting and donating to political campaigns.

"I'd be interested in another study on why these exceptions are there," Orlowski said. "We need to ask, 'How can we engage people on all ends of the spectrum of television consumption?' "

The report analyzes data collected in the 2006 National Civic and Political Health Survey that sampled 1,700 15- to 25-year-olds and 550 adults 26 and older. Orlowski conducted the research for "Television Consumption and Civic Engagement" during a summer internship at CIRCLE.

He is co-author of another recent CIRCLE report, "Millenials Talk Politics: A Study of College Student Political Engagement."

"That report is one of our single-most downloaded documents," said CIRCLE Research Director Mark Lopez. "We've had questions from political campaigns about the study. Alex played a major role in writing that report and managing the focus group data."

Full copies of both reports can be viewed at www.civicyouth.org.

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