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Episode #047

Fox News // The Presidential Propaganda Machine

April 24, 2020



[00:00:03] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English, the show where you can learn fascinating things about the world and listen to interesting stories at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:20] I'm Alastair Budge.

[00:00:22] Today we are going to be talking about Fox News.

[00:00:27] It is one of the most powerful TV channels in the United States and the preferred TV channel of the current US president.

[00:00:36] And it's like [Marmite](#)¹, people either love it or they hate it.

¹ a brand name for a type of soft, dark brown, salty-tasting food for spreading on bread, made from yeast, that is popular in the UK. If something is referred to as 'Marmite', it means that it divides opinion



[00:00:42] Indeed, four out of 10 Americans say they trust it and about the same say that they distrust it.

[00:00:51] So today we are going to talk about how it all works, who is behind Fox News, what their [motives](#)² may be, how Fox News really makes money and what the [implications](#)³ of this might be for the future of Fox News and how we think about the media.

[00:01:11] It's going to be quite an exciting one. I think.

[00:01:14] Before we get into all that though, let me just take a minute to remind you that you can get a copy of the transcript and key vocabulary for this episode and all the other episodes for that matter over on the website, which is [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:01:30] The transcript and key vocabulary is super helpful for following along with the podcast and means that you can understand every word and build up your vocabulary at the same time as listening to the podcast.

[00:01:44] So that's definitely worth checking out if you haven't done so already.

[00:01:48] The link to go to is [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:01:53] Okay then let's talk about Fox News.

² a reason for doing something

³ consequences, results



[00:01:58] For those of you that don't know much about it, Fox News is an American [conservative](#)⁴ news channel.

[00:02:06] It's actually America's most watched network on basic [cable](#)⁵ with an average of 3.5 million [prime time](#)⁶ viewers.

[00:02:16] And it has been getting more and more popular over the past few years.

[00:02:21] Why is this?

[00:02:22] Well, there are a few theories, but the obvious one might be that Fox News has a very, very [cosy](#)⁷ relationship with President Trump.

[00:02:33] From an early stage in the Trump presidency, and even beforehand, during his [candidacy](#)⁸, Fox News decided it was going to be almost [unwaveringly](#)⁹ loyal to the president.

⁴ tending to emphasise the importance of preserving traditional cultural and religious values, and to oppose change, esp. sudden change

⁵ the system of sending television programmes or phone signals along wires under the ground

⁶ in television and radio broadcasting, the time when the largest number of people are watching or listening

⁷ comfortable and pleasant, especially (of a building) because of being small and warm

⁸ the fact of being a candidate in an election

⁹ without changing



[00:02:47] And its loyalty has been repaid by Trump frequently re-tweeting [clips¹⁰](#), telling people to watch Fox News and appearing on the new shows.

[00:02:59] And no matter what you might think of Donald Trump, he certainly does bring in viewers.

[00:03:05] For those of you who are unfamiliar with Fox News and haven't ever watched any of the [clips](#) of Fox News, you might think, [hang on¹¹](#), if it's just the news, why is one particular channel so popular?

[00:03:24] Isn't the news or pretty much the same nowadays?

[00:03:29] Don't they just report what has happened?

[00:03:32] Well, despite being called Fox News, the majority of the content that is actually on Fox News is more opinion than news.

[00:03:43] The typical [format¹²](#) is one of their [star¹³](#) hosts, their [star](#) presenters will talk about something that has happened, but will give a very strong opinion on the event and on the [implications](#) for Fox News viewers, for ordinary Americans, as they would say.

¹⁰ a short part of a film or television programme

¹¹ to wait for a short time

¹² a pattern, plan, or arrangement

¹³ most important, famous



[00:04:05] And when it comes to Trump, which it almost always does with Fox News, the [default](#)¹⁴ position of almost every [anchor](#)¹⁵, almost every presenter on Fox News, is to [staunchly](#)¹⁶ defend him.

[00:04:22] So it's not so much news, but rather a constant [stream](#)¹⁷ of opinion.

[00:04:29] If you switch on Fox News looking for a balanced and objective view of the day's events, well, I think you will end up slightly disappointed.

[00:04:42] But the thing here is that opinion sells, opinion is what [draws in](#)¹⁸ the viewers.

[00:04:51] In the [era](#)¹⁹ of information being so easy to distribute, the value of actually being [on the ground](#)²⁰ and reporting news has reduced.

[00:05:04] When news can be reported by anyone with a Twitter account, the value of just being there and saying what happened is much less today than it was even 10 years ago.

¹⁴ the thing that exists or happens if you do not change it intentionally by performing an action

¹⁵ a person who is the main news reader on a television or radio news programme

¹⁶ strongly

¹⁷ a continuous flow of things or people

¹⁸ attracts

¹⁹ a period of time of which particular events or stages of development are typical

²⁰ among the general public



[00:05:19] And Fox News knows this.

[00:05:22] Out of the top 15 [cable](#) shows in America, Fox News has 13 of them, and they all do a pretty similar thing.

[00:05:32] It's a strong conservative opinion that is almost universally based on defending or [complimenting](#)²¹ President Trump.

[00:05:42] And this, for a country with a theoretically free media that talks so strongly about the power of free speech, this can seem just mad.

[00:05:55] Lou Dobbs, who is a Fox News host and an incredibly loyal Trump supporter, recently asked his viewers to rate President Trump's [handling](#)²² of the coronavirus pandemic.

[00:06:10] Viewers were given three options.

[00:06:13] Very good, excellent, and superb.

[00:06:18] Right, that seems to be reaching some North Korean levels of [obsession](#)²³ with one's dear leader.

²¹ a remark that expresses approval, admiration, or respect

²² a remark that expresses approval, admiration, or respect

²³ something or someone that you think about all the time



[00:06:26] And despite the rest of the world. I think we can safely say not putting Trump's performance on coronavirus in any of those three categories, those three categories do strangely enough, seem appropriate for the Fox audience.

[00:06:44] 63% of Fox News viewers did rate his performance as excellent.

[00:06:52] Well, I guess at least most of them didn't rate it as superb as that really would make you think of it being like a Pyongyang type situation.

[00:07:01] So from an outsider's perspective, as a non-American, it's just mad to think that this is what millions of people are actually consuming every evening.

[00:07:14] While it might be mad on some levels, Fox News certainly knows its audience and it knows what they want.

[00:07:23] It knows that Trump sells, it knows the [buttons to press](#)²⁴ to [ignite](#)²⁵ its audience, and it doesn't [shy away](#)²⁶ from [controversy](#)²⁷, it doesn't avoid controversy.

²⁴ ways to encourage a particular feeling

²⁵ to (cause to) start burning or explode, to feel strongly about something

²⁶ to avoid something that you dislike, fear, or do not feel confident about

²⁷ a lot of disagreement or argument about something, usually because it affects or is important to many people



[00:07:38] And because of its [outspoken²⁸](#) views on certain topics, Fox News has [got into some hot water²⁹](#), it has got into quite a lot of trouble with the advertisers that pay to show adverts on its shows.

[00:07:54] Lots of the bigger shows have lost a load of their advertisers.

[00:08:00] There have been big social media campaigns where customers try to get companies to stop advertising on Fox News saying that they will [boycott³⁰](#), they will stop shopping with them, if they don't.

[00:08:15] On one level, these [petitions³¹](#) have worked, they have served their purpose.

[00:08:21] Lots of advertisers have indeed [pulled³²](#) their adverts from Fox News.

[00:08:27] One show, the Tucker Carlson show, has lost dozens of advertisers, and it's estimated that advertising [revenue³³](#), the money they have made from advertising, has fallen by tens of millions of dollars.

²⁸ expressing strong opinions very directly without worrying if other people are offended

²⁹ got into trouble

³⁰ to refuse to buy a product or take part in an activity as a way of expressing strong disapproval

³¹ a document signed by a large number of people demanding or asking for some action from the government or another authority

³² removed

³³ the income that a government or company receives regularly



[00:08:43] Brands just don't want to be featured alongside programmes with views that their customers might find offensive, so they've just stopped showing ads on Fox News.

[00:08:56] But, and here is where it gets really interesting, even with no advertising money Fox News is still a very [profitable](#)³⁴ organisation and it manages to make a vast amount of money.

[00:09:10] How this actually works is fascinating.

[00:09:15] So there are TV channels, [cable](#) companies, and customers, the viewers.

[00:09:22] Customers generally subscribe to a [cable](#) company which provides them with a series of different TV channels.

[00:09:32] The TV channels charge the [cable](#) networks a [fee](#)³⁵ for each customer, no matter whether that customer ever actually watches the channel.

[00:09:43] And Fox News charges a huge amount to the [cable](#) companies, which they then pass on to the customers.

[00:09:54] So to give you an example, while a network like MSNBC charges about 33 cents for each customer, CNN charges between 70 and 90 cents per customer, Fox News charges around \$2 for each customer.

³⁴ the income that a government or company receives regularly

³⁵ an amount of money paid for a particular piece of work or for a particular right or service



[00:10:14] It can afford to charge so much, firstly because it brings in lots of viewers, the [cable](#) companies know that if they don't offer Fox News, they will lose subscribers, and \$2 to pass onto a customer isn't that much when the majority of American [cable](#) subscribers are paying over \$75 a month.

[00:10:38] These [fees](#) that Fox gets from the [cable](#) companies and ultimately from the customers are worth 1.8 billion a year.

[00:10:49] So just to [reiterate](#)³⁶ on that, even if you don't watch Fox News, if you have a [cable](#) subscription with Fox News in it, you're still paying about \$2 a month for Fox News.

[00:11:04] Secondly, which I think is also pretty interesting, Fox News does an excellent job at presenting itself as the voice of the [underdog](#)³⁷, the voice of the true real American, and anyone who tries to silence it is an enemy of the people, an enemy of free speech, an enemy of American freedoms.

[00:11:29] So why I mentioned this is that Fox News hosts frequently talk about the fact that [cable](#) companies are looking to remove Fox News from their packages, and it asks, or rather encourages its viewers to complain, telling them that their [cable](#) company is trying to silence them, is trying to silence Fox News.

³⁶ to say something again, once or several times

³⁷ a person or group of people with less power, money, etc. than the rest of society



[00:11:54] Understandably, this means that there's pressure from the [cable](#) companies not to drop Fox News and means that Fox News can charge larger and larger amounts of money to the [cable](#) companies.

[00:12:08] They are basically holding them [hostage](#)³⁸, using their viewers as [hostages](#).

[00:12:15] So even without advertisers, Fox News can still survive and even [flourish](#)³⁹.

[00:12:22] Such is the power of its community, of presenting itself as the voice of the [underdog](#)⁴⁰, of the [underrepresented](#)⁴¹ American.

[00:12:33] The thing that I find particularly funny about this, or maybe it's not even that funny at all, is that Fox News isn't even that American.

[00:12:44] It was created by an Australian, the media [mogul](#)⁴², Rupert Murdoch.

³⁸ someone who is taken as a prisoner by an enemy in order to force the other people involved to do what the enemy wants

³⁹ to grow or develop successfully

⁴⁰ If a type of person or thing is underrepresented in a group or organization, there are not enough of them in it:

⁴¹ If a type of person or thing is underrepresented in a group or organisation, there are not enough of them in it:

⁴² an important person who is very rich or powerful



[00:12:50] Now, the empire of Rupert Murdoch is too wide and far reaching to explain just as a small section in a podcast, but he is the boss of NewsCorp, a huge media [conglomerate](#)⁴³ that [spans](#)⁴⁴ newspapers and TV across the world.

[00:13:09] And whatever Murdoch's personal opinions may be, he is evidently incredibly [savvy](#)⁴⁵, very smart, and knows what makes people want to read or watch something.

[00:13:23] And from early on it was clear that he had an idea about what people wanted.

[00:13:30] Here's a quote from him in 1996 when Fox News launched, he said, "the appetite for news, particularly news that explains to people how it affects them is expanding enormously".

[00:13:48] Whether news that explains to people how it affects them is still true is slightly [dubious](#)⁴⁶, but 25 years ago, Murdoch saw that people wanted opinion.

[00:14:01] Opinion is what sells, opinion is what brings people together.

⁴³ a company that owns several smaller businesses whose products or services are usually very different

⁴⁴ covers (normally a large area)

⁴⁵ practical knowledge and ability

⁴⁶ thought not to be completely true or not able to be trusted



[00:14:06] And if you can make people think that their views are being [aired](#)⁴⁷, that they are being supported, then they will feel more and more loyal to the network that they feel is supporting them.

[00:14:21] So who are these people that are watching Fox News?

[00:14:25] Who are these 3.5 million people who are watching it every day?

[00:14:29] Well, I guess this might not come as a huge surprise to you.

[00:14:34] Firstly, it's mainly conservatives, the programming is all pretty conservative.

[00:14:40] And while Democrats [tend](#)⁴⁸ to be split between a few different channels, there isn't really anything in America that [unites](#)⁴⁹ conservatives and those on the right, in terms of news channels, like Fox News.

[00:14:57] The viewers are also in general, older.

[00:15:01] The [median](#)⁵⁰ age is 68, and nine out of 10 are white.

⁴⁷ given time on television or radio

⁴⁸ to be likely to behave in a particular way or have a particular characteristic

⁴⁹ to join together as a group, or to make people join together as a group; to combine

⁵⁰ The median value is the middle one in a set of values arranged in order of size



[00:15:07] So you can, I guess, see why the Trump message [resonates](#)⁵¹ with this group of [predominantly](#)⁵² older, conservative, white Americans.

[00:15:19] It's about making America great again, going back to some [idyllic](#)⁵³ time that people like Fox News viewers imagine as preferable to a modern globalised world.

[00:15:31] There is one interesting development though, relating to the Fox News audience that could end up being the [undoing](#)⁵⁴ of Fox News, the [downfall](#)⁵⁵ of the channel.

[00:15:44] At the start of the Coronavirus outbreak, Fox News [downplayed](#)⁵⁶ the impact of the virus, with one host even calling it another attempt to [impeach](#)⁵⁷ the president.

[00:15:59] Despite the fact that Fox News has now completely reversed its position, has changed its opinion, even saying that it always said that the Coronavirus was an

⁵¹ If an experience or memory resonates, it makes you think of another similar one, or you agree with it

⁵² mostly

⁵³ An idyllic place or experience is extremely pleasant, beautiful, or peaceful

⁵⁴ the cause of someone's failure, or of someone's loss of power or money

⁵⁵ (something that causes) the usually sudden destruction of a person, organisation, or government and their loss of power, money, or health

⁵⁶ made to seem less important than it should be

⁵⁷ to make a formal statement saying that a public official is guilty of a serious offence in connection with their job, especially in the US



important thing to take seriously, there are [countless](#)⁵⁸ times in its programmes where it certainly [minimised](#)⁵⁹ the threat.

[00:16:19] And of course its viewers are loyal and likely to believe what their favourite hosts tell them.

[00:16:27] Now, the current view is that the older you are, the more [liable](#)⁶⁰ you are to have health problems and even die from the coronavirus.

[00:16:36] And the Fox News viewers who had been told that the coronavirus wasn't anything to worry about, well, they are considerably older than the average.

[00:16:48] So there is a big fear at the moment that there will be some kind of huge [lawsuit](#)⁶¹ from the families of Fox News viewers who died from the coronavirus saying that the network [minimised](#) the risk, and so their viewers didn't take it seriously.

[00:17:06] Fox News is at the moment, very busy preparing itself for this as it could end up being an incredibly expensive case.

⁵⁸ very many, or too many to be counted

⁵⁹ to reduce something to the least possible level or amount

⁶⁰ having (legal) responsibility for something or someone

⁶¹ a problem taken to a law court by an ordinary person or an organisation rather than the police in order to obtain a legal decision



[00:17:17] Who knows what will happen, but it would be slightly [ironic](#)⁶² if something that the hosts had spent weeks calling a [hoax](#)⁶³ and nothing to worry about was the thing that finally [did for](#)⁶⁴ this network that has made billions of dollars through having a pretty [fast and loose](#)⁶⁵ relationship with the truth.

[00:17:41] Okay then that is it for today's episode on Fox News.

[00:17:47] As I said, I'm not an American, as you can tell from my accent, but it is pretty fascinating for an [outsider](#)⁶⁶ to think that this network really is so popular with so many Americans, and that shows that you and I might watch [clips](#) of and almost laugh at, are actually, some of the most popular news shows in America.

[00:18:10] Fascinating, but also pretty scary.

[00:18:13] So for our listeners who do live in America, as there are actually quite a few of you, I'd love to hear from you.

[00:18:21] What do you think about Fox News?

⁶² interesting, strange, or funny because of being very different from what you would usually expect

⁶³ a plan to deceive someone, such as telling the police there is a bomb somewhere when there is not one, or a trick

⁶⁴ to seriously damage something, or to seriously hurt or kill someone

⁶⁵ to treat something or someone without enough care

⁶⁶ a person who is not involved with a particular group of people or organisation or who does not live in a particular place



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[00:18:23] What do you think will happen to Fox News in 10 years time?

[00:18:28] The email to write into is hi hi@leonardoenglish.com.

[00:18:34] And as a final reminder, if you're looking for the transcripts and key vocabulary and also the bonus episodes, the place to go to is Leonardoenglish.com.

[00:18:46] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:18:51] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]



Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Marmite	a brand name for a type of soft, dark brown, salty-tasting food for spreading on bread, made from yeast, that is popular in the UK. If something is referred to as 'Marmite', it means that it divides opinion
Motives	a reason for doing something
Implications	consequences, results
Conservative	tending to emphasise the importance of preserving traditional cultural and religious values, and to oppose change, esp. sudden change
Cable	the system of sending television programmes or phone signals along wires under the ground
Prime time	in television and radio broadcasting, the time when the largest number of people are watching or listening
Cosy	comfortable and pleasant, especially (of a building) because of being small and warm
Candidacy	the fact of being a candidate in an election
Unwaveringly	without changing



Clips	a short part of a film or television programme
Hang on	to wait for a short time
Format	a pattern, plan, or arrangement
Star	most important, famous
Default	the thing that exists or happens if you do not change it intentionally by performing an action
Anchor	a person who is the main news reader on a television or radio news programme
Staunchly	strongly
Stream	a continuous flow of things or people
Draws in	attracts
Era	a period of time of which particular events or stages of development are typical
On the ground	among the general public
Complimenting	a remark that expresses approval, admiration, or respect
Handling	the way that someone deals with a situation or person



Obsession	something or someone that you think about all the time
Buttons to press	ways to encourage a particular feeling
Ignite	to (cause to) start burning or explode, to feel strongly about something
Shy away	to avoid something that you dislike, fear, or do not feel confident about
Controversy	a lot of disagreement or argument about something, usually because it affects or is important to many people
Outspoken	expressing strong opinions very directly without worrying if other people are offended
Got into some hot water	got into trouble
Boycott	to refuse to buy a product or take part in an activity as a way of expressing strong disapproval
Petitions	a document signed by a large number of people demanding or asking for some action from the government or another authority
Pulled	removed
Revenue	the income that a government or company receives regularly
Profitable	making or likely to make a profit
Fee	an amount of money paid for a particular piece of work or for a particular



right or service

Reiterate

to say something again, once or several times

Underdog

a person or group of people with less power, money, etc. than the rest of society

Hostage

someone who is taken as a prisoner by an enemy in order to force the other people involved to do what the enemy wants

Flourish

to grow or develop successfully

Underrepresented

If a type of person or thing is underrepresented in a group or organisation, there are not enough of them in it:

Mogul

an important person who is very rich or powerful

Conglomerate

a company that owns several smaller businesses whose products or services are usually very different

Spans

covers (normally a large area)

Savvy

practical knowledge and ability

Dubious

thought not to be completely true or not able to be trusted

Aired

given time on television or radio

Tend

to be likely to behave in a particular way or have a particular



characteristic

Unites

to join together as a group, or to make people join together as a group; to combine

Median

The median value is the middle one in a set of values arranged in order of size

Resonates

If an experience or memory resonates, it makes you think of another similar one

Predominantly

mostly

Idyllic

An idyllic place or experience is extremely pleasant, beautiful, or peaceful

Undoing

the cause of someone's failure, or of someone's loss of power or money

Downfall

(something that causes) the usually sudden destruction of a person, organisation, or government and their loss of power, money, or health

Downplayed

made to seem less important than it should be

Impeach

to make a formal statement saying that a public official is guilty of a serious offence in connection with their job, especially in the US

Countless

very many, or too many to be counted

Minimised

to reduce something to the least possible level or amount



Liable	having (legal) responsibility for something or someone
Lawsuit	a problem taken to a law court by an ordinary person or an organisation rather than the police in order to obtain a legal decision
Ironic	interesting, strange, or funny because of being very different from what you would usually expect
Hoax	a plan to deceive someone, such as telling the police there is a bomb somewhere when there is not one, or a trick
Did for	to seriously damage something, or to seriously hurt or kill someone
Fast and loose	to treat something or someone without enough care
Outsider	a person who is not involved with a particular group of people or organisation or who does not live in a particular place

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

You can email us at hi@leonardoenglish.com.

