

Battleground marketing

Unlikely TV networks emerge as hot spots to reach partisan viewers

By Andrew Wallenstein and James Li

Barack Obama might be outpacing him on TV, but John McCain may have some effective, cheaper options for advertising in the crucial battleground states.

A new Nielsen PreView study scrutinizing the media consumption habits of U.S. voters in 13 of the most hotly contested states found that strategic media buying in cable could yield easy-to-overlook channels that offer high concentrations of viewers belonging to particular political parties.

For instance, the automotive-themed cable network Speed Channel managed to attract higher concentrations of both Republican and independent voters than any other channel — even more than the 24-hour news networks.

That could be good news for McCain as he seeks to appeal to Republicans and independents even as he trails Obama in media spending by a ratio of 3-to-1 in the battleground states, according to the Wisconsin Advertising Project. The study found that Obama and McCain together spent \$28 million from Sept. 28-Oct. 4 on TV ads.

The PreView study, based on an online survey conducted Sept. 30 of 40,000 registered voters, highlights the most efficient options for reaching viewers strictly by their political affiliation in the states where the bulk of marketing and campaigning will be targeted in the final weeks before the Nov. 4 election.

The findings also shed new light on long-held assumptions about the political composition of audiences for some prominent broadcast and cable channels. While CNN and MSNBC — often criticized as left-leaning networks — finished among the top 10 highest concentrations of Democrat-registered viewers in battleground states, both were topped by entertainment channels BET and VH1.

But even more surprising was the emergence of Speed as the leading source for Republican viewers, who were 52% likelier to watch the channel than the average U.S. household, beating out Fox News Channel — long considered a Republican favorite — which finished second with 48%.

However, when measured across all 50 states, Fox News topped Speed 48%-28%.

Other TV favorites for Republicans on the national level included Golf Channel, which finished second to Fox News at 32%, followed by Hallmark Channel at 29%.

Speed also had the highest concentration of independent voters in battleground states, with 72%. Other top finishers among independents included CNBC (48%), Travel Channel (44%) and CNN Headline News (33%).

As for Speed's surprising combination of Republican and independent voters, likely factors include the prominence of NASCAR among red states and a growing corps of younger viewers to explain the indie influx.

On the Democrat side, CNN was a solid third (39%) behind BET and VH1. VH1's schedule is filled with fizzy, celebrity-driven reality shows that probably don't play big with right wingers,

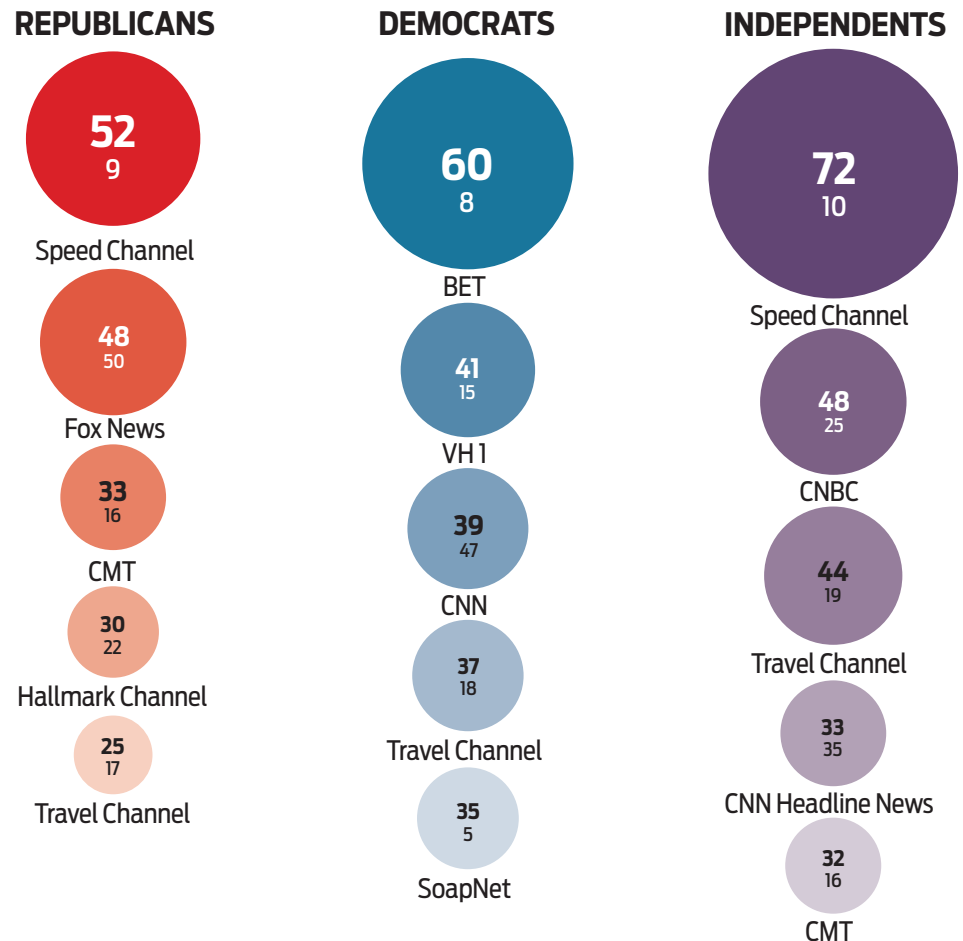
while BET's predominantly black audiences tend to be registered Democrats.

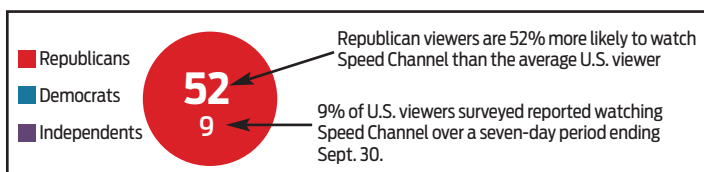
Although the broadcast networks boasted the highest totals of political parties because they have the biggest audiences, that makes them a less-targeted, more-expensive proposition. While a whopping 84% of Republicans in the battleground states that were surveyed reported watching Fox Broadcasting Co. in comparison with the 50% that did same for Fox News, Republican viewers were 48% more likely to watch than the average household — three times more than they did Fox Broadcasting.

Consequently, if McCain were to buy Fox Broadcasting airtime, he likely would be paying more to reach viewers he doesn't need to target. **THR**

TOP 5 NETWORKS

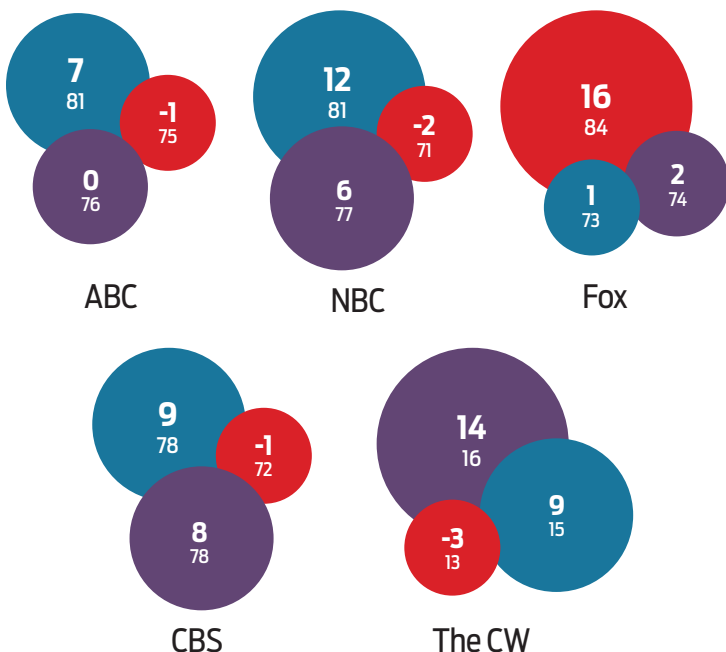
Channel favorites in battleground states





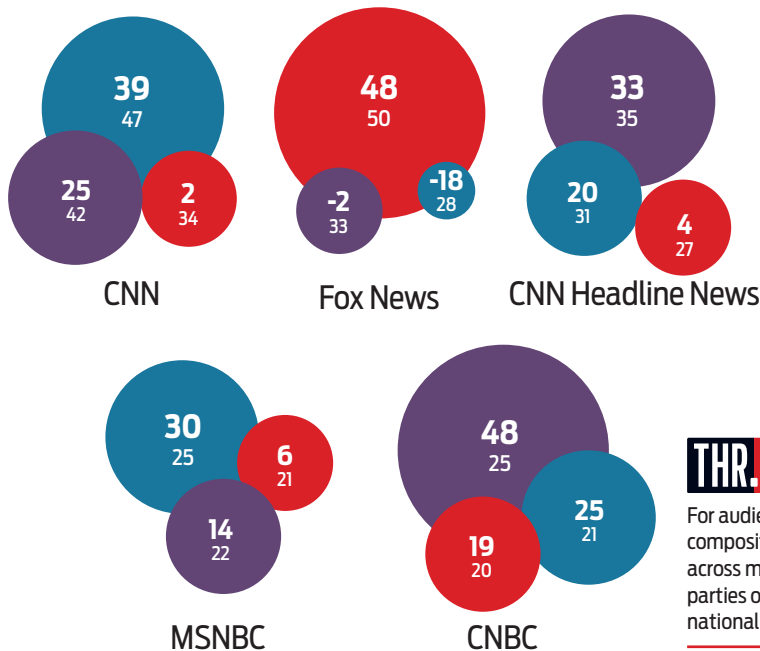
BATTLEGROUND: BROADCAST NETS

Audience composition across major parties



BATTLEGROUND: 24-HOUR NEWS

Audience composition across major parties



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For audience composition across major parties on a national level

Ads across America

Obama spreads the wealth of fundraising surplus countrywide

By Paul J. Gough

The presidential candidates' TV advertising strategies are departing from their traditional focus on the battleground states to a truly national approach.

Millions of dollars are still being spent to sway independent and undecided voters in such states as Florida, Ohio, Virginia and Pennsylvania that could go either way. But millions more are going to the broadcast networks despite the higher costs of national-reach blurbs.

The game-changer has been the decision by Barack Obama's campaign to opt out of public financing and the massive amounts it has raised — \$150 million in September alone.

Tobe Berkovitz, an associate dean and advertising professor at Boston University, doesn't see Obama having to make the customary budgetary choices among TV, radio or direct response.

"Usually, you've got all these options and a limited amount of the pie," Berkovitz said. "Obama has the entire pie factory. Strategically, Obama can do it all."

The Obama campaign raised the stakes during the summer, when it ponied up \$4 million for 30-second spots during NBC's Summer Olympics telecasts. It was the first time since 1996 that any presidential spots had run on broadcast TV. That was immediately answered by the McCain campaign, which spent \$5 million on its own ads.

Since then, Obama has outspent McCain not only in battleground states but also on the national airwaves. Obama, for example, was for a time all alone running campaign ads in the crucial state of Florida.

Spending further increased with a half-hour time buy Wednesday on CBS, NBC and Fox, where Obama will talk to the nation six days before Election Day. It's the first time buy since 1992, when Ross Perot purchased a series of 30-minute blocks.

Conventional wisdom would have it that Obama would want to address the uncommitted and independents in battleground states that could go blue Nov. 4. That's where the bulk of the money is spent, not only for Obama but also for McCain.

But Aaron Cohen, chief media negotiator at New York-based ad buyer Horizon Media, thinks the national buys make sense given the campaign being flush with cash.

"It would be hard to spend that kind of money on a purely local level," he said. "The national buy works to reinforce the blue states without having to spend local money."

Mark McKinnon, a former Bush and McCain campaign strategist who is vice chairman of Public Strategies, said the Bush campaign employed a national cable strategy.

"We found it to be very effective because even though it reached voters who weren't in target states, it energized supporters and enhanced our fundraising," he said. "It is clearly having the same effect for Obama with greater reach through a national broadcast campaign."

The McCain campaign has tried, even with limited funding, to go head-to-head with Obama. While it spent more on the Olympics than Obama, it hasn't yet jumped in with the \$3 million-\$4 million for a four-network time buy that it would need.

But McKinnon doesn't think that in presidential campaigns there's much ROI for TV ads.

"Ads contribute to the overall narrative of the campaign and can be used effectively as a tactical tool to shape press coverage," he said. "But overall, a lot of money is wasted."