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MSNBC and CNN See Trust Levels Rise
FOX News Sees Lowest Trust Levels Since 2018
Is Format The Secret of Trust and Ratings?

NEW YORK, NY (February 23, 2021) – Coverage of the Presidential election, drawn-out reporting of results, Trump's lawsuits, Trump's failed efforts to overturn the election, the Georgia Senate runoffs, the Capitol insurrection, the Inauguration at the Capitol, a second impeachment trial, and ongoing economic and coronavirus trials have amplified TV news viewership. It has also produced altered trust levels for regular viewers who watch the networks 3+ times a week, particularly for MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News.

MSNBC & CNN Up, FOX News Down
"MSNBC and CNN were the only news brands indicating higher viewer-trust levels this wave," said Robert Passikoff, founder and president of Brand Keys, (www.brandkeys.com) the New York-based brand and customer loyalty and engagement research consultancy that conducts the bi-annual survey. "FOX News has always ranked high on "trust" among their regular viewers, but this is the first time since 2018 their trust levels have fallen."

Via the *Brand Keys Emotional Engagement Brand Analysis*, 4,254 respondents (balanced for gender and political affiliation, from the 9 U.S. Census Regions) rated the TV news brands they watch 3+ times a week. The majority of TV news brands (78%) have stabilized to mid-2020 levels, with current ratings as follows:

	8/20	**2/21**
BBC	90%	90%
FOX News	90%	86%
PBS	87%	87%
Bloomberg	84%	82%
MSNBC	90%	93%
CBS	88%	84%
NBC	89%	85%
ABC	90%	88%
CNN	90%	92%

Format Drives Viewers: Destination Vs. Breaking News
"News is not always news," noted Passikoff. "By that we mean format creates it's own window for viewers. FOX News is essentially a destination channel with viewers knowing precisely what they're going to get; politically conservative opinion offered up by conservative personalities like Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity." That's a formula for appointment-driven viewing. Consumers know where and when they need to tune in.

MSNBC and CNN are the best examples of breaking news networks. Their hosts are prominent news hosts too, but not the primary reason viewers prefer a breaking news format. "Coverage of the election, the insurrection, the election certification, the inauguration are all events tailor made for those brands and ratings seem to confirm that," said Passikoff.

From election Day through Inauguration Day it has been reported CNN had 1.9 million viewers, MSNBC had 1.6 million viewers, and FOX only 1.5 million viewers. It couldn't have helped that throughout his Presidency Trump had supported Fox News on Twitter and after Election Day Trump urged his Twitter followers to their switch allegiance and watch conservative cable rivals Newsmax or OAN.

Or the fact that Systematic named three FOX anchors (Maria Bariromo, Jeanine Pirro, and Lou Dobbs, who has already been cancelled) in their $2.7 billion lawsuit for "conspiracy to defame and disparage Smartmatic and its election technology and software." "Enormous lawsuits have a habit of eroding trust in a news host," observed Passikoff

What Are Viewers Looking To Trust?
"Trust" relates to a number of factors when it comes to TV news. But foremost among them is a fair presentation of important content. A Total Audience view of what content was of primary concern to respondents this wave, identified the following:

Storming of U.S. Capitol	25%
COVID-19 Vaccination Rollout	23%
Economic Stimulus Programs	19%
Re-Opening Schools & Businesses	14%
Second Impeachment trial	10%
2020 election	9%

Trust In President Biden
Brand Keys continued to track Presidential trust levels. President Biden's trust-contribution was 61%, a significant increase of 12% since the last wave of research.

By political affiliation, Democrats rated him at 92% (+9%), Independents at 64% (+20%), and Republicans at 27% (+8%).

Methodology
Brand Keys uses an independently-validated research methodology fusing emotional and rational aspects of categories to identify four path-to-purchase behavioral drivers for the category-specific Ideal. It identifies the values (including "trust" as it is characterized in a particular category) that form the components of each driver, along with their percent-contribution to engagement, positive behavior toward a brand, and loyalty.

Brand Keys' research technique, a combination of psychological inquiry and higher-order statistical analyses, has a test/re-test reliability of 0.93, and produces results generalizable at the 95% confidence level. It has been successfully used in B2B, B2C, and D2C categories – including media and politics – in 35 countries.