

THE YOUTUBE NIELSENS

When I discovered that CBS had put out an embeddable clip of the exchange they used for the teaser advertising yesterday's installment of the Couric-Palin comedy hour (effectively pre-empting their own broadcast), I wrote this in an email:

I actually wonder if they haven't gotten as much traffic as they expected.

AFAIK, they treated today's clip differently than they did the last ones—they made the clip available for embed at the same time as they released the teaser of that clip (which is the one I put up on a post).

In other words, I suspect that they didn't get the traffic they wanted, because people were watching the fun bits on YouTube the next day. So they pre-empted those YouTubes and have the embed up with two ads.

I guess the proper word is "viewership"—meaning I suspected that CBS's ratings for their Couric-Palin interviews weren't all that great.

Turns out I was right.

Katie Couric's newsmaking interviews with the Republican vice presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, last week had only a slight impact on the ratings for her CBS newscast. But if the network could have added up all the other viewers the interviews (and its spoof) racked up, on places like CNN, YouTube and "Saturday Night Live," Ms. Couric would surely have been more seen and talked about than in any week since she began her tenure as anchor.

Ms. Couric received a rush of attention for the two interviews, in which Ms.

Palin, governor of Alaska, spoke haltingly on, among other topics, her state's "narrow maritime border" with Russia. Clips turned up across the spectrum of television and Web sites.

The first interview last Wednesday, for example, has been viewed more than 1.4 million times on YouTube, while the parody of the interview on "SNL" was streamed more than 4 million times on NBC.com, viewed in full more than 600,000 times on YouTube and in shorter clips many more hundreds of thousands of times.

Still, the "CBS Evening News" gained only about 10 percent in audience from the previous week – and it was actually down from the same week the year before. The newscast averaged just under 6 million viewers for the week, up from 5.44 million the previous week. A year ago Ms. Couric's program drew about 6.2 million viewers. (CBS was also a distant third last week behind ABC, which won with 8.07 million viewers, and NBC, with 7.98 million.)

The CBS newscast didn't even record its highest audience totals last Wednesday and Thursday, when the interviews were broadcast. Monday was the network's best-rated night of the week.

Mind you, I'm not sure what to make of this data. The CBS executives interviewed in the article seem happy with the attention anyway, because it has boosted Couric's brand. (Note to all women reporters who have credibility problems tied to the impression you're a lightweight: interview Sarah Palin while you still can, because she will, by comparison, make you look like a fricking genius.)

And obviously, CBS tried to adjust to this new reality. After having lost ad revenue for last

week's interviews, they finally figured out they should release their own embeddable videos, so they can attach an ad before and after the clip, though a number of blogs simply made a new YouTube from that clip by stripping out the ads. I expect we'll see more of the early release of content, with some way to prevent people from stripping the ads.

Still, I find the phenomenon an important milestone. One of the most important events of the campaign, thus far—Palin's disastrous performance on CBS—has happened in the dispersed world of YouTube rather than on the broadcast network that created that event. That will have a range of effects, I suspect, not least in giving broadcasters an incentive to create content that bloggers will respond to. But what other effects it will have, I'm not sure.