

Coronavirus Impact on National TV Viewership: May 25-31



By [Kaitlin Sumner](#), Supervisor, Research and Business Development, [Lockard & Wechsler Direct](#)

While TVHH viewership seemed to be on the decline from April into May, the week of May 25 — and the emergence of a new national crisis — sparked an unexpected growth in ratings. As thousands participated in protests against police brutality, many tuned back into TV for updates on the latest news stories. As a result, households using TV (HUT) increased for the first time since the week of March 23, with new citywide curfews in many regions contributing to the stay-at-home status nationwide. That’s right: after three straight weeks of increases in March, total HUT levels had declined for eight consecutive weeks — including a 3.2-percent dip the week of May 18. However, HUT increased by 1 percent during the week measured here.

Looking more specifically at some of the networks that have been most impacted, among the top 50 Nielsen-rated cable networks, here are the stations that experienced the highest increases and decreases in week-over-week (WoW) TV household viewership:

Week of May 25, 2020	
TOP FIVE	
Network	% Change vs. previous week
CNN	55%
Fox Sports 1	49%
History	27%
Motor Trend	27%
Fox News Channel	17%

Source: The Nielsen Co.

Week of May 25, 2020	
BOTTOM FIVE	
Network	% Change vs. previous week
FX	-13%
ESPN	-12%
A+E	-11%
National Geographic	-11%
Paramount	-9%

CNN (up 55 percent) and Fox News Channel (up 17 percent) both made the top five this week, adding significant viewership on their coverage of the protests surrounding the death of George Floyd. Both networks saw the biggest WoW gains in viewership during the weekend. While nearly all news outlets saw an increase in impressions by covering the protests, CNN’s special *I Can’t Breathe: Black Men Living & Dying in America* aided in its weekly growth, with more than 2 million tuning in.

Fox Sports 1 saw nearly a 50-percent

lift in viewership, impacted greatly by the strong return of NASCAR. History also saw a significant increase, up 27 percent WoW. The network gained on the premiere of the miniseries *Grant*. In theme with increases to auto-focused programming, Motor Trend rose 27 percent this week. Additional weekly airings of programs like *Bitchin Rides*, *Iron Resurrection*, *Garage Squad*, and *FantomWorks* accelerated weekly growth on the network.

FX lost viewership due to shifts in weekly movies, while ESPN reported its

lowest average ratings since the onset of the pandemic. National Geographic lost 11 percent WoW, after experiencing highs last week on *Heroes of the Sky*, *Life Below Zero*, and *WWII in Europe*.

A+E and Paramount Network declined 11 percent and 9 percent respectively, with the greatest losses in viewership occurring Friday through Sunday. In the wake of protests against police violence, the networks made the decision to pull upcoming episodes of *Live PD* and *Cops*, influencing these declines.

Media Spend by Category on Top/Bottom 5 Nets: May 25-31



TOP FIVE	Short-Form Products			Lead-Generation			Long-Form			Brand/DR (with phone number)			Brand/DR (web, mobile, SMS)		
	Units	Spend	WoW % Change	Units	Spend	WOW % Change	Units	Spend	WOW % Change	Units	Spend	WOW % Change	Units	Spend	WOW % Change
1. CNN	100	\$367,437	30%	558	\$1,437,795	-9%				421	\$880,769	-34%	3,015	\$4,072,586	-13%
2. Fox Sports 1	38	\$39,901	-28%	206	\$68,198	-9%				156	\$114,370	-10%	1,217	\$464,472	-13%
3. History	41	\$98,889	22%	356	\$708,423	58%	39	\$42,871	-8%	439	\$833,627	-27%	2,604	\$4,326,875	0%
4. Motor Trend	99	\$126,147	280%	376	\$288,070	124%				299	\$193,817	-32%	2,219	\$992,580	4%
5. Fox News Channel	161	\$1,004,996	38%	884	\$3,857,012	-7%				441	\$1,287,662	-28%	1,900	\$4,219,090	-17%

BOTTOM FIVE	Short-Form Products			Lead-Generation			Long-Form			Brand/DR (with phone number)			Brand/DR (web, mobile, SMS)		
	Units	Spend	WoW % Change	Units	Spend	WOW % Change	Units	Spend	WOW % Change	Units	Spend	WOW % Change	Units	Spend	WOW % Change
1. FX	25	\$31,970	-65%	233	\$470,939	44%	43	\$23,804	-5%	231	\$384,619	14%	2,476	\$3,577,713	-6%
2. ESPN	81	\$633,415	-20%	160	\$837,570	1%				140	\$662,643	-21%	2,256	\$8,167,271	-14%
3. A+E	22	\$44,883	97%	196	\$288,108	31%	41	\$73,901	5%	434	\$996,206	-30%	2,375	\$3,451,282	-2%
4. National Geographic	39	\$89,447	305%	193	\$78,831	19%	41	\$72,580	-2%	274	\$189,062	-27%	1,961	\$945,165	-3%
5. Paramount	86	\$135,587	43%	266	\$147,642	13%	53	\$50,000	2%	476	\$703,605	-7%	2,242	\$2,160,326	-5%

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