

News consumption of political stories not enough to retain political knowledge

September 25 2012

A strong democracy depends on smart voters who choose their leaders based on their knowledge of important political issues. One of the ways that Americans learn about politics is by following the news. Now, researchers from the University of Missouri School of Journalism have found that simply following the news is not enough.

A panel survey involving more than 1,200 teenagers from 12 to 17 years of age found that adolescents learn more about politics when they think and talk about what they read or watch on the news. Edson Tandoc, a [doctoral student](#) at MU, found that [adolescents](#) who spend more time thinking and talking about the news with their peers and relatives tend to know more about political developments in the country.

"This is important because an individual's political identity begins long before one is eligible to vote," Tandoc said. "Our [political identity](#) is not shaped overnight and so it is important to start molding our future voters while they are still young."

Tandoc and his [adviser](#), Esther Thorson, a professor and associate dean for graduate studies and research in the MU School of Journalism, analyzed two surveys conducted six months apart. The first survey, conducted six months before the 2008 presidential elections, asked teenagers how frequently they followed the news, how much they thought about the news, and how often they discussed [political news](#) with their peers and relatives. The second survey conducted right after the elections asked the same teenagers several questions about politics to

measure their levels of [political knowledge](#).

What Tandoc found is that news consumption does not directly lead to political knowledge. Instead, news consumption leads to thinking about the news which then leads to engagement in discussions about the news, which finally ends with political learning.

"Engaging teenagers in the political process is vital for the future of democracy," Tandoc said. "Our study shows that if parents and educators want to increase political knowledge and action among younger generations, it is important to involve them in discussions about what they are reading in the news. Just giving them a story to read is not enough. Teenagers need to be able to think through and talk about political issues in order to retain knowledge about them."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: News consumption of political stories not enough to retain political knowledge (2012, September 25) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-news-consumption-political-stories-retain.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.