TREND INSIGHTS

FIRST QUARTER 2017: CABLE NEWS NETWORKS HAVE THEIR BEST QUARTER EVER
Presidential campaigns and elections are topics cable news networks can typically rely on for strong ratings. The 2016 election was no exception; it was arguably the longest and most contentious in recent memory. Cable news became an important source to millions of viewers throughout the year, providing wall-to-wall coverage from caucuses and primaries to town halls, debates and conventions—and, of course, election day.¹

Typically, ratings of cable news networks return to normal post-election and after the Presidential inauguration on January 20. This year, however, has been different. In the first three months of 2017, the audience delivery of Fox News, CNN and MSNBC have actually grown to record levels, even when compared to the already strong ratings of first quarter 2016. All three cable news networks averaged over one million viewers in prime time (Monday-Sunday 8-11 p.m.) in first quarter 2017, ranking in the top 10 in audience among all cable networks, in both prime time and total day (Monday-Sunday 6 a.m.-6 a.m.).²

Source:
¹http://www.salon.com/2016/10/26/after-the-trump-bump-cable-news-has-been-the-big-winner-this-election-season-but-thats-about-to-end/
²http://www.adweek.com/tvnewser/q1-cable-ranker-fox-news-is-no-1-in-total-viewers/325049
FOX News Channel (FNC): During first quarter 2017, FNC was the top rated cable network for both broadcast day and prime time. The network averaged 1.71 million viewers throughout the quarter, an increase of 27% from one year ago. Among adults 25-54 FNC averaged 359,000 viewers, an increase of 32% from first quarter 2016. In prime time, FNC averaged 2.84 million total viewers, up 20% from last year’s already strong first quarter. This was the second most watched quarter in prime time for the news network. In prime time, FNC averaged 576,000 viewers aged 25-54, 19% above the previous year.3

According to Fortune, in the first three months of 2017, FNC set a network audience record in every hour between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. Business Insider reports The O’Reilly Factor on FNC averaged nearly four million viewers, making it the highest quarterly audience ever for a regularly scheduled cable news program. Fox and Friends and Hannity also reported record high ratings in their time periods for the quarter.4 5

CNN: Cable ratings success was not limited to Fox News. According to a press release, CNN just posted its most watched quarter in 14 years. In prime time, CNN averaged 1.18 million viewers and 405,000 adults 25-54. This was an increase of 12% in total viewers and 22% for the demographic, compared to first quarter 2016. Looking at total day viewing, CNN delivered 823,000 total viewers and 265,000 adults 25-54.6

CNN further reported several weekday news programs had record high viewing among both adults 25-54 and total viewers. The Lead with Jake Tapper (4-5 p.m., Eastern) increased total viewers by 39% and adults 25-54 by 56% from 1Q 2016. Erin Burnett Outfront (7- 8 p.m. Eastern), increased total viewers by 30% and adults 25-54 by 45% when compared to the previous year. CNN’s top rated show for the quarter was Anderson Cooper 360 (8-10 p.m. Eastern). The first hour of “AC 360” had its most-watched quarter since it was launched, among both total viewers and adults 25-54. CNN Tonight with Don Lemon (10-11 p.m. Eastern), had its best quarter ever with total viewers up 52% and adults 25-54 up 62% from one year ago.7

Source:
3http://www.adweek.com/tvnewser/q1-2017-ratings-fox-news-is-cables-most-watched-network/324673
4http://fortune.com/2017/03/28/fox-news-cable-history/
6http://www.adweek.com/tvnewser/q1-2017-ratings-cnn-has-most-watched-q1-since-the-iraq-war/324675
Of note, The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer (5-7 p.m. Eastern) increased its total audience by 33% from last year to nearly 1.1 million viewers. Additionally, viewing among adults 25-54 grew by 43% from the prior year. It was the second best quarter for the program since it was launched in 2005. Furthermore, CNN’s daytime program block from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern had its best quarter with total viewers since first quarter 2003 and with adults 25-54 since fourth quarter 2008. New Day with Chris Cuomo and Alisyn Camerota recorded its most watched quarter among adults 25-54 and second highest with total viewers.

**MSNBC:** According to an MSNBC press release, the network had its most watched quarter in its 21-year history. For first quarter 2017, MSNBC’s prime time total audience grew by 61% from one year ago, reaching 1.43 million viewers. Meanwhile, the cable news network’s 25-54 audience in prime time increased by 49%. For the broadcast day, MSNBC’s total viewing increased by 55%, with adults 25-54 growing by 40% compared to first quarter 2016.8

In the first three months of 2017, the total audience of The Rachel Maddow Show (9-10 p.m. Eastern), grew by 91% in total viewers and increased its adults 25-54 audience by 87% from first quarter 2016. Ratings for The Rachel Maddow Show peaked on March 14 when a record high 4.13 million viewers tuned in. For the quarter, The Rachel Maddow Show averaged a record 2.23 million viewers.9 10

MSNBC’s other prime time shows also recorded strong gains in audience when first quarter 2017 is compared to the prior year. All In with Chris Hayes (8-9 p.m. Eastern) reported an increase in total viewers of 71% and adults 25-54 of 69%. The newscast delivered MSNBC’s best overall viewership in the time period in nine years and the highest adults 25-54 audience since fourth quarter 2012. The Last Word with Lawrence O’Donnell (10-11 p.m. Eastern), nearly doubled its average audience (+92%) and increased adults 25-54 viewing by 78%. The newscast also delivered MSNBC’s highest total audience in the time period ever and the largest adult 25-54 audience since fourth quarter 2008.

Source:

9 [http://www.adweek.com/tvnewser/with-more-than-4-million-viewers-rachel-maddow-had-the-no-3-show-on-tv-at-9pm-tuesday/323969](http://www.adweek.com/tvnewser/with-more-than-4-million-viewers-rachel-maddow-had-the-no-3-show-on-tv-at-9pm-tuesday/323969)
MSNBC also had strong gains in other dayparts for the quarter. For example, Morning Joe (6-9 a.m. Eastern), reported a 35% increase in total viewers while the adults 25-54 audience rose by 20%. For the 9 a.m.-5 p.m. (eastern) programming block, the total audience grew 59% year to year. It marked the seventh straight quarter of audience growth in the daypart. Among all cable networks in the time period, MSNBC ranked #5, up from #10 one year ago. FNC, CNN and MSNBC—with their 24-hour coverage—grew by 46% in 2016. Those three networks accounted for 55% of all national news consumption in 2016, up from 45% the previous year. All other national TV rated person-viewing hours fell in by 1% in 2016.11

So far in 2017 it is clear that these viewing trends are not slowing down but are even growing, as the news cycle has not slowed down post-inauguration. Cable news, despite all the news sources available, continues to be the primary destination for millions of viewers. That trend should continue in the months ahead.
