

2024 BOB SHILLING MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY: In the 2024 election year, polls have shown that people are divided, even when it comes to trust in their news sources. Polls have shown people only trust the news sources that reflect their own political views. In your reporting, how do you earn the trust of viewers and listeners regardless of their political affiliation?

Journalistic trust comes from the empowerment of a narrative through others' voices. While written, audio and other forms of communication hold their value, they are not nearly as effective as video. Unfortunately for journalists, we are in a time where people need to physically interact with something to fully believe its truth. The most successful medium of sharing news today, social media, lies in the spread of content that a mass audience can view. The reason I was drawn to broadcast at such a young age is because it allows for visual confirmation and emotional attraction. It allowed me to feel connected to a speaker's thoughts in an undeniably true way.

Saving local news is precisely the solution to breaking the divide within our communities. The polarization of our society creates a narrative today where journalists just make up thoughts and facts. I believe the best stories come from one-on-one conversations with relevant stakeholders. There are plenty of stories - good and bad - that directly affect one's community. A parent, for example, will be a lot more invested and thoughtful with an emotionally appealing story about their child's school system than a national story that has little significance to their day-to-day lives.

I approach every story with the bare minimum of preparation and background research for the stakeholders to tell me the story. This prevents a preconceived narrative in my mind. Our industry came to be as a messenger service. Therefore, I need to simply be the messenger of other's emotions and opinions. Raw emotion trumps any belief or idea. You can only get human emotion through an intimate, understanding conversation. Communities will prioritize shared emotions over polarized beliefs in any given local story. Broadcast allows reporters like me to share powerful visuals and emotional thoughts from our community. Once a bridge is formed between a community and the reporter, or news outlet, trust can be shared without any objection. In my opinion, it's not hard to earn trust if you just let others talk and present their ideas to push out into a journalistic platform without any interruption.

(Essay by Eddy Calkins, University of Maryland, Philip Merrill College of Journalism, winner of the 2024 Bob Shilling Memorial Scholarship).