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New Horizons in English Studies 8/2023

LANGUAGE

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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Fox News' Reporting on COVID Measures[1]

Abstract. The Fox News Channel is the most-viewed cable television channel in the United States of America. It is known for practicing partisan reporting in favor of the Republican Party and has often been accused of lacking objectivity and not being fair and balanced, contrary to its original slogan. The article discusses the results from a critical discourse analysis of the spoken discourse aired on Fox News during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, specifically examining bias, especially right-wing bias. The corpus compiled for the study consisted of the spoken transcripts of all episodes of the morning show *Fox and Friends* aired between March 2020 and December 2021. The analysis focuses on identifying phenomena, such as language of power, bias towards favoring one side of a controversial issue, as well as what discursive strategies are used to achieve the desired effect, such as framing and phrasing of the hosts' comments and arguments. Based on the analysis, I show the bias implicit in the text and the motivations behind Fox's style of reporting. The article concludes with a discussion about its contributions and possibilities of further research, including a multimodal approach.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, COVID-19, Fox News, language of power, vaccines, bias.

[1] Bachelor thesis amended for journal publication

DOI: 10.17951/nh.2023.8.39-56

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1. Introduction

One of the controversial topics discussed on Fox News in the years 2020 and 2021 was the measures against COVID-19, namely mask wearing and vaccination, and a significant portion of their right-leaning viewers were at the forefront of strongly opposing these measures.

As pointed out by Bauer, Nadler, & Nelson (2022), the style of reporting on Fox News has led many scholars to categorize it as propaganda rather than genuine fact-based news. Not all agree, and some claim the problem with its classification is much more complex, the consensus being that there is bias present.

The subject of this article is the morning show *Fox and Friends*[2], more specifically, the discourse on the show related to the COVID-19 pandemic and especially the measures against coronavirus imposed in the United States. For this reason, the period being examined is March 2020 until the end of 2021.

This study aims to determine whether there is bias present on *Fox and Friends* and if so, how it manifests in the language of the speakers appearing on the show. It combines Corpus Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), utilizing the former approach for quantitative research and the latter for qualitative research.

For the quantitative part, a corpus containing transcripts of 671 episodes (16,725,118 words) of *Fox and Friends* was compiled to look for the existence of bias on the concepts referred to by nine key words commonly associated with the anti-covid measures and the context they are used in.

The qualitative part is concerned with a closer analysis of specific concordance lines, such as identifying linguistic devices, such as the way the speakers frame and phrase their arguments, and what the findings suggest about the motivations behind reporting in such manner.

The research questions chosen for this study are as follows:

RQ 1. Does *Fox and Friends* show bias when discussing the anti-covid measures? If so, how, and how explicitly?

RQ 2. Does *Fox and Friends* object to the anti-covid measures? If so, how?

RQ 3. Does *Fox and Friends* act as an echo chamber for its audience? If so, how?

My assumption is that the results will suggest a strong bias on the side of Fox News and their tendency to approve of one side of a controversial issue by objecting to the measures, talking unfavorably about the political left and favorably about the right.

[2] *Fox and Friends* is among Fox's programs labeled as factual news (i.e., not commentary).

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2. Methodology

The program *Fox and Friends* was chosen due to it being a news program, which ought to retain a certain level of objectivity, as opposed to other editorial programs (i.e., commentary) on Fox News like *Tucker Carlson Tonight* or *The Ingraham Angle,* which are described by the hosts as political opinion shows not based in fact. In addition, *Fox and Friends* specifically has not yet been the focus of similar research. To answer the research questions, a corpus of the show's transcripts was compiled and interrogated.

2.1 The Corpus

All the recordings of the show *Fox and Friends* together with their transcripts were obtained from the online library Internet Archive. The period chosen for the research is March 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021, a time when anti-covid measures were some of the most talked-about topics on the news, vaccination started being available for every American citizen, and the most misinformation started spreading around it. The corpus contains all 671 episodes of *Fox and Friends* aired in that time span. The corpus contains 16,725,118 words.

2.2 Corpus searches

To examine the bias in the context of discourse about anti-covid measures, nine key words relating to the pandemic were chosen – three with generally negative connotations, three with neutral connotations, and three with positive connotations, as shown below:

negative connotation words:	*quarantine*, *lockdown*, *mandate*
neutral connotation words:	*mask*, *vaccine*, *booster*
positive connotation words:	*recovery*, *health*, *progress*

Recovery, health, and progress are concepts that are generally viewed as being positive by the majority of people while quarantine, lockdown, and mandate are (while sometimes necessary) generally viewed as something negative. However, masks vaccines, and boosters can be seen as one or the other depending on the individual, which is why these words have been labeled as neutral.

In addition, the results for every search have been shuffled exactly once using Sketch Engine's built-in feature to have the results more representative in a select sample.

2.3 Data processing and analysis

To get an idea of how the key words were represented in the corpus, I first searched for the words themselves in Sketch Engine's concordance, recorded the number of hits, and calculated their relative frequencies in the corpus.

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Then, the context in which the key words occur was examined. This meant reading through the concordance lines and determining whether the key words were used in a positive, negative, or neutral context. I have decided to select a representative sample of the first 50 lines (after shuffling) for each key word as the subject for the quantitative part of the research.

For a further breakdown of the results, I focused on the concordance lines of the three words with neutral connotations (*mask*, *vaccine*, and *booster*) and examined whether the speakers mention somebody from the left wing or right wing in a negative, neutral, or positive context (depending on the context of the line) to help demonstrate possible bias.

3. Results

The following section presents the results of all the searches outlined in the previous section.

3.1 Number of hits and relative frequencies

Table 1 shows the number of hits and relative frequencies of the key words with the negative filters applied.

Table 1. Number of hits and relative frequencies

Key word	Number of hits	Relative frequency per million words
mask	7,457	446
vaccine	8,092	484
booster	473	28
quarantine	903	54
lockdown	1,584	95
mandate	3,177	190
recovery	771	46
health	5,157	308
progress	683	41
Total	28,297	1,692

The table shows that the words *mask* and *vaccine* occur the most frequently while the word *booster* has the lowest frequency of all the key words.

3.2 Speakers' stance on key words

Table 2 shows the stance on the concepts and ideas behind the key words expressed by the speakers featured on *Fox and Friends* in the 50 concordance lines for each word.

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Table 2. Stance on the key words

Key word	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
mask	2	17	31	50
vaccine	13	24	13	50
booster	7	21	22	50
quarantine	2	36	12	50
lockdown	0	18	32	50
mandate	0	3	47	50
recovery	22	20	8	50
health	13	18	19	50
progress	20	7	23	50

As seen in the table, the words with negative connotations have very few to no positive mentions. The mentions are generally negative, with the exception of *quarantine*, which is mostly spoken of neutrally. In the case of the word *mandate*, they are overwhelmingly negative. For the words with positive connotations, the results are rather polarizing apart from *recovery*, which has mostly positive or neutral mentions. When it comes to words with neutral connotations, the sentiment skews towards the negative, but is more balanced in the case of *vaccine*. Overall, the results show Fox's tendency towards negativity when talking about the anti-covid measures.

3.3 Partisan mentions of key words

This subsection focuses on the three key words with neutral connotations (*mask*, *vaccine*, and *booster*) in greater detail. Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5 show in how many instances the political left or right were mentioned in a given context followed by specific illustrative corpus examples. It is apparent that in the sample concordance lines, there are no instances of the right wing being mentioned in a negative context nor the left wing being mentioned in a positive context. Additionally, most of the negative statements about vaccines also mention the left wing and most of the positive ones mention the right. Due to limited space, the neutral mentions have been omitted in this version of the article.

3.3.1 Mask

Table 3 shows in how many instances the mention of the word *mask* coincided with a mention of the left wing or the right wing in their respective context (i.e., positive, neutral, or negative).

Table 3. Partisan mentions of "mask"

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Left wing	0 out of 2	4 out of 17	13 out of 31
Right wing	0 out of 2	5 out of 17	0 out of 31

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Corpus example 1 contains an interview with Dr. Mehmet Oz from the early days of the pandemic, who talks about the importance of wearing a face mask and explains how it protects people from the community spread of the disease.

Corpus example 1, interview with guest (Dr. Mehmet Oz), positive bias, April 1, 2020

Dr. Mehmet Oz (guest): The reality is those 6 feet measures are designed for different purposes. They are designed for talking. it's the talking that actually allows enough spit and virus particle to come out of your mouth without you realizing it that you *could quite easily contaminate somebody in your workspace*. Definition of close contact 6 feet for more than 10 minutes. Not an accident. Sneezes and coughs, it *will go further. That's why masks they play an important role*.

Corpus example 2 presents an interview with a guest (Karol) who strongly opposes children having to wear masks in schools and presents her arguments and opinions.

Corpus example 2, Interview Ashley & guest (Karol), negative bias, April 2021

Karol Markovicz (guest): I think for smaller kid, especially for 2 and 3-year-olds I have a 2-year-old niece just seen the world mask throughout her whole life. *Very hard to get cues and language when everybody is masked and you yourself have to be masked at that age*. I think the same path would be to get masks off kids right now but for sure once grownups stop wearing masks and hopefully, we will soon that kids will follow. *Just because they don't have a vaccine doesn't mean they have to stay masked for the rest of their lives.*

Ainsley Earhardt (host): *If you have the vaccine why do you still have to wear a mask.*

Karol: That's a whole other ballgame *but yes, absolutely.*

Ainsley: Do you think the kids will have to wear masks next fall when they go back to school?

Karol: I think in some places that's where we will see the divide between *places that are making sane decisions and places that are not. …* So, I think we will see some places do away with masks, *fall the sanity on it. Again, European schools generally don't make kids wear masks under age 11 or 12. again, I don't think they should be wearing masks either*, but we have gotten to where that would be, you know, a good compromise.

Ainsley: Right. We want everyone to be safe *but* we also want normalcy for our children.

In Corpus example 3, the hosts point out the supposed inconsistencies in Dr. Fauci's statements about the need to wear masks based on very short clips likely taken out of context.

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Corpus example 3, Discussion among hosts, negative bias + left wing mention, February 24, 2021

Brian Kilmeade (host): He is covering for Jen Psaki, the Vice President, the President but *all three disagree on covid-19.*

Steve Doocy (host): The problem with covid-19 is it seems like we *are learning something else.* One of the things he said in that little montage of soundbites that was so *devastating* is back in March of last year you *don't have to wear* a mask. We now know the science *supports* a mask protects you and the people around you because the way you get covid-19 as you breathe the air from somebody with covid-19 and so had they said earlier we don't know but he was emphatic, you don't need to wear –

Brian: *Now he wants us to wear two.*

3.3.2 Vaccine

Table 4 shows in how many instances the mention of the word *vaccine* coincided with a mention of the left wing or the right wing in their respective context (i.e., positive, neutral, or negative).

Table 4. Partisan mentions of "vaccine"

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Left wing	0 out of 13	3 out of 24	7 out of 13
Right wing	9 out of 13	0 out of 24	0 out of 13

Corpus example 4 sees the hosts reading headlines about the vaccine rollout at the end of 2020 in an optimistic manner.

Corpus example 4, hosts reading headlines, positive bias, December 20, 2020

Pete Heagseth (host): Back with a Fox News alert. Millions of doses of Moderna's covid-19 vaccine will soon be shipped from a Mississippi distribution center. This is a live look at workers packing boxes or they will be soon. it is the second vaccine *joining the country's arsenal fighting covid-19*. The vaccines are set to arrive tomorrow at hospitals and nursing homes nationwide.

Will Cain (host): Get to the packing very soon for the live shot. Moderna *hopefully* their vaccine just like Pfizer a week or so.

The guest in Corpus example 5 praises Donald Trump and his administration for a speedy development and delivery of the vaccine.

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Corpus example 5 Interview with an expert, positive bias + right wing mention, June 10, 2021

Dr. Marc Siegel (guest): And right now, is the time for humbleness. There are several things that are worked. We have got be the vaccine that *came out of the Trump administration. Let's praise President Trump and the Trump administration for Operating Warp Speed for that vaccine, which is helping to bring us out of this pandemic.* Not the lockdowns, not the masking, not the dogma.

In Corpus example 6, the host reports on Donald Trump's rally and mentions his remark about his frustration caused by Joe Biden supposedly taking credit for the vaccine.

Corpus example 6, Host (Pete) reporting on a Trump rally, negative bias + left wing mention, March 2021

Pete (host): He also, a lot of *frustration* from the former president about *Joe Biden trying to take credit for the vaccines*. One of the other *big applause* lines was *Joe Biden got his Trump shot*, and then President-elect Biden got a shot before he was in the White House, who delivered that.

3.3.3 Booster

Table 5 shows in how many instances the mention of the word *booster* coincided with a mention of the left wing or the right wing in their respective context (i.e., positive, neutral, or negative).

Table 5. Partisan mentions of "booster"

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Left wing	0 out of 7	5 out of 21	8 out of 22
Right wing	1 out of 7	1 out of 21	0 out of 22

In Corpus example 7, the host introduces and plays a video recording of a health expert, who recommends vaccine boosters.

Corpus example 7, Discussion among hosts, positive bias, December 4, 2021

Rachel Campos-Duffy (host): When you talked to Dr. Rochelle Walensky. She talked about boosters, and this is the new, I guess, way that they want to deal with omicron – *boosters, boosters*. I will take have you take a listen to what she said there, and we will get your reaction on the other side.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky (recording): We do believe that our vaccines will provide some protection against omicron and that having vaccine induced immunity is *better* than not having that immunity. That is why we are *continuing to suggest and recommend, strongly recommend* that people *not only* get their vaccine but actually get their booster.

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Corpus example 8 shows an interview with a doctor who is questioning data from Pfizer and accuses them of greed.

Corpus example 8, Interview with an expert, negative bias, August 15, 2021

Dr. Nicole Saphier (guest):	But I agree with you, Will, because a lot of the data … is coming from data and statements *from people who stand to make money* whether it's the Pfizer CEO saying we're all going to need booster shots or people who just in general are actually *making money from these vaccine companies.* So, *I don't think that is right.* I wish the CDC would actually become more capable and put forth their own data.

In Corpus example 9, the hosts criticize President Biden for recommending booster shots to Americans.

Corpus example 9, Discussion among hosts, negative + left wing, September 9, 2021

Brian (host):	I don't want the teachers union making our policy. Taking our policy and adjusting to it just because you vote *Democrat* doesn't mean every *Democrat* politician has to listen to you. It makes people have *doubts.* The answer is people don't doubt -- people doubt everything come out and before we move on, quick thing, this is the same thing with booster shots. The WHO urges a halt to booster shots. *Two FDA officials leave* after *President Biden* announces "I'm going to recommend booster shots". Why? Because they don't recommend booster shots. Now, *the World Health Organization says don't*. The FDA officials some down there who aren't political *I can't go along with this. I quit.* Guess who is going to talk about booster shot today? *Joe Biden*. Might it be he is trying to *play his favorite tune* he usually *gets the highest ratings*? Covid-19? *Does it look like a guy in charge?* Let's get booster shots. Let's *send people* back to get the jab.
Ainsley (host):	To your point, *this is why there is confusion*.
Brian:	*No trust.*

4. Discussion

4.1 Key words

The negative mentions of *mask* were the most numerous. The guest in the exchange in Corpus example 2 emphasizes the inconvenience of having to wear a mask, giving an example about the difficulty of reading facial cues, she presents an extreme, hyperbolic, unrealistic worst-case scenario of children having to wear masks for the rest of their life and implies that only places which have no mask measures are sane, which can be

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considered an evaluative term here, whose usage aims to legitimize her stance on the issue. Everything the guest says in the interview, the host agrees with without a hint of skepticism or questioning any of her claims.

The story from Corpus example 10 talks about a restaurant owner using a loophole to avoid having to comply with a mask mandate by rebranding her business as a private club.

Corpus Example 10, Interview Brian & Guest (Amanda), negative bias, September 9, 2021

Brian (host):	Business owner is getting *creative* after shutdown *for refusing to enforce mask mandates* Amanda Wallace, reopening her restaurant as a " private club" to avoid the covid protocols … and now, the county is still attempting shut the business down via a court order. … Amanda, what brought you to this point?
Amanda Wallace (guest):	Just to keep my *business* open.
Brian:	So in order to avoid the mask mandate.

The host is portraying her as a brave defiant rebel fighting against oppression from the government. He uses a positive evaluative term *creative* when describing the owner's disobedience and the rather aggressive *enforce* in connection to the mandate. Also, by choosing to report on stories of this nature, Fox gives an impression they care about the average working-class American, making them more relatable. Again, the host completely agrees with and supports the guest, further on in the interview.

In Corpus example 11, the hosts use an opportunity to make the newly appointed Democratic president Joe Biden look hypocritical. They call him out for not wearing a mask in a video where he stands alone outside.

Corpus example 11, host playing an interview with press secretary Jen Psaki, negative bias + left wing mention, January 23, 2021

Pete (host):	All right, hours after signing *a federal mask mandate, Joe Biden goes maskless* at the Lincoln Memorial. Our next guest *called out the hypocrisy* and got called the wrong name. Peter Doocy, yes, Peter, joins us live coming up.
Peter Doocy (recording):	Why weren't President Biden and all members of the Biden family masked at all times on federal lands last night?
Jen Psaki (recording):	I think, Steve, he was *celebrating* an evening of a historic day in our country.

The rest of the answer of the White House press secretary is then cut off and the part of the interview is discussed live right away in a rather mocking manner, making the President seem irresponsible and having double standards by pointing out that the reason for not complying with his own mandate is "just" celebrating. This tactic can be seen as an attempt to delegitimize the opposition leader.

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An example of a positive mention of *vaccine* can be seen in Corpus example 4, where the hosts read the headlines, saying that the Moderna vaccine is "joining the country's arsenal fighting covid-19." and that it's "hopefully" effective.

The reason why the vaccines have significantly more positive mentions than masks can perhaps be attributed to the fact that they are considered to be Trump's achievement as can be seen in Corpus example 5, where the interviewee says President Trump and his administration should be praised for Operation Warp Speed. Although Donald Trump's contribution to developing the vaccine is debatable, since, again, this statement is used to legitimize the right wing.

In fact, the vast majority of positive mentions of the vaccine also mentions Republicans in a positive context, one more of which is contained in Corpus example 12.

Corpus example 12, News announcement by the hosts, positive bias + right wing mention, November 16, 2020

Alex Azar (earlier recording):	This is *really a historic day*. this is the vaccine that *President Trump partnered with Moderna* on January 13th at our NIH lab now *over 90% effective vaccine* in one of the largest clinical trials ever so now we have Pfizer, we have Moderna, and *thanks to President Trump's vision* we've been making both of those and four other vaccines at commercial scale production.
Carly Shimkus (host, live):	Now he believes there will be enough vaccines for 20 million Americans to get the shot by the end of the year. So, Steve, Ainsley, Brian, *great news there*.

The excerpt has essentially the same message as the previous example since it also legitimizes Donald Trump. It glorifies and asserts the importance of the achievement with the phrase "really a historic day" and emphasizes the effectiveness of the vaccine, after which the host adds her own comment, evaluating the situation positively.

Finally, in Corpus example 6 – another instance of de/legitimizing – it is again emphasized by a host indirectly quoting Donald Trump by stating that the vaccine is Trump's achievement and Joe Biden is supposedly unjustifiably trying to take credit for it.

The negative mention of *booster* in Corpus example 8 is taken from an interview with a radiologist, who expresses skepticism towards data on boosters from the company Pfizer, which "stands to make money" from the vaccines. She interprets their data as influenced by greed, appealing to the viewer's morals and delegitimizing Pfizer, which might create distrust in some viewers towards the vaccine manufacturers.

Corpus example 13 demonstrates how negative discourse about the boosters is used by the hosts to raise concerns and cause irrational fear.

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Corpus example 13, Discussion among hosts, negative bias + left wing mention, October 3, 2021

Will (host): What does fully vaccinated mean. If I can read between the lines, everyone almost everyone is unvaccinated. Here's what I mean fully vaccinated status according to *Anthony Fauci* with the Atlantic means three shots. He's previously suggested a third shot could become common practice until a stronger tack saying it is likely for a real complete regiment that you *would need a third dose*. He went on an interview to *essentially define* fully vaccinated as someone who is already gotten their booster shot. So if you knock on your booster shot, *you're unvaccinated, the division of America to the vaccinated and unvaccinated put you back at square one, welcome to the world of unvaccinated.*

The host criticizes Dr. Fauci for allegedly redefining what full vaccination means and claims suggesting boosters would lead to a "division of America", presenting a far-fetched worst-case scenario to alarm the viewers and deepen their distrust towards Fauci.

About half of the negative mentions of *lockdown* focused on the Democrats and often criticized their decision making and questioning the lockdowns' effectivity, presenting it as a hindrance rather than a safety measure. Corpus example 14 shows one such instance:

Corpus example 14, Hosts' commenting on Trump's speech, negative bias + left wing mention, August 21, 2020

Donald Trump (recording): *Biden would terminate this unprecedented recovery.* He wants to *impose a permanent lockdown* combined with a *socialist takeover* of the U.S. economy. Did you hear him the other day? *Lock it down. He wants to lock it down*. So everything *we have gained* over the last number of months, *he wants to lock it down*.

Lee Carter (host): … People are *very concerned* about covid. People are very concerned about their personal safety. What they do not want is *another lockdown* because as much as people are concerned about their personal and individual safety, they are *very concerned about the economy* and what this means for their financial life and the future of our country.

This example contains an excerpt from one of Donald Trump's speeches, which deserves a study of its own. Nevertheless, here he warns the audience about how America would supposedly change for the worse once Joe Biden takes office. In it, he contrasts Biden's "terminate" with Trump's "unprecedented recovery", establishing an extreme, diametrical difference in quality between the two candidates. He then proceeds to further delegitimize Biden with threatening his target audience with far-fetched, unfounded ideas of "a permanent lockdown" and "a socialist takeover." Then

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he uses a rhetorical question to engage the audience and give an illusion of dialogue, after which he answers it with repeating Biden's intention is to lock the country down. In the last sentence, he again contrasts the threat of a lockdown with his own administration's accomplishments (Simpson & Mayr 2010).

The hosts commenting on the speech do not put forward any criticisms of his speech. One of them just stresses the people's deep "concern about the economy" (a key issue for most Republican voters) while sidelining the concerns about personal health and safety.

Corpus example 15 with *mandate* shows a rant by a host and a former White House press secretary during the Trump administration about vaccine mandates for children.

Corpus example 15, Discussion among hosts, negative bias, December 28, 2021

Kayleigh McEnany (host): That's just it. It's one thing to mandate something for an adult which I *don't agree with at all*. But then you go through the adult to *mandate on a child to tell me what to do with my 2-year-old. … What country sacrifices their children on the altar of covid-19?* And that's exactly what we have done. We know *kids are not affected by covid* in the same way as adults yet, we have closed down schools. A bunch of jurisdictions did that last year, forcing them into virtual learning, which we know is *devastating*. Now if you are a 5 or 6-year-old in New York. We are gonna *put you out in the streets in the freezing cold* and not allow you in a restaurant if you don't have the vaccine. No thank you. Let's not *sacrifice America's children*.

She expresses disapproval of the mandates and frames them as a violent action taken against one of the most vulnerable and protected groups in the country – children, including her "2-year-old", who is arguably as defenseless as one can be. She then proceeds to utilize fear as a means to support her argument, comparing mandates to "sacrificing children on the altar of covid-19", evoking the imagery of possibly savage and mindless cultish brutality, and presents the consequences of not submitting to the measures as brutal suffering for the children by "We are gonna put you out in the streets in the freezing cold".

Corpus example 16 shows the hosts' reaction to a clip of Joe Biden pointing out that despite all the criticisms of his mandates, Fox itself has an even stricter one for their employees.

Corpus example 16, Hosts' comment on internal mandates, negative bias + left wing mention, October 22, 2021

Ainsley (host): Yesterday he was *mocking anti-covid vaxxers*. Most people are not anti-vaxxers they just *question* whether or not this is going to be *safe* for them down the road.

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Steve (host):	Here he is last night asked about … first responders being let go right about now because they have not complied with local and state mandates regarding getting the shots. Here's the president. Watch this.
Anderson Cooper (recording):	Should police officers, emergency responders be mandated to get vaccines and, if not, should they be stay at home or let go?
Joe Biden (recording):	*Yes and yes.* The idea is that, look, the two things that concern me, one are those who just try to make this a political issue freedom. I have the freedom to kill you with my covid. [laughter] No, I mean, come on. Freedom. Number one. Number two, the second one is, you know, the gross misinformation that's out there.
Brian (host):	Misinformation he said about Fox. He thought *I think it's funny* that Fox has a vaccine mandate. You have a *testing option* at Fox. What he said is totally inaccurate.
Steve:	*We don't have a mandate, we have a protocol.*
Brian:	That's *a little different*. Someone should tell the president. *That's misinformation*.

As their reaction, the hosts accuse Biden of "misinformation" and deny his claim by calling their own mandate by a milder term "protocol" and pointing out there is a "testing option at Fox". However, in reality, Biden's proposed mandate does allow employees to test weekly if they are not vaccinated, which they strategically omit here. Fox's mandate, on the other hand, forces its staff to test daily and wear a mask around other employees if they are not vaccinated, making their policy much stricter, for which they were officially praised by the White House and Biden (Relman 2015).

4.2 Motivations and Ideology

The result section and the previous subsection of the discussion section have demonstrated there is, indeed, bias on *Fox and Friends* in the discourse about anti-covid measure. Table 2 shows their inclinations towards negativity while the tables in 3.3 show that in the sample, Democrats are never mentioned in a positive way while Republicans are never mentioned in a negative way. This claim is supported by the closer analysis of the discourse in the sections above.

To complete the answer to RQ 1., the bias manifests itself through several linguistic devices used in the discourse on *Fox and Friends*. One of them is intertextuality, in short, bringing other voices into the discourse. In the sample, intertextuality is mostly used to bring voices, which confirms the program's views, especially when it comes to the live guests, to amplify and legitimize these views (Simpson & Mayr 2010).

Statements by speakers with an opposite view are mostly presented via playing a short recording of their speech or reading an excerpt of a text containing their claims without the speaker being present to offer a defense. In cases like these, the hosts work with assumptions, which have the opposite effect to intertextuality – they can

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partially silence other voices to help change the audiences' perception of a given issue. Ideological assumptions are often used to blame certain problems exclusively on the Democrats by presenting assumptions as unquestionable reality, by which the hosts exercise their power through language. Assumptions are also a useful tool for leaving the audience members to deduce their own meaning without stating something explicitly and to a certain extent, evading responsibility for what has been said (Simpson & Mayr 2010).

Connected to this practice is the somewhat blurred line between fact and opinion on *Fox and Friends*. Many reports are presented as an exchange of knowledge but besides the statements of fact, evaluations are also abundantly present, sometimes making it difficult to distinguish between the two (Hart 2010).

Another technique employed in the program is highlighting the Democrats' failures and negative effects of their policies on the working class who is forced to submit to them. To emphasize the negative effects, they sometimes invite the ordinary working-class people to testify about how the measures are limiting their ability to conduct business and perform other tasks, showing that Fox cares about them (unlike the government, allegedly); moreover, these segments also make the program more relatable and easier to engage with.

It also contains uses of humor to mock and ridicule the Democrats, including President Biden, while many times, the reports go as far as to invoke fear by claiming the measures are threatening children, the most vulnerable and protected demographic, and frequent mentions of limiting freedom and authoritarianism to alarm the viewers. All these techniques serve to delegitimize the opposition, which the speakers do not attempt to hide whatsoever.

When talking about the right-wing, almost the opposite is true about the Republicans. They are mostly praised and portrayed as the rational party out of the prominent two. Moreover, in several cases, the hosts glorify the right's accomplishments, especially Trump's (e.g., vaccines), whom they treat almost like a savior figure fighting for the people. Many acts of defiance against the measures from the people who oppose them tend to earn praise as well. These techniques serve to legitimize the right wing. This is a result of the growing connection between Fox News and the Republican party in recent years as described by Hoewe et al. (2021).

As for RQ 2., the *Fox and Friends* hosts do generally object to some of the measures such as masks, lockdowns, or even boosters, often complaining about the inconveniences they cause, and freedom limitations as mentioned above. However, the vaccines seem to be an exception with a substantial amount of positive mention owing to the fact they are perceived as Trump's achievement.

They express the strongest disapproval towards the mandates (as shown in Table 2), however, are mostly silent on the vaccine mandate Fox employees have to subject to, which is much stricter than the mandate proposed by Joe Biden These comments suggests the hosts are not themselves against these measures, otherwise they would quit working at Fox or, at the very least, comment on it on air. The real reason for objecting

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to them seems to be something different than their beliefs that the measures are bad or harmful and it seems rather to stem from the need or a want to satisfy their audience.

In order to answer RQ 3., it is appropriate to establish Fox's ideology. Simpson and Mayr (2010) define ideology as "a means by which dominant groups can exercise power over subordinated or subjugated groups." With its high viewership, Fox News can be considered a dominant group, and given it is a profit-driven company, it is naturally in their interest to extend its reach by offering its viewers the content they want to consume in the most efficient way possible.

They grow and maintain their viewership by catering to their target audiences, which is, in large part, achieved by taking the stance of this specific demographic on political issues. What also helps with their engagement, is that the conversation on the program tends to be very one-sided, lacking nuance and opinion plurality, with it being distinctly clear who the viewer should side with and who the evildoers in their view are, making it easy to understand for anyone watching regardless of prior political awareness. The corpus examples have also shown that they discuss the virus and the pandemic more in terms of business and economy (issues important for the right-leaning population) rather than health and safety.

Their business strategy thus creates a perpetual echo chamber with a limited, one-sided perspective on current events as a result of Fox providing the content their viewer base demands. Satisfying the demand (or lack thereof) then influences the show's ratings and viewership – they are rewarded for providing the core demographic with the content they want by the increase in ratings. Thanks to this feedback loop, both the content on the show and its audience can gradually become more radicalized. This cycle was also described by Hoewe et al. (2021).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Research findings summary

The study has shown there is general bias towards negativity against the anti-covid measures and even more so, unconditional bias towards favoring Republicans and discrediting Democrats. It has also identified several linguistic devices used by the speakers in biased statements. The analysis has concluded that this stance is motivated by Fox's goal to amass influence and viewership as a profit-driven organization. It is highly probable that the bias is prevalent across all topics discussed on the show.

5.2 Further studies

Future studies could benefit from this corpus to examine a different controversial issue discussed on the program in this time span in a similar manner, such as the Black Lives Matter protests and systematic racism, the January 6th riot, presidential election fraud,

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international relations and conflicts, abortion laws, teaching of critical race theory, censorship, etc.

Alternatively, the corpus could be expanded further to keep track of the discourse around these issues going into the future. The study could then compare potential changes in bias on *Fox and Friends* around the key words.

The same study could be conducted with the subject being a different program on Fox News or a different news network altogether. The findings from the studies could then be compared and the difference in bias across the programs or networks could be observed.

Finally, the field could benefit from more focused qualitative multimodal studies which, along with the verbal content, would also analyze the role and purpose of the visual elements and other paralinguistic features on the programs.

5.3 Closing remarks

The research has shown that partisan bias in reporting on covid-related issues is practically omnipresent, which in effect, can contribute to disseminating disinformation throughout the populous. Similar to food, one is what one consumes, including one's media diet.

In a study on Fox News viewers' beliefs and attitudes, Brookman and Kalla (2022) paid regular Fox News viewers to watch CNN (a network considered to have an opposite bias to Fox News) instead of Fox for a 30-day period during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. After this period, they were given a survey asking them about different issues, which found out they have been, at least partially, "deprogrammed". The participants became more immune to and capable of identifying disinformation. This shows there are potential dangers in the style of reporting seen on Fox News if regularly viewed by such a large audience. It can have nonnegligible impact on voting behavior if the viewers are only given a limited perspective of reality.

As for the contributions to the field, this study, and other studies like this one can help with understanding the way certain news outlets use language to persuade their audiences and help reach their goals, which could be useful for teaching information and media literacy in schools.

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