

Critical Discourse Analysis of Bret Baier's Opinion Piece in FOX NEWS about His Interview with Crown Prince Mohamed Ben Salman

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Abstract

The present study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore an opinion article written by FOX NEWS political anchor Bret Baier about his interview with the Saudi Crown Prince in 2023. This study is based on the assumption that the norms and values underlying any text are frequently implicit, not explicitly expressed. Through Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis, a complex pattern emerged of linguistic mechanisms such as framing, lexical choice, mixing of genres and lack of hedging, together with selectivity and sourcing of content. These in turn could be interpreted and explained as expressing not only journalistic opinion but attention-seeking, self-promotion, audience design, and indeed journalistic reporting of events with the author as protagonist. The opinion part of the article itself, focused on the relative merits of US democracy and Saudi monarchy, was found to be problematic with respect to its claimed source (the previous interview) and to serve as much as a vehicle to signal the power of the author and the media as that of democracy versus monarchy. Suggestions are made for further research.

Keywords

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Framing, Power, Opinion Piece, Ideologies, US, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

An opinion article, often referred to as an op-ed (due to its location in a hardcopy newspaper opposite the editorial page), is a genre of media that has played a crucial role in journalistic expression, offering writers a platform to share their insights, critique, and perspectives on current events, policies, and a variety of

societal issues. It belongs to a kind of journalistic non-fiction (but non-reportage) that thrives in the US more than elsewhere (Greenberg, 2007). According to Fowler (1991), opinion pieces or opinion discourse play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and often aim at influencing policy decisions by raising audience awareness about lesser-known issues and engaging them to respond to recent news by providing a deeper context.

Due to the subjective nature of opinion discourse and its use of persuasive language, logical reasoning, and the author's credibility to analyze complex issues, discourse analysts have regarded this genre as a fertile ground providing rich material for exploring how language constructs reality, influences perceptions, shapes public discourse and reflects underlying social and political norms. An example is Le (2004) which critically analysed editorial articles in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, looking to see how the editors represented themselves and their relationship with the readership, so as to exercise influence.

The present study focuses on an opinion piece of a specific kind, where the opinion is claimed to target what was shown in a previous interview conducted by the same journalist, with a prominent world figure (in this case, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia). Albeit a niche situation, this type of example offers an unusual opportunity (exploited, e.g. Fairclough, 1995) to work with transcripts or recordings of interviews alongside media treatments of them to analyze how language is reshaped to fit different ideological or narrative goals (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

The aim of the present study is therefore to explore a recent opinion text of that sort in such a way as to show how it constructs reality, influences public perceptions, and reflects underlying norms. Previous work in this area, together with the critical discourse framework that will be used, are now presented in the following sections.

2. Research on Opinion Pieces

As mentioned above, the opinion piece has grown as a notable genre of discourse which entices both discourse and content analysts to carry out various types of research studies (Fowler, 1991). For example, Alhamid (2024) carried out a study investigating opinion headlines in the Radar Tegal newspaper (in Indonesia) focusing on framing. The research used a limited part of a critical discourse analysis approach (CDA) to explore the attitudes and views of the newspaper in the headlines of opinion sections. Data were analyzed qualitatively to identify the contexts and the attitudes of the opinion articles. Results indicated that newspapers' attitudes fall into two broad categories: critical framing which disagreed with the information in articles, and supportive framing which approved and backed the information in articles.

In another recent study, Angela (2022) conducted a metadiscourse analysis in which she explored the stance and engagement markers in The Jakarta Post's opinion articles. Using a qualitative case study approach, the researcher looked at

10 opinion articles written in English to establish stance and engagement features (Hyland, 2005) employed by the authors in their opinion discourse. Findings revealed that stance markers were used more often than engagement markers, which is understandable since in op-eds, writers try to voice their views and attitude to influence their readers rather than engage in guiding their readers through the issue discussed.

In a similar study examining stance and engagement aspects, Al-Rickaby (2020) aimed to identify and contrast stance and engagement markers in both English and Arabic opinion articles. Through the lens of CDA and using a mixed method approach, the researcher studied 20 articles (10 in English and 10 in Arabic). The findings reveal that authors of both English and Arabic opinion articles utilize similar stance and engagement markers in their persuasive texts. Nonetheless, there was notable variability in the frequency with which different sub-categories of stance and engagement markers were used between the two data sets.

On the same line, Babapour & Kuhi (2018) conducted a contrastive study to identify the different types of stance markers employed by 30 English and 30 Farsi newspaper opinion columnists. Following Hyland's model of stance markers (Hyland, 2005) as an analytical framework, the researchers reported that English columnists used hedges and self-mentions much more often than Farsi columnists did. Conversely, Farsi columnists employed a significantly higher number of boosters and attitude markers. They also pointed out that the observed similarities and differences between the columnists may have stemmed from the cultural and linguistic preferences inherent to each language.

Aside from discourse analysis studies of opinion pieces, Hoffman & Slater (2007) employed content analysis to characterize and compare lay and journalist opinion expressed about substance use and health issues. The researchers analyzed 591 opinion articles from national newspapers in the US. They relied on Schwartz (1992)'s classification of types of framing value that could be expressed in opinions about the topic involved (e.g. alcohol, crime etc.). Findings indicated that variations in values were observed based on the type and topic of the articles. Also, values commonly linked with liberal beliefs were found to correlate with higher levels of integrative complexity.

In prior work examining op-ed articles, Greenberg (2000) used both content and discourse analysis methods to examine spatial and temporal features of 57 opinion articles in five mainstream Canadian daily newspapers. The researcher reported that the analyzed opinion discourses exaggerated their views of issues and events by stating the obvious to justify taking sides on matters.

Overall, these research endeavors underscore the value of discourse analysis in unraveling the multifaceted nature of opinion pieces. However, they tend to examine several or in some cases many different instances of opinion text only in newspapers and in only one limited predetermined way. Often, they target features that have easily searched lexical indicators (e.g. discourse markers like *definitely*) or represent values of some very broad and easy to identify dichotomy (e.g.

positive and negative attitude). Hoffman & Slater (2007) represent an exception, but even the elaborate classification they use applies only to text that is pure opinion from start to finish.

By contrast the present researcher noticed that op-ed text these days is often online rather than in hard copy newspapers, and often does not appear to consist only of opinion. Furthermore, both its language and content need detailed attention rather than just one or the other. More than that, not all the studies mentioned above could be said to be truly critical or able to shed much light on underlying ideologies, power relations, and linguistic strategies employed to convey viewpoints and shape public discourse. Studies are needed that not only contribute to academic scholarship but also offer valuable insights for media professionals, policymakers, and the broader public seeking to understand the complexities of opinion discourse in contemporary media landscapes.

For those reasons the present study selected to look in depth at both the language and content of just one exemplar of today's online op-ed discourse, using the full power of modern critical discourse analysis.

3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

According to Paltridge (2012) Critical Discourse Analysis assumes that language usage is inherently connected to society and that discourse shapes as well as mirrors the social environment. A CDA examination could illuminate themes like gender, ideology, and identity, observing how these elements are manifested in specific texts. This exploration begins by dissecting the language used and what is or is not actually said (i.e. the literal content), then progresses to elucidating and understanding the full message of the discourse. Subsequently, the analysis may involve interrogating the texts to uncover the ideologies and presumptions that underlie the use of language, and connect these to various perspectives on the world, individual experiences, and beliefs.

The development of CDA is often attributed to scholars like Fairclough (1989, 1995, 2010), van Dijk (2001), Wodak (1996), and Wodak & Meyer (2001), who began formulating their theories in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These pioneers were influenced by the earlier work of Foucault (1980) on discourse and power, as well as by social theorists like Gramsci (1971) with his concept of hegemony.

This study leverages Fairclough's seminal model for CDA discourse theory as an analytical framework. Norman Fairclough's comprehensive approach to analyzing discourse acknowledges the central role of power within language, much like the earlier philosopher Foucault. Fairclough views language as a crucial form of social practice, besides others such as visual communication, asserting that it operates within specific social contexts and power structures, often reflecting and perpetuating (rather than challenging) power dynamics, thereby acting as a means of social regulation and dominance. He argues that power is actually wielded through speech or writing, influencing social practices and institutions. He

integrates elements from linguistics, sociology, and critical social theory, making his model interdisciplinary.

Fairclough's three-level framework examines discourse at text, discourse practice, and social practice levels, illuminating how language both maintains and maybe challenges power relations. An important aspect of Fairclough's model is its recognition of the impact of discourse on subjectivity. Despite acknowledging language's regulatory influence, Fairclough highlights individual agency and the potential for resistance and social change through counter discursive acts. He emphasizes that individuals possess the capacity to contest dominant discourses and alter their social meanings, actively participating in and potentially transforming these discursive practices.

All in all, Fairclough's model of CDA is selected above others for the present analysis because it is particularly suited to analyzing how discourse both constructs and is constructed by social power dynamics. Furthermore, its three levels of analysis facilitate integration of micro-level textual analysis with macro-level social critique, which is precisely the aim of the present study to achieve. It also offers insights into both continuity and change in social practices and ideologies. For these reasons it is adopted in the present study with the aim to illuminate a recent example of a journalistic opinion piece, showing how the social nature of such pieces is changing in the modern world.

4. Materials and Methods

The study is a detailed case study of one op-ed article, using a Faircloughian qualitative approach. The reason for choosing to look at one article in depth was essentially that, as the literature review revealed, previous studies of such articles had often considered multiple articles but only targeted one very specific textual feature. Hence their ability to reveal the social meaning of the discourse was very limited. The present study aimed to reveal the full range of social nuances possible to convey in today's op-ed discourse through a detailed investigation of one recent exemplar.

4.1. The Data and its Context

The main data (1221 words: [Baier, 2023](#)) consisted of one opinion article written by Bret Baier, the Fox News chief political anchor, relating to an exclusive interview he conducted with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on 20/9/2023. This interview marked the royal's first interaction with a major U.S. news network since 2019. The interview was quite long and a transcript of the first half hour (c 5000 words) was available. The interview covered a range of issues, both domestic and foreign, but did not break any significant news or produce controversy ([Saab, 2023](#)). Bret Baier's article, published a fortnight later, is available to the US and the world to read on the Fox News website, while only very short clips from the interview itself are readily available. While the exact number or location of people who read Bret Baier's opinion article about this interview is

unknown, it is safe to say that the interview garnered wide attention due to the prominence of the interviewee and the context of the discussion.

Fox News in general is recognized as having a conservative US Republican stance although Bret Baier has a reputation for being even-handed politically and sometimes going against the Republican viewpoint (Darcy, 2023). Overall Fox contrasts with its news providing rival CNN which caters for a younger and more liberal or centrist (e.g. Democratic) clientele. CNN is also more fact based and world oriented while Fox is more inclined to blend opinion with fact and be more US-centric.

This article was selected in part because of the interest of the content to the researcher (a Saudi citizen) but mainly for its research interest in that it represented a text that, on a superficial read at any rate, did not appear to be purely opinion nor focused on one agent. This complexity of focus contrasts with many texts chosen for CDA where there is a single person or issue often prominent (e.g. Martin Luther King or gender inequality). In the present case, the main players in the content of the article are the Crown Prince and Saudi Arabia, the USA, Netanyahu of Israel, the writer Bret Baier, and Fox News. It remains to the present analysis to show which of those, if any, are heroed by the text.

4.2. Data Analysis

This is a piece of qualitative case study research. The analysis of the article primarily follows Fairclough's framework of language and power (Fairclough, 1989). The article was read repeatedly attempting to identify chunks of text that seemed unusual for a text of this sort, or expected features that were omitted, or features of wording in some way indicative of points often raised in CDA (e.g. lexical choices, framing choices). Each is then pursued at the contextual levels of discourse practice (interpretation) and social practice (explanation).

5. Findings

It became rapidly apparent to the researcher that this text was not a simple or single discourse but had several different parts and layers of discourse. In other words, it was not just, as stated in the title, about what the author's 'interview with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reveals about the power of democracy'. In order to illuminate this interdiscursivity, six different parts or layers of the text were isolated, around which the CDA account that follows is organised.

5.1. Overall Genre and Lack of Hedging

Although above I have referred to the target text as an opinion piece, for the most part it does not itself overtly signal that, but only by implication from the content of what is said in part of the text. It is not marked as such by the title, which is not worded overtly as opinion, e.g. *My take on what my interview...shows...* It is not shown by its position on the page because Fox News does not exist as a newspaper, only online, where editorial and opinion pieces are not identifiable by their

location in the format seen in hardcopy newspaper pages. While it has the word OPINION just above the title, that is in a very small font, swamped by the title of the piece in very large letters. Furthermore, the piece is categorised by Fox as a “Special report”, which gives it the air of fact rather than opinion.

Indeed, the title of the piece and almost all the text are written in the simple present or past, without modal verbs, and without using hedging expressions such as *I believe that...or it could be argued that...* which are typical of expression of opinion. Only towards the end do we get a few wordings that explicitly signal a subjective opinion of the writer: *Everyone seems worried, it was clear to me that..., Just imagine if...*

Thus, the text uses verbs and tenses typical of bald reporting of fact, and therefore of much journalistic reportage of events. This is partly because some of the text is indeed reporting facts of where the interviewer went and what was said in the interview. It starts before the interview with the reporter’s arrival in Saudi Arabia and it ends after the end of the interview when the interviewer meets Netanyahu in New York. However, insofar as it does contain opinions of the author they are mostly also expressed as if facts, with no indications of probability that are associated with carefully thought out opinions (e.g. zero occurrences of modal *may* and *might*). He says about peace in the Middle East *All sides are optimistic* rather than something like *All sides appeared to me to be optimistic*. Overall, the text comes across to the reader with the feel of a first person narrative, and again narratives, while they may be of fact or fiction, are not usually associated with opinion. Short of interviewing Baier, we can only assume that this fact-like wording of the piece is a deliberate choice of the author and or Fox.

5.1.1. Discourse Practice

Framing opinion as Certainty:

The infrequency of modal or opinion-marking verbs minimizes expressions of uncertainty or possibility, which are typical in opinion pieces. As a result, the statements appear to a reader as authoritative and definitive, even though they might represent subjective or contested views. This creates a journalistic style that blurs the line between factual reporting and personal opinion. By contrast greater use of hedging would have softened the assertiveness and strategically created a sense of openness or flexibility while still guiding interpretation.

Reader Interpretation:

Readers are more likely to perceive the journalist’s views as established facts, rather than as personal interpretations or suggestions. This framing can reduce critical engagement, as readers may not realize they are being presented with an opinion rather than an objective analysis.

Genre Intertextuality:

Opinion pieces traditionally include modals or hedging verbs like *seem* to indicate speculation, evaluation, or the potential for disagreement. By avoiding hedges, the journalist departs from conventional opinion-writing practices, potentially aligning the piece more closely with report-like genres, which have

greater authority in public discourse.

5.1.2. Social Practice

Authority and Power.

Writing that avoids hedging asserts the journalist's perspective as dominant or indisputable, which can reinforce their authority. This aligns with power dynamics in media where certain voices are given more weight, potentially marginalizing alternative viewpoints. In this text the agent who gets their authority strengthened by this is Bert Baier, a prominent reporter, and through him, Fox News (which might indeed require their Special Reports to be written in this way) and not either the Crown Prince or the USA. The factual tone makes the writer and publisher look assertive and strong and therefore more believable.

Control of Public Discourse.

Presenting opinions as facts contributes to entrenching public perceptions and debates. In doing so, the journalist might strengthen a specific ideological narrative while discouraging dissent or alternative interpretations. The use of assertive language in the opinion text tends here to reinforce its message about US superiority, and by implication (without mentioning his name) supports the Trump "Make America great again" line which would accord with the general Fox pro-Republican stance (Makuch, 2024).

Societal Impacts on Credibility.

In a broader context where misinformation and "fake news" are significant concerns, presenting opinion as fact could reinforce trust among audiences predisposed to agree with the journalist's perspective, further polarizing public discourse.

5.2. Genre of the First Two Paragraphs

Sources agree that in popular narrative writing, including for example best seller novels, the first paragraphs are crucial because the author needs to capture the reader's interest, so they will invest in reading it (by continuing and probably by paying). They must serve as a "hook" (Lyon, 2008). This is in contrast with "serious" factual or opinion writing that is expected to begin with explaining what its topic is and why it is important in more academic terms.

The present text clearly follows the former model in that it starts out not saying how it is going to present the views of the author about a landmark interview he recently conducted but rather it describes his arrival by helicopter at a luxurious Saudi resort (albeit not yet fully built) to meet his prestigious interviewee. Indeed, it begins with two paragraphs which, with slight rewording, could be the start of a best seller novel. They are very visual so could equally describe the opening scene of a major film. Instead of the interviewer arriving to meet the Crown Prince for a political interview, a similar account would fit an action hero like James Bond arriving to meet an adversary bent on world domination. Words that signal a popular novel rather than a political opinion piece include the descriptive chunks *the clear blue waters of the Red Sea* and *the wind swept off the water*, the informal

word *chopper*, and the feelings of the person arriving: *As I walked out of the helicopter, the gravity of the moment sunk in.*

5.2.1. Discourse Practice

Intertextuality:

The journalist blends elements of narrative storytelling with political commentary, a stylistic departure from the usual formal tone and content of the first paragraphs of political opinion articles. This technique engages readers emotionally and draws them into the scene, creating a sense of immediacy or intimacy with the writer. This mixing of styles could serve to hero the interviewer, indirectly shaping how the audience perceives him before the political discussion even begins.

Reader Engagement:

By starting with a vivid, almost cinematic description, the writer aims to captivate readers who might otherwise find political analysis dry or inaccessible. This approach also signals a departure from a purely analytical piece, inviting the audience to view the encounter as a unique and personal experience and maybe identify with the interviewer.

Framing and Authority:

The introduction frames the interview in an extraordinary or exclusive context, emphasizing the journalist's privileged access to a high-profile leader. This may subtly elevate the journalist's perceived authority or the importance of the interview content.

5.2.2. Social Practice

Normalization of Power and Prestige:

The description of a grand arrival (e.g., via helicopter to a golf course) reinforces the opulence and exclusivity often associated with global leaders, particularly in the Gulf region. It normalizes displays of wealth and power in leadership and may unconsciously shape readers' views of such leaders as glamorous or larger-than-life figures. By focusing on the aesthetics of the meeting, the journalist however risks distracting from or softening the critical issues that might be expected to be discussed, such as human rights, political reforms, or regional conflicts.

Orientalism and Exoticism:

There could be an implicit exoticization of the Saudi context, portraying it as an extraordinary or otherworldly setting, giving the false impression that all of the country is a billion dollar construction site dedicated to providing leisure resources. This aligns with broader discursive practices in Western media where Middle Eastern environments are depicted in grandiose or overly exoticized terms (e.g. Egypt as nothing but pyramids).

Media's Role in Constructing Public Figures:

The narrative introduction positions the Crown Prince within a crafted story, shaping how readers interpret his persona and leadership style. This framing could either build or reinforce societal narratives about him, depending on the prior knowledge of the reader.

5.3. The Book Mention

Near the start of the piece, the author refers to a book he is about to publish. It is however not very obviously linked to his theme since the book is about the forming of the US constitution in the 18th century and has no connection with Saudi Arabia nor was featured in the interview. He makes a connection only tenuously by saying *I was quite aware of conducting this interview against the backdrop of a period of crisis in our own system of government. As I speak to people about my upcoming book, “To Rescue the Constitution: George Washington and the Fragile American Experiment”, they frequently respond with concerns about whether our constitutional system can survive this era of turmoil.* Such current turmoil in the US is then cited as a possible weakness of democratic governance in contrast with the traditional monarchic Saudi system. The book is also referenced by implication in the final words of the piece, where again its relevance is tangential. The US democratic system whose origins are described by the book is cited as a reason for US influence in the Middle East: *The United States has long been a key broker on the complex peace process in the Middle East. Our stature and our constitutional integrity give us that authority—a process that started in Philadelphia’s Independence Hall in May of 1787.*

We may surmise the author is really taking advantage of writing the opinion piece, which is likely to be read by a lot of people due to the rarity of interviews with the Crown Prince, to advertise his book.

5.3.1. Discourse Practice

Interdiscursivity by Self-Promotion within the Discourse:

The mention of the book disrupts the primary theme of the article (the interview and political analysis) by reference his largely unrelated book, which belongs to discourse of another genre (marketing). This is a notable discursive choice that prioritizes the author’s secondary objective (book promotion) alongside their primary one (engaging readers with the article’s main content).

Audience Interpretation:

For readers, the reference to the book might feel out of place or self-serving, potentially undermining the article’s credibility or focus. Conversely, for loyal followers of the writer, it could enhance engagement, encouraging them to view the author as a multifaceted intellectual with expertise spanning different topics.

5.3.2. Social Practice

Marketization of Journalism:

The book mention exemplifies the commercialization of journalistic spaces, where authors use articles not just to inform or persuade but also to drive personal or commercial interests. This reflects broader societal trends where professional and commercial self-promoted identities often overlap.

Media as a Personal Brand:

The insertion of a book reference underscores how modern media personalities operate as personal brands. This aligns with a neoliberal ideology emphasizing

self-promotion and entrepreneurialism. Journalists are no longer just conveyors of information but also products themselves, leveraging every platform to monetize their intellectual output.

Cultural Capital and Authority:

Referring to a book on the U.S. Constitution positions the author as a learned figure with broad expertise, indirectly lending weight to their opinions in the article. Even though the book is only very tenuously related, it builds cultural capital, subtly reinforcing the author's authority and credibility in the eyes of the reader.

5.4. Interview Content Coverage

When the researcher has direct access to a text of what another text reports or discusses, it is possible to assess how far the source and the discussion cover the same content. In the present case the researcher was able to locate the complete first half hour of the interview and crosscheck the content with that in the article. Since that transcript alone was four times the length of the article, clearly much had to be dealt with more briefly or omitted in the article (whose length is more limited, dictated by Fox News, presumably). However, we learn something from analysing what topics of the interview were chosen to be omitted and which included or at least mentioned in the article.

Material which was in the interview but not the article fell into three categories. First there were some internal Saudi topics omitted in the article—the Neom project by name, the status of women. Second there were a number of international topics concerning Arabia in relation to: Yemen, Iran, India, China, S. Korea, Russia, BRIC countries, Europe, Gulf nations. These were all, in effect, summarized by the article, without any further consideration, in the words: *The interview was chock full of news about Saudi Arabia, the region and the world.* The absence of any account or opinion being provided of those topics can be perhaps explained on the grounds that the article was aimed primarily at the lay US audience that consumes Fox News, who is perceived to be right wing and mainly interested in matters of direct interest to the US and only in the most prominently important or accessible features of a country such as Saudi Arabia: compare the Trump slogan “America first” (Makuch, 2024). Consistent with that, the article shared with the interview, at least brief mentions of: golf and sport; tourism; the reputation of the Crown Prince and his vision; Saudi economic growth; Khashoggi (who worked for the Washington Post, but was murdered in 2018); 9/11 and Bin Laden; Israel, Netanyahu and the Palestinians (where the US plays a major role); and Trump and Biden (though not by name in the article). Perhaps the only item in the interview that is surprising by not being shared is that of armaments and nuclear war.

Overall, then, the article did not appear to omit matters in such a way as to make either the US or the Prince/Saudi Arabia appear more correct or dominant. Rather it appears to have been guided simply by its perception of what the target audience would like/expect to read about. That is of course a typical motivation

of news channels who have a major aim to attract as many readers/listeners as possible, because they rely heavily on income from cable and satellite subscriptions and advertising.

5.4.1. Discourse Practice

Editorial Choices and Gatekeeping:

The journalist acts as a gatekeeper, deciding what information is included or excluded. This decision is influenced by assumptions about the audience's interests and the norms of the media organization. Omitting details reflects the practice of tailoring content to a target audience, which is common in journalism and can also be regarded as a form of audience design. However, it raises questions about what is considered "relevant" or "worthy" of inclusion and who decides this.

Framing the Narrative:

By excluding certain topics, the journalist shapes the overall impression readers form of the interview and the person being interviewed. The omissions contribute to constructing a specific narrative or image of the interviewee which in this case may align with the audience's preferences or cultural expectations.

Intertextuality and Context:

The omission may align with broader discursive conventions in similar US journalistic contexts. For instance, certain areas of foreign affairs tend to be left out consistently across media when reporting on specific public figures, reinforcing a shared narrative.

5.4.2. Social Practice

Reinforcement of Audience Expectations:

The journalist's omissions may reflect and reinforce societal norms about what is deemed "interesting" or "relevant". For example, leaving out what the CP has to say about many countries around the world technical details about a famous person's profession could perpetuate stereotypes of Saudi leaders as exclusively focused on the USA. This practice can contribute to limiting the scope of public discourse by sidelining topics that are perceived as complex or unappealing.

Power and Ideology:

The act of selecting and omitting reflects the journalist's role in shaping public discourse, which is inherently linked to power. By controlling what readers are exposed to, the journalist influences public knowledge and perception of the famous person or the broader issues discussed. This can perpetuate dominant ideologies, as content that challenges societal norms or introduces unfamiliar perspectives might be excluded.

Audience Commodification:

The omissions could reflect market-driven journalism, where the primary aim is to cater to audience preferences to maximize engagement. This shifts journalism from a purely informational role to a commercial one, influenced by economic pressures.

5.5. The Presentation of the Core Opinion/Argument

The title— *What my interview with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reveals about the power of democracy*—unambiguously conveys that the opinion to be given will relate to the power of democracy in some way compared with the power of a regime such as that in Saudi Arabia. To a US audience it also strongly suggests (although does not explicitly state) that it is US democracy that will be judged superior. Later this is indeed the overall argument made.

US superiority is indeed subtly shown right from the first paragraph where the interviewer's helicopter lands on the golf course of a luxury Saudi resort. Instead of just being described as a *golf course* or more dramatically as a *spectacular golf course carved from the sandy soil of the island*, it is referred to as *the just completed Robert Trent Jones Jr. course*. American readers will recognize this as name checking a famous American golf course architect, who presumably designed this golf course. Subtly that hints that even in such a huge Saudi project there is reliance on US expertise.

Later again the writer implicitly assumes that the fact that CP responded in the interview in English rather than Arabic is a positive development. That again however is based on the presupposition that the language of the USA is inherently superior, quite aside from any substantive arguments supporting US hegemony.

The essence of Baier's opinion itself, when it starts in paragraph 3, is declared by the title to stem from the interview. However, consider the analysis in **Table 1**. It is interesting that, on a simplistic count of pluses and minuses, the USA only comes out marginally ahead of KSA in approval. This could reflect the interviewer's reputation for being more even handed than Fox as a whole, in this case with respect to US success in comparison with Saudi Arabia.

What is even more striking however is that very little of Baier's opinion text is really sourced from his interview, and, where it is, the interview was mostly evidencing things the CP had already said in previous interviews. Despite the title of the piece which attributes his opinion wholeheartedly to his interview, the vast majority of the support for Baier's opinion, on the evidence of his own account, comes from other sources. Indeed the interview did not feature the theme of governance comparison between Saudi Arabia and the USA. Baier's sources are mainly Baier talking to other people, or just relying on what he observed or indeed on common knowledge, including the famous quotation from Winston Churchill. The content of the opinion argument Baier presents could have been written almost entirely without his interview with CP having occurred.

5.5.1. Discourse Practice

Framing and Credibility:

The journalist frames the article as being informed by a high-profile interview, lending it authority and exclusivity. However, the content's lack of direct engagement with the interview itself suggests that the hoo provided by the Crown Prince interview is more rhetorical than substantive. This framing is a discursive strategy

Table 1. Summary of opinions expressed by Baier and their apparent sources of support (B = Baier, CP = Crown Prince, KSA = Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).

Governance commented on (pos/neg)	B's Opinion	Support seemingly relied on by B for his opinion
KSA+	Crown prince is visionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opinion of ordinary Saudi citizens who were asked by B CP's desire to transform and promote the Kingdom (visible to B in projects like the resort) CP's willingness to answer all B's questions in the interview
USA-	US constitution is currently in turmoil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People B talks to about his book Everyone worried about unsuitability of both US presidential candidates (B's observation)
USA+	Democracy may not be perfect but is better than other systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Churchill quotation
KSA-	KSA has power at the top, monarchy and theocracy, but people lack a voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General knowledge
USA±	USA has bottom up democracy with power to the people, but allows conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General knowledge
KSA-	Lack of transparency, issues do not get fully answered by a single ruler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CP's interview responses on Khashoggi (repeating those in O'Donnell, 2019 in a CBS <i>60 Minutes</i> interview) CP's interview responses on Saudi involvement in 9/11 (repeating those in Goldberg, 2018 in interview with <i>The Atlantic</i>)
KSA+	KSA on the move in its economy, international sporting involvement and modernization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CP answered in English (not Arabic as in O'Donnell, 2019) Saudi ministers say this B's own observation
KSA-	Risk because only one person makes all the key economic decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> B's own reflection
USA+	Economic success depends on democracy which restrains capitalism and responds to needs of people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> B's own reflection
USA+	US has role as peace broker in the Middle East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> US stature and constitutional integrity give it that authority

to enhance the perceived value of the article by associating it with the access and prestige of speaking to a global leader, regardless of whether the interview substantively informs the piece.

Reader Expectations:

Readers may feel misled if they expect new insights tied specifically to the Crown Prince's statements. This discursive choice could undermine trust in the journalist if the piece appears to trade on the interview's prestige without delivering unique, interview-derived content.

Genre Intertextuality:

The opinion text blends discourses of political philosophy (e.g., comparing democracy and monarchy) with journalism (e.g., reporting on an interview). This interdiscursivity obscures the boundary between analysis derived from the journalist's reflections and that from the interview itself, creating ambiguity in the article's purpose.

5.5.2. Social Practice

Media's Role in Political Discourse:

By framing the piece around an interview with the Crown Prince, the journalist aligns their analysis with the global narrative of Saudi Arabia as a key geopolitical player. This reflects the media's role in legitimizing or amplifying the voices of powerful figures, even when those voices do not substantively contribute to the analysis. The article could misleadingly bolster an image of Saudi Arabia as a state engaged in meaningful dialogue about governance, even though the journalist's comparison of regimes is not based on the Crown Prince's input.

Prestige and Access in Journalism:

The use of an interview as a framing device reflects broader practices in political journalism, where access to elite figures is often equated with journalistic success. This dynamic reinforces the power imbalance between journalists and their subjects, with the latter controlling access to their narratives and the former using that access to elevate their own platforms.

Discourse on Governance Models:

The comparison of governance systems (monarchy vs. democracy) taps into ideological debates about political structures. By not tying arguments specifically to the Crown Prince's statements, the journalist reinforces existing narratives about both systems, rather than introducing new perspectives. This reflects how dominant discourses about governance are reproduced rather than critically interrogated.

5.6. The Post-Interview Events

After apparently concluding giving his opinion, the writer ends the article by highlighting how, after the interview was published, the Crown Prince's answer to one of his questions (about Saudi-Israeli relations, which he had not previously mentioned), prompted the Israeli leader Netanyahu to respond. The journalist then flew to New York to interview Netanyahu. This part of the text is therefore not

about the journalist's opinion but about his action participating in a real world event. Although the topic is new, this text in some way serves, with the first two paragraphs discussed above, to bracket the rest of the account (of the interview and Baier's opinions) within a narrative of his movements. That narrative of events even more than in the first two paragraphs, presents the journalist as a man of action, not just of talk and reflection. He changes his flight arrangements to go to New York and conducts another interview.

5.6.1. Discourse Practice

Genre Shifting:

The article transitions from an opinion-based text to a narrative of journalistic action, blending genres. While much of the article represents the journalist's interpretative stance, this ending recounts their involvement in unfolding real-world events, shifting the focus from analysis to reportage. This shift underscores the journalist's active role in shaping the story and frames them as a key participant in the larger geopolitical discourse.

Framing the Journalist as an Agent:

By highlighting their own actions (e.g., the follow-up interview with Netanyahu), the journalist positions themselves as more than an observer. This framing enhances their authority and prominence, portraying them as a central figure in facilitating dialogue between powerful leaders. This could also reinforce their credibility as someone with unique access and influence, distinguishing their work from that of other commentators or reporters.

Narrative Cohesion:

Including this real-world consequence at the end serves to validate the importance of the original interview with the Crown Prince. It creates a sense of continuity and progression, where the journalist's work directly leads to tangible political reactions.

5.6.2. Social Practice

Media's Role in Geopolitical Events:

The narrative reflects the media's dual role as both a conveyor of information and a participant in shaping political discourse. The journalist's actions (interviewing leaders, prompting responses) become part of the geopolitical dialogue themselves. This also illustrates how media figures and platforms act as intermediaries in global power structures, enabling communication between leaders while simultaneously crafting narratives for public consumption.

Construction of Media Authority:

By emphasizing their role in catalyzing responses from world leaders, the journalist aligns themselves with the power structures of international diplomacy. This reflects broader trends in journalism where prominent reporters gain cultural capital by being perceived as integral to major political conversations.

Commercial and Institutional Implications:

Highlighting such involvement enhances the prestige of the journalist and their

media outlet (Fox). This could serve commercial purposes by attracting more readers or viewers who value exclusive, high-stakes reporting. It also demonstrates how journalism operates within neoliberal frameworks where individual journalists and institutions build their brand by showcasing proximity to power and influence.

Audience Expectations.

The journalist's recounting of their role may cater to audiences who are increasingly interested in the journalist's personal perspective or involvement in global events. This reflects a shift in modern media where journalists often become part of the story.

6. Discussion

Overall, the above detailed CDA reveals that what might at first glance seem like a run of the mill opinion article is awash with hidden meanings and complexity. It is interdiscursive, mixing several genres, and multiply intertextual, connecting not only with the interview that it purports to be based on. Several overall themes emerge.

The piece presents opinions with an air of factual certainty, using definitive language rather than hedging or modal verbs typical of opinion writing. This style risks misleading readers, who may interpret subjective opinions as objective facts. It also reinforces the journalist's authority while limiting critical engagement from the audience.

The use of cinematic and narrative elements in the introduction creates an engaging, almost novel-like setting. While this enhances reader engagement, it may distract from substantive political discourse and normalize displays of power and wealth associated with global leaders, reinforcing specific societal views.

The inclusion of mention of the journalist's upcoming book represents a blend of content with self-promotion. This reflects the commercialization of journalism, where personal branding and revenue considerations sometimes overshadow the core purpose of informing the public.

Omissions in the article (e.g., topics like Saudi women's rights, Yemen) are tailored to suit the target audience's interests. This editorial gatekeeping shapes public perceptions and reinforces ideological narratives. It reflects broader trends of audience commodification and market-driven content in journalism.

The article both overtly and covertly contrasts Saudi authoritarianism with U.S. democracy, on balance favouring U.S. superiority. While ostensibly fair, the discussion aligns with pre-existing narratives about Western governance models, using the interview as a rhetorical rather than evidential device.

The journalist's active involvement (e.g., prompting political reactions) is highlighted, shifting the narrative focus onto his role. This elevates the journalist's authority and personal brand, while illustrating the modern trend of media figures becoming integral to geopolitical discourse.

The framing of the article positions media as both a mediator and participant

in global politics. By aligning themselves with power structures, journalists can reinforce dominant ideologies. The media's role extends beyond reporting and expressing opinion to shaping narratives and influencing diplomatic dialogues.

7. Conclusion

The choice to conduct a detailed CDA of one opinion piece, rather than a selectively focused analysis of one specific aspect of many, goes against the pattern of many of the studies reviewed. Yet I feel it was valuable. It revealed a number of unexpected features, not least that the power mentioned in the title, between the governance of the US and Saudi Arabia, was not the only power evident in the piece. In many ways the piece served more to enhance the power of Bret Baier and Fox News. On reflection, the differences from a standard opinion piece as instantiated in the literature (as described in 2) do chime with today's journalistic context and the stance of Fox (as described in 4.1). Still, they indicate more work needs to be done.

Further analysis could valuably investigate many specific patterns found in this analysis across a wider range of journalistic opinion pieces. These include how the hedge-minimizing stylistic choice aligns with broader trends in media language, and audience reactions to assertive language, hence its role in reinforcing or undermining trust in media institutions. Again, more needs to be understood about how the novel-like narrative style used in places, with reporter as protagonist in real events, affects the credibility and perceived neutrality of the journalist. The analysis highlighted the interplay of media, power, and public engagement, showing how journalistic practices contribute to constructing both the discourse and the events it reports. Furthermore, the nature of audience reactions to journalist self-promotion within texts with other apparent purposes needs more attention.

Finally, the cavalier use of what was claimed as the main opinion source (the interview) and the neglect of so much of its content potentially has great ideological or social significance. Patterns across multiple pieces of journalism are needed to identify recurring themes in omissions and the impact of such practices on public discourse and societal knowledge. Overall, more needs to be understood about how power operates in today's media, both in legitimizing elite voices and in shaping public understanding of political and social structures.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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