



Can Advertisers Live With The Aging Of Major TV Network Audiences?

Media Dynamics Inc.'s analysis, featuring data from *TV Dimensions 2015*, pinpoints key shifts in TV viewer demographics.

Nutley, NJ, April 7, 2015 - When it comes to primetime TV and the performance of the major networks—ABC, CBS and NBC—there is little doubt that share of audience is directly correlated with demographics, notably the age of the audience. In its recently-published research annual, **TV Dimensions 2015**, Media Dynamics, Inc. took a look back over decades of audience surveys, and found some key stats worth pondering:

- In 1960, the three broadcast networks dominated primetime, attracting about 92% of the average primetime audience. The median age of their viewers was 34 years, only four more than that of the total population.
- In 1990, the three networks' combined share of primetime viewing had declined to 63%, due to the impact of cable, the Fox network and independent channels. The median age of ABC/CBS/NBC viewers was up to 41 years.
- In 2014, the three major broadcast networks drew only 25% of the average primetime audience, and the median age of their viewers had risen to 57 years, 19 years higher than the median age of the total population (see accompanying table).

Obviously the aging of ABC/CBS/NBC audiences is of concern to advertisers, who once looked to these networks to provide a mass reach umbrella—covering all sectors of the population—for their campaigns. “The networks might try to turn things around by emulating cable’s much edgier approach to dramas and sitcoms,” observes Ed Papazian, President of Media Dynamics, Inc. and editor of **TV Dimensions 2015**, “but it won’t be easy.”

While some are seizing on the aging of the major networks' primetime audience to argue that advertisers should desert TV and look elsewhere—especially to digital venues—this “sky is falling” scenario is wildly exaggerated. In reality, very few advertisers are focused exclusively on the 18-34 age group. Indeed, most brands garner the majority of their sales—up to 75%—from adults aged 35+, who remain fans of many ABC/CBS/NBC primetime shows. And even the younger set, while watching less frequently, can be reached with a balanced schedule of major network fare and Fox, CW and cable shows.

So, to return to the question posed in the headline, can advertisers live with the aging of major TV network audiences? “Yes,” says Papazian, “providing that advertisers adjust their thinking and pay attention to all of

the important segments, not just Millennials.” He adds, “You may not be able to rely completely on ABC/CBS/NBC primetime shows any more, but it doesn’t mean that they’ve lost their value either.”

THE AGING OF ABC/CBS/NBC PRIMETIME VIEWERSHIP 1960-2014

	ABC/CBS/NBC PRIMETIME		
	AVG. SHARE OF AUDIENCE	MEDIAN AGE OF VIEWERS	MEDIAN AGE OF TOTAL POPULATION
1960	92%	34	30
1990	63	41	33
2014	25	57	38
% Change:			
1960-1990	-31	+21	+10
1990-2014	-60	+39	+15
1960-2014	-78	+68	+27

Source: Media Dynamics, Inc., **TV Dimensions 2015** (www.MediaDynamicsInc.com/tvdimensions).

About TV Dimensions 2015

[TV Dimensions](#), the centerpiece of Media Dynamics, Inc.’s series of media research annuals, was launched in 1982 as a premier reference source for advertisers, agencies and the media. Focusing on the medium’s function as an advertising vehicle, it covers all the key aspects, including audience demographic and consumption patterns, ad impact and engagement, ROI, reach and frequency and CPMs.

About Media Dynamics, Inc.

[Media Dynamics Inc.](#) is a publishing & consulting company founded in 1982 by Ed Papazian, the former Media Research Director and Media Director of BBDO (1960-75) and co-creator/publisher of **Ad Forum** and **The Media Cost Guide**. MDI’s **Dimensions** series has served as [the](#) reference source for data trending and insights on radio, magazines, TV and intermedia. For 28 years, the newsletter, **Media Matters**, has delved into territory often slighted by other publications and presented a voice of reason to a frenetic and often overloaded media industry. Media Dynamics’ library includes several research annuals and numerous special reports and white papers that focus on targeted areas of the media, e.g. spot TV, cable, ad receptivity, CPMs and upfront cost estimates. Media Dynamics, Inc. has also spent more than 20 years consulting on various media issues, including agency/client interactions on the media function, the hiring of independent media buying services and the evaluation of agency/media buying performance. Past clients include a cross section of TV networks, cable services, magazines, TV & radio reps, advertisers, ad agencies, research companies and new media.



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