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## **HOW POLARISATION IS REFLECTED IN THE U.S. NEWS AND MEDIA FRAMING OF THE CHARLIE KIRK ASSASSINATION**

Political polarisation has increasingly shaped both the content and reception of U.S. news media, influencing how citizens interpret political events and moral issues. The present research aims to comprehend the manifestation of political polarisation through the elaboration of a politically charged incident in the political setting of U.S. mainstream and social media. Through a comparative qualitative design, it examines how Fox News and MSNBC covered and subsequently framed the assassination of conservative commentator Charlie Kirk in September 2025, and how audiences on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) reread these frames. Based on Entman's four framing functions (1993) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) with a focus on tone, the study investigates the emotional and linguistic cues that express ideological meanings. The results indicate that the difference in framing is very stark. Fox News featured the event through the lens of morals and religion, heralding Kirk as a person of conservative values and a victim of injustice, and linking it to deeper systematic persecution of conservative values. While MSNBC switched from neutral reporting to personal commentary connecting the incident to the crisis of democracy. Social media responses under both outlets' posts deepened these narratives with emotional, moral, and accusatory discourse that changed news to a moral confrontation. The research deduces that the media acts as a frame that not only mirrors the ideological bias in society but also perpetuates it, as both the professional discourse and the audience's discourse help to uphold the partisan ethical divisions. The study asserts making sense of situational conflicts in a polarised media environment through framing as the primary dynamic of the propagation and communication of political polarisation. In doing so, the paper aims to contribute to ongoing debates on how framing, discourse, and audience interpretation interact to sustain ideological division in the contemporary media ecosystem.