

## Research Article

# Fox News Channel Constructed Realities of Christchurch Shooting

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**Abstract.**

Fox News Channel is a mass media that has ideological ties to the United States Republican Party. Fox & Friends is claimed to be the highest rating cable news program in the US since 2001. In 2019, Fox & Friends reported Christchurch Shooting. The Christchurch incident is the deadliest mass shooting in New Zealand history. FNC constructed reality potentially influenced the public's understanding of Christchurch shooting. This research examines and explores FNC constructed reality by analyzing how the perpetrators, motives, and impacts are framed. Based on research findings, FNC constructed reality denied the Christchurch shooting as an act of terror. It also tried to influence public understanding that the perpetrator has no ideological connection with Donald Trump. When compared with the Utrecht shooting, FNC chose to use word terror in describing the event, even before the Dutch government gave an official statement regarding the incident. FNC constructed reality shows bias and favoritism towards perpetrators of a certain race, which contradicts the company's slogan that claims to produce fair and balanced coverages. Thus, to carry out the journalistic functions in a democratic country, FNC must educate the public about the realities, instead of spreading biased and discriminatory reporting.

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## 1. Introduction

Eriyanto (2012, p. 2) argues that the mass media construct reality in a particular way [1]. According to Eriyanto (ibid), framing analysis can simply be described as analysis to find out how reality (events, actors, groups, or whatever) is framed by the media [1]. In brief, media frames go through a process in which social reality is interpreted and constructed by the media. In constructing a reality, the mass media use their ideology as the main measurement. Based on Eriyanto's explanation (2012, p. 146), the behavior and news produced by journalists are in mutually agreed-upon values. Realities are also framed and viewed in this framework and values [1].

Shoemaker and Reese in Bebawi (2018, p. 20) explain that the communication workers' intrinsic factors are considered, such as their education, personal background, and professional history. Other considerations include their value and belief systems

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and how they perceive their roles [2]. Entman (1993, p. 52) explains that framing means selecting some aspect of the known reality and making it more prominent in the text [3]. Entman (ibid) argues that the communicator makes judgments either consciously or not in deciding what to convey. Frames guide the assessment, often referred to as schemes that govern the communicators' belief systems [3]. That is, frame analysis can examine the strength of construction carried out by the communicator through observation of the highlighted aspects of reality, which are the results of the communicator's considerations guided by the values of their beliefs to influence audience awareness through the communication process.

Quoting from Foxnews.com, Fox News Channel (FNC) is an American cable television channel owned by Fox Entertainment Group. FNC is news television, which is a subsidiary of 21st Century Fox. FNC's main studio is located at 1211 Avenue of the Americas, New York City, New York. Former media consultant for the Republican Party, Roger Ailes, has been the first CEO of Fox News Channel from October 7, 1996, to June 2016 [4]. FNC claims that in the third quarter of 2017, Fox & Friends (aired 6–9 AM New York time) broke the record for most viewers in FNC history, reaching 1.5 million viewers [5]. As the most popular FNC program, Fox & Friends has enormous potential in constructing people's understanding of reality, especially as it relates to mass shootings.

La Monica (2009, p. 5) reported that Fox News Channel has been accused of biased reporting and supporting the US' conservative party [6]. Based on the study conducted by Mitchell et al. (Pew Research Center, 10/21/2014), Fox News primary source comes from government and political news. However, Fox News is the most deceptive source by consistent liberals (81% distrust) [7]. According to Martin and Yurukoglu (2017), Fox News has successfully expanded the number of votes for Republicans in the 2016 presidential election [8]. The data reinforces the existence of Fox News Channel's support for the Republican Party, so it can be expected that both FNC and the Republicans have similar preferences.

In covering the Christchurch mass shootings, Fox & Friends producers seem resistant to use the term terror. Instead, they used the term 'Mosque Shooting,' even though there was a 72 pages manifesto uploaded to the perpetrator's social media, Brenton Tarrant, explaining his motivation behind the attacks. In constructing the Christchurch shootings that killed 51 people and injured 49 others, it seemed that Fox & Friends producers purposely chose certain words to direct public understanding of the incidents.

## 2. Literaturereview

## 2.1. Media Ideology

According to Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan (2015, p. 3), an ideological approach to the study of media is designed to help people become more sensitive to how the media reflect, reinforce, and shape ideological systems [9]. They added that ideology refers to the structure of beliefs or ideas that help determine a culture's thinking and behavior. Lull in Sobur (2015, p. 61) explains that ideology is a system of views expressed in communication; awareness is the essence of the attitudes, opinions, and feelings possessed by individuals or groups, while sovereignty is the process by which the dominant ideology is conveyed. Hegemony forms awareness until finally, social power can work [10].

Eriyanto (2012, p. 146-147) explains that journalists' behavior and news are based on agreements or values that are understood together in the community [1]. He added (2012, p. 154), ideology can be interpreted as meaning or political significance [1]. It implies how a person sees events from a certain point of view can also be defined as the broad meaning of ideology. According to Wiik in Lauk and Harro-Loit (2016, p. 1959), professional journalists are part of an occupational community with a particular symbolic resource-professional ideology [11]. Those professional ideas and standards are essential in constructing occupational identity. The ideology directs journalists to do their daily work and decisions making. Based on the explanation, it can be concluded that the media ideology is a set of agreed values and serves as a benchmark for media journalists in producing news. The media's view of the world, as well as the nature and relationships between people, can construct public understanding and create false perception.

## 2.2. Media Construction of Reality

Couldry and Hepp (2018, p. 15) believe that how media construct realities is structured to exhibit the media's role that is deep, consistent, and mutually reinforcing their organizations on shaping the social world [12]. They argue that the social world is mediated and becomes a media tool for promoting certain ideology to dominate the social world. The dynamics changes in the social world and structures are none other than the press's role that continuously (indeed recursively) construct public understanding. Couldry and Hepp explain that everyday reality is a form of communication practice that dominates the social world and is influenced by institutional facts. In other words, institutions (mass media) construct the realities, which is then spread to dominate the social world.

Yan (2020, p. 42-43) explains that the media construction of social reality involves the selection of events and issues to be reported and how they are defined and interpreted [13]. Based on Yan's assumption, the media selects and emphasizes several aspects of events and issues by creating specific patterns of understanding that lead the audience to make specific interpretations of reality. The process of conveying this meaning depends on interactions and negotiations with internal and external factors. From the explanations above, the author understands that the social world is built by humans. Mass media construct realities that are widely spread to dominate our social world. In the end, the constructed reality becomes an everyday reality consumed by the public. Media constructed reality can be examined by observing the entity of a reality displayed by the media and how it is delivered to the public.

### 2.3. Media Frame

Entman (1993, p. 51) states that the concept of framing consistently offers a way to describe communicating forces [3]. According to Entman, frame analysis illustrates the exact way in which influence on human consciousness is exercised through the transfer (or communication) of information from one location to the consciousness itself. Entman (ibid) explains that framing means selecting some aspects of the known reality and making it more prominent in the text [3]. He added that in deciding what to say, communicators make judgments either consciously or not. The assessment is guided by the frames (often called schemes) that govern the communicators' belief systems.

D'Angelo (2018, p. 72) explains that the Entman framing analysis model is based on the values' connectivity [14]. According to Eriyanto (2012, p. 222-224), the Entman frame analysis model simply consists of definitions, diagnoses, moral judgments, and media recommendations [1]. That is, in general, frame analysis can examine the strength of the communicator's constructed reality by observing the highlighted aspects of reality, which are the results of the communicator's considerations guided by the values of their beliefs to influence audience awareness and understanding through the communication process.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. The History of Fox News Channel

According to Fox News Channel (FNC) official website, FNC is a 24-hour all-encompassing news service devoted to delivering breaking news as well as political and business news [5]. FNC claims to be the number one cable television network in the USA. FNC published the Suffolk University poll on its main website, stating that FNC has become the most-watched television news channel for the past 15 years [5]. FNC is a subsidiary of the 21st Century Fox Group. It claims to dominate the cable news landscape with a reach of up to 90 million families. Since October 7, 1996, the FNC operates using two satellites, namely: Galaxy 17 Transponder 6 and Galaxy 15 Transponder 2. The headquarter is on 1211 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036. FNC also has branch offices spread across 14 cities in the world, namely: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Jerusalem, London, Los Angeles, Miami, Paris, Rome, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington DC [4].

Stempel III and Hargrove (2015, p. 173) emphasize that Fox News Channel was created in 1996 by Australian-born U.S. media entrepreneur Rupert Murdoch [15]. Murdoch appointed Roger Ailes, former media strategist for the Republican Party, who personally directed Richard Nixon's campaign in 1968, as CEO of the cable and satellite all-news channel. According to Stempel III and Hargrove (ibid), Fox News has become America's top-rated cable news channel. Though, the channel has been widely criticized as showing a conservative bias despite its slogan 'fair and balanced' reporting [15]. Stempel III and Hargrove (ibid) explain that Murdock established a news empire that began with newspapers in Australia and New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s, expanded to England by acquiring News of the World and The Sun 1969, and finally The Times of London in 1981 [15].

Murdock became a naturalized US citizen in 1985 when he purchased Twentieth Century Fox, followed by HarperCollins publisher in 1989 and The Wall Street Journal in 2007. Stempel III and Hargrove added, although British cable operations are not very profitable, Mudrock wants to challenge the American Cable News Network and keep Ailes away from the -America's Talking- cable channel, which eventually becomes MSNBC's rival [15]. Based on the company statement, it is known that Fox News Channel is part of an international media network own and lead by Rupert Murdoch that is spread across several countries, including Australia, France, Germany, Luxembourg, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States [4].

Fox & Friends is one of the programs that air on Fox News Channel. In a statement published on foxnews.com, FOX & Friends (6–9 AM/ ET) is delivering 1.5 million total

viewers during the third quarter of 2017, which was the highest-rating on company history at that time [5]. The program is mainly hosted by Ainsley Earhardt, Brian Kilmeade, and Steve Doocy. On its official website, Fox News Channel claims that since 2001, Fox & Friends is the defending champion for the number 1 Cable Television Program award in the United States. Therefore, it is probable that Fox & Friends becomes the standard reference for other morning news programs.

### 3.2. Frame Analysis Finding

Title : Conway reacts to Trump being blamed in New Zealand massacre.

Date : Monday, March 18, 2019.

Duration : 8 minutes, 17seconds.

Results :

In this news package, FNC invited Kellyanne Conway, the Whitehouse adviser for President Trump, to respond to the Christchurch mass shooting. As a conservative, Conway portrayed the perpetrator as an econaturalist or eco-fascist who was sad, terrible, and had ideological ties to China (01:11-01:17 and 00:59-01:11). According to Conway, the Christchurch shooter's motives are the same as Norway shooter in 2011 (00:25-00:33). She argued that the perpetrator had a desire to kill people and virtually broadcast the process (02:19-02:22). Conway claimed that she had predicted the Christchurch shooting would result in several parties comparing the perpetrator and his manifesto with Donald Trump (00:25-00:33). Though, she firmly believes that they both are incomparable.

Frame Explanation :

Entman's frame analysis model proves that Fox News Channel has uniform narrative patterns in constructing the reality of mass shootings. The trend that was mostly found was several denials and defenses for perpetrators with specific backgrounds. FNC constructed public understanding of the link between Trump and the New Zealand shooter with the help of Kellyanne Conway. Conway defines an issue as a predictable thing. Conway validated that Trump was mentioned once in the perpetrator's manifesto that widely spread on social media (00:59-01:11). Nevertheless, she denied that the two have anything in common.

Throughout the interview, Conway made some inconsistent statements in an attempt to distinguish perpetrators from President Trump. The fact that the perpetrators attacked Muslim immigrants, according to Conway, does not represent the conservative views implemented on the President Trump Muslim ban policy in 2017. In contrast, Conway

argued that President Trump is a leader who condemns hatred, crime, and bigotry (00:34-00:43). He is a leader who has grown the United States’ economy and has spread peace throughout the world (06:49-06:58). Conway claims that the US government also encourages the public and tech companies not to give credibility and a platform to hate and crime (02:00-02:18).

TABLE 1: Fox & Friends constructed reality on Christchurch shootings, analyzed by Entman Frame Analysis Model.

FRAME			
No one is to blame but the New Zealand shooter. However, he is not a conservative. The shooter is a white supremacist, econaturallist or eco-fascist who is pathetic, terrible, and full of hatred. President Trump is a leader who has grown the US’ economy, spreads peace around the world, and condemns hatred, crime, and bigotry.			
ELEMENTS	HIGHLIGHTED ASPECTS		
<b>Definition</b>	Issue	Trump is blamed for the mass killings in New Zealand.	
	Perpetrator	A whitesupremacist, adhering to econaturallist or ecofascist ideology. A pathetic man, terrible, and has an ideological affinity with China.	
	Motive	Similar to the 2011 Norway shooter, they both have the desire to kill and broadcast the process virtually.	
	Impacts	Politic	The United States government condemns hatred, crime, and bigotry.
		Social	Some people tried to blame Trump for the attacks.
<b>Cause</b>	Trump was mentioned once in the manifesto created and circulated by the perpetrator.		
<b>Moral Judgement</b>	The shooter is a terrible, pathetic man with an ideological affinity with China, while Trump is a great leader. They both are different, but the perpetrator doesn’t deserve to be labeled as a terrorist.		
<b>Recommendation</b>	The American public needs to educate themselves by reading the perpetrator’s manifesto in its entirety, listen to the government’s statements and attitudes, and stop blaming others because only the perpetrators can be blamed for the New Zealand mosque shootings.		

### 3.3. Discussion

Based on the author’s collected data on the Fox News Channel’s historical background, its vision and mission, and the FNC executive council’s closeness with a certain political party, it is known that Fox News Channel tends to have an ideological alliance with the US’ Republican Party. It is shown on Christchurch shootings coverages that were attempted to emphasize certain realities and direct public understanding based on conservative ideology. FNC producers seem to be resistant even just to mention Jacinda Arden’s official statement, New Zealand’s Prime Minister, that was addressing the incident as a terror attack. Instead, FNC invited a speaker, Kellyanne Conway, who was half-hearted in responding to the issue.

Conway condemned the perpetrator's actions with some strong words, but somehow, these bad things that he did, were still not enough to label the perpetrator as a terrorist. Conway did her best to defend President Trump and asked the public not to believe the misleading accusations against President Trump. She also urged the American public not to respond to any information shared by a certain party. Instead, Conway suggested the public educate themselves by reading the perpetrator's manifesto in its entirety.

## 4. Conclusions

Mass media' ideology is a set of values agreed upon by media journalists and is used as the primary guidance in producing news. Media ideology influences the media's political and economic direction in constructing a reality. Generally, media' ideology is in line with media owners and/or investors' ideology. Hence, media ideology may change according to the ideology that came to power.

The research findings show that the Fox News Channel's ideology aligns with a party's ideology affiliated with the executive council members. Nevertheless, in the case of Fox News Channel, the reality of mass shootings constructed by Fox & Friends' producers tends to have a uniform model. The pattern glorifies conservative views that are anti-immigrant and promotes Islamophobia. This presumption was justified by FNC's reluctance to label the New Zealand mass shooting perpetrator who targeted Muslims as a terrorist, even though the local government has declared the incident as a terror attack. Based on the discussion above, the authors recommend Fox News Channel producers to be more objective in compiling news, especially those related to mass shooting incidents. To the researchers, the authors suggest doing more in-depth and comprehensive research to control the media's fundamental functions as a broadcasting institution, especially in democratic countries. Similar research is also useful to conduct frequently to evaluate mass media performances and objectivity from time to time.

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