



Broadcast News Remains Relevant in Age of Fake News, Social Media

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In the age of the lightning-fast news cycle, social media and fake news, broadcast newscasters' responsibility remains bringing viewers a concise and objective telling of the day's stories, said the three main anchors - ABC News' David Muir, CBS News' Jeff Glor and NBC News' Lester Holt - at PromaxBDA Station Summit in Las Vegas on June 26.

"That's one of our main responsibilities - to break through the noise and give people the bottom line," said Muir, who has anchored ABC News' World News Tonight since 2014. "Think about the way our lives have changed - from the moment you wake up in the morning, you check the headlines on your phone. Everything is hitting people all day long and our job is more important than ever to calm things down."

At NBC Nightly News, it's about differentiating itself with original content, said Holt.

"We have put an enormous amount of resources into beefing up our investigative unit, and our coverage of health, consumer, science, digital and social media issues. Those are the stories that are going to differentiate us. It's that added value that makes the difference," he said.

The three also said it's important to them to bridge the divide across an increasingly divided America.

Asked what he thought the most important story being covered in the news today was, Holt said: "The attack on the justice system - that is a thing that will have a long-reaching impact on our country. If we lose our trust in the justice system and in journalism, these are important pillars in a functioning democracy.

"Underlying all of this is what I call the death of shock. We're not shocked anymore as a country. There are stories that we'll all run to because they're enormous and within two days, no one's talking about them anymore. We are just at a point now that shock happens on a daily basis, [so] we are longer shocked."

For example, Holt said, while the media rushes to cover mass shootings - such as Parkland, Fla., Santa Fe, Texas, or Las Vegas last year - stories quickly come up that usurp the previous one. Soon, everyone is on to the next thing.

"That's one of the challenges of what we do," Holt said. "We've got to remind people that no, we've got to keep talking about this, this is an important topic. Parkland was unique in that it kept the nation's attention because of the activism of the students, but we're not talking about what happened in Santa Fe, Texas, just a few weeks ago. We're not even talking about what happened just down the street here less than a year ago."

Moderator Frank Biancuzzo, executive vice president and group head, Hearst Television, cited a study that found 90% of stories on President Donald Trump are negative. Biancuzzo asked the panel whether they thought coverage around the administration was balanced.

"I think the mainstream media, and I proudly count myself as one of them, have been fair," said Holt. "It's our job to call out the unusual and there is a lot of unusual with this administration. We have to call out the challenge to the notion of objective truth. We can't ignore these stories. We don't have the luxury of being numb to these stories. But we can [report on] it without a sense of arrogance and take a sober look at it."

All three anchors are spending more time in the field, having just traveled to Singapore to cover Trump's meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Holt covered events on the U.S.-Mexican border last week, while Glor spent Monday and Tuesday broadcasting from California and talking to a panel of California voters about their view of the current state of immigration in the U.S.

All three men have a presence on social media, although Muir's is the largest across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

"Social media is about connecting with the audience," Muir said. "[Former ABC News Anchor] Peter Jennings had this great conversation with America. But I recognize today that that conversation goes both ways. The only reason I do social media now and then is to let people know that we've got many of the same likes, desires, hopes and dreams for our families and our communities."

Glor, who was named anchor of the CBS Evening News late last year, has a more casual relationship with social media, saying "I'll post when I think it's interesting. A lot of times it's so family can see it so I'm not on a text chain with 80 different people. For me, Tweeting is more industry-focused and more news-related while Facebook or Instagram is more personal."

For Holt, social media is a "great tool to promote or stories but I think it's a generational thing. People my age are not as used to sharing personally and sometimes it's not fun wading in because the conversation can devolve very quickly."

[Paige Albinak is also a contributor to Broadcasting & Cable and a version of this story ran on www.broadcastingcable.com.]

[Images courtesy of Cashman Photo]