

Intro Music ([00:00](#)):

Intro ([00:10](#)):

This is update one, the podcast of the national press club in Washington DC. Update-1 provides a forum for listeners to learn about national and international stories, focusing on journalism and communication issues, news and politics. Now, the latest edition of update one.

Bill Loveless ([00:36](#)):

Hi and welcome to update one. I'm Bill Loveless, a longtime member of the National Press Club. Our guest today is Jason Mollica, a season's strategic communications professional with 20 years of experience as a journalist, news producer and public relations practitioner. He's also a professor in communications at the American university in Washington, DC. Our topic today, how has the media covered the impeachment of president Trump? Jason, welcome to update one. Bill. Thanks for having me. I appreciate it. Jason. First, let's talk a little bit about you. You cut your teeth on TV and radio. Tell us about that.

Jason Mollica ([01:14](#)):

It was my first love when I graduated from temple university in 97 I kind of always wanted to be involved in the media in some way. A radio and television had a great appeal for me. So it was natural when I attended temple that that's the direction I wanted to go. I interned in Philadelphia at NBC 10 WCIU in Philadelphia. I worked for Metro networks, uh, cut my teeth on both sides. And then when I graduated, I started working at the NBC affiliate, but actually doing multimedia producing, uh, working for MSNBC on the internet, which at the time was the precursor to what we're seeing today as far as online news, uh, websites, et cetera. Uh, so I did that for a little bit and then got back into the TV side and worked in the sports department at WCU and then stayed in sports a little bit longer for, uh, with Comcast sports in Philadelphia and did some sports.

Jason Mollica ([02:05](#)):

But then, uh, right after nine 11, um, got a position in New York city with Fox news channel and started working there as a, uh, producing their crawl, uh, doing producing news feeds. Um, and then shortly thereafter in 2003, right around the time that, uh, the Iraq war started, uh, we launched Fox news radio when I was one of four people to help launch Fox news radio, uh, to what it is today, which is a digital news operation still on traditional radio. But, uh, my career kind of went in the media way for a long time and then got out and got into public relations. And, uh, after working in, uh, at a small university and then working at a firm, started my own consultancy, moved to DC. And this is where I am now in America.

Bill Loveless ([02:44](#)):

And here you are today. An interesting blend of experience. A one I'm sure to you, it's, uh, you conveyed to your students that makes for some interesting conversation. Absolutely. Here in your classroom. Well, the impeachment in the hearings, uh, uh, uh, regarding, uh, president Trump, uh, ever sieved enormous coverage and all forms of media. Uh, where did you get your news from? And, um, was it newspapers? Was it a local or national TV news? Um, how did you follow this?

Jason Mollica ([03:16](#)):

Well, I followed a lot of it using Twitter. I mean that's my kind of GoTo to start. Not that I askew, you know, any other form of media, but I start on Twitter because I like the immediacy of it. Um, I try to cut through the clutter. I don't really pay attention to, um, how, how it's branded in the sense of is it left, is it right, is it down the center? I get the news from there and then I transfer onto digital platforms like NBC news or CNN or Washington post wall street journal. I try to dive in. I still will pick up a traditional, you know, the print newspaper because I still love sitting there to read the print. I actually, I know it's, I, you know, I still walk into the news, the supermarket and it's right there at the service desk.

Jason Mollica (04:00):

Um, I, I like kind of being able to read it at any supermarket that I go into, usually has some newspaper in there. Um, but I start off nowadays by turning on Twitter and looking to see what the, you know, the top stories are what people are talking about, what's happened over night. Um, it's kind of gets back to that news gathering that I had when I was, uh, working in television and working in news. It was getting as much information as possible and then kind of disseminating what's truth, what's spin, uh, what really is just noise. And that's how I, that's how I learned and basically kind of kept up with all the impeachment process and kind of figured out, all right, what, what is the main point? What are the main points here? How do I convey that to my students and show them that this is how you cut through the clutter as well. And this is how you really have to go through and make sure that what you're following is fact and not spin.

Bill Loveless (04:53):

Right. Well, what would be some of the brands that you were going through in the course of the day? Once you've gone through your Twitter feed, you were following up, where were you going to get a deeper read?

Jason Mollica (05:02):

I would go to a Washington post, New York times wall street journal. Uh, I'd check out time. Uh, I would go onto Vox, uh, pretty much anywhere that I could at least get a lot of the story. I even, you know, honestly I'd go to PolitiFact. Um, and I'll go to real clear politics just to kind of get the lay of the land on, you know, what some of the surveys are like out there about the topic of impeachment. Like how do the American people feel about it? Are they really invested in the coverage of the story? Um, so that's where I try to try to try to get a big swath of land so that way I can really make a educated and informed decision. One of the things that I've tried to make sure that I, and I convey to my students is if I make a snap decision on something in news, if I do that, it's a big mistake.

Jason Mollica (05:51):

We've seen that if people jumped to a conclusion, it ends up being a mess. I had a, uh, uh, my boss at Fox news radio, Mitch Davis wants to tell me I would rather you be last and right than first and wrong. And that's never steered me wrong. You know, any of us heard that from editors over the years. Yeah. And I tell that to my students all the time and they may get sick of hearing it, but I will use that as, you know, to my dying breath that that will be my credo. I'd rather be last in right than first and wrong.

Bill Loveless (06:17):

It's hard. It's hard though to follow that these days where the pace of the news and the 24 hour cycle, uh, it just sort of, uh, bears down on, on journalists regardless of what they're covering.

Jason Mollica (06:28):

Yeah. I mean the minute a journalist, whether it's a, you know, whether it's a host like Jake Tapper or if it's a reporter, uh, that is relaying a story on what they're hearing from a source, uh, someone on social media, we'll call them a left wing nut job or right wing terrorist store. And I think those are the sort of things that don't obviously help a conversation. The media is constantly on the defensive and it's a shame because the media really, regardless of what you follow, I mean, you can believe that the HuffPost is leans left or the New York Times leans left. The New York Post is more of a, you know, it's a tabloid, so it's going to lean, right. Or because it's a, was a Murdoch entity. Things along those lines, you still need to realize that they have a job to do. They're providing a service, um, to us that, to the people that aren't covering the news, if, and yes, it's disseminated much quickly, more quickly today.

Jason Mollica (07:24):

Twitter is, uh, you know, uh, I don't want to say, uh, the fault of that, but it has helped accelerate wanting news yesterday, wanting the information two hours ago when we just got it. And I think that's something where journalists are doing their very best to keep up with this, uh, freight train that's moving forward and they're, they've done a great job I think. Um, but in this day and age, if they don't kind of fall into line to what the American public, at least a section of the American public believes that they should adhere to. Uh, they're automatically branded as you know, enemies. And, uh, I mean it doesn't help that the president of United States has sort of put them under the crosshairs as well.

Bill Loveless (08:04):

Right. So when you're in your, in your perusal of all this news and my goodness, there's been so much of it on this topic, uh, it's almost, uh, it truly has had a 24 hour cycle of its own. Um, what did you make of the coverage?

Jason Mollica (08:19):

I thought the coverage in itself was, was fair. I think, no matter, I think no matter where you watched, you're going to get at some sort of, you're going to get a different perspective and is different than Fox news channel. Uh, ABC is different than CNN, et cetera, so on and so forth. Uh, you'll get different coverage from the BBC that you would from say MSNBC. Uh, so I think overall it was, it was good, was it, it seemed the times to drone on. And I think in this day and age, the American people don't necessarily want to watch eight, nine hours of coverage of, uh, you know, the house and the Senate debating the issue. However, it is an important, it was, and it still is an important time in American history. There's only been, you know, a handful of instances where presidents have been impeached.

Jason Mollica (09:04):

Um, I think the one thing that did, uh, bring pause for me was when we started to see comparisons to Watergate. And that worried me because as you know, Watergate was a totally different animal, a different time. Uh, there was not as much media. Uh, the, I think the charges in many ways were not that what happened with president Trump was not as serious, but you saw the way things played out and how it wasn't a quick fix or a quick, uh, you know, judge and jury with Watergate, it took time to play out. Uh, it just seems now as we look back in history that it was, Oh, the president resign. It was Watergate and was like, no, the president resigned. He chose to resign. He was being, you know, there was a force to push him to resign, but he eventually said, I'm going to resign the presidency effective noon tomorrow. With the president, with president Trump,

Jason Mollica ([09:55](#)):

It was more of a defiance, you know, it, everything was false. And so when we saw the coverage, you automatically had, I think in many ways people had, in the back of the mind, the Democrats have an agenda, uh, at least from the perspective of those that were on the right. The Democrats have the agenda, the Republicans are protecting the president. We had all of this sort of loud noise going on and the, I think eventually the American people were just like, look, I'm, it's important but not as important as it should be for me to get really get to the crux of the story. Like you said, the 24 hour news cycle is such where we get all of this information. What can I do? What can you do to summarize what went on today so I can make my own decision? Again, I think the media in today's day and age, especially in this sort of, especially with impeachment, did the best job possible. Um, but when you do have talking heads where you have opinion programs, you're going to get a mishmash of what is fact and what's the opinion of say, a Sean Hannity or a Don lemon per se, that you're going to need different perspectives. So I think that plays into how people view and how even I view what went on during the impeachment hearing.

Bill Loveless ([11:05](#)):

Right. Well, I'm of an age where I can remember the Watergate hearings and, and it seemed as though at the time we were saturated, it was on all broadcast on TV. It was the first time in our lives or my life anyway, at that time that I could recall such coverage of an event. And, uh, we were all glued to the TVs to the extent we could be. But the difference was that, um, there wasn't a bombardment or it's probably not the best choice of words, but there wasn't just this, uh, uh, you know, uh, you know, almost amount of, uh, of news being broadcast in so many other outlets on the very topic. Uh, it wasn't being talked about 24 hours a day and you could always sort of watch it and then sort of catch up in the morning or to get the perspective in the morning from your, uh, from your morning newspaper or maybe the next day, even in your evening back in that time.

Bill Loveless ([11:53](#)):

So I think there was a big difference there. You said you thought it was fair buy in lodge and you know, I was looking at back, I think the polls varied on, on how the press did on this. Uh, there was a recent Hill, Harris X poll that found 45% of so-called independent voters, right? That's what they were looking at. So the coverage was not biased in favor of or against the president. A 40% thought it was biased against him and 14% it was biased in his favor. So, um, there was a perception out there of some bias, uh, right. In terms of the way they treated this.

Jason Mollica ([12:28](#)):

And I think in, in many ways to the bias being there is sort of a, I think in many ways it is well known today. I think the way things play out, we automatically assume, and we hear this from other outlets, you know, people that are on Twitter or Facebook and to think about it too, we're being, if depending on where you're getting your news, and even if you're getting it from multiple outlets during the impeachment hearings, you could watch different networks on Twitter. You could go to Facebook and watch it. You could even call it up on your computer and watch a digitally, uh, you could end up listening to it. So you're getting different perspectives and you can see why there would be a level of thinking of bias. Cause if you're watching it from, let's say you're watching it from CNN, there may be a level of lean left.

Jason Mollica ([13:15](#)):

And then just like with Fox, you know, there's going to be a place where leaning right. They're not going to necessarily see the Democratic point of view per se. Uh, just like on CNN, they may not lean to understand the Republican point of view, even though they may have, you know, democratic or Republican strategists on each network. So you can understand why there would be a level of thoughts of bias in some ways. But I think unfortunately because of the 24 hour news cycle and because of the networks that are out there today that sort of are considered the, the which way they lean, there will always be that level of, Oh there's a bias out there. And I think it's a matter, and again, this is from my own perspective, that's why I like to look at different perspectives and look to see how each are covering it and then say, okay, how can I make up my own mind and understand what's fact, what's not?

Jason Mollica ([14:04](#)):

But in today's age, not every, you know, Joe or Josephine American are taking journalism courses and looking to be and understand, you know, what's fact, what's fiction? And that's okay. Um, but I think in some ways we are living in a world that has an inherent bias because of the access to news. We choose to watch a certain network because we liked the personality. Well, they may decide that or they may have people on the network that think one way. And that's the opinion you're getting in their opinion programming as if during the day you may not have opinion, you may have certain opinions, but you're getting more of a straight forward new shot. And I think that's where the blurring of the line is. I think we see the primetime programming in cable news as the opinion shows, as the ones where, Oh, that's where I'm getting my facts. When their opinion shows, they'd been opinion shows for a long time now at those hours. Right. And, but the American people, and this isn't to say the American people aren't intelligent, it's just we're not looking at news as six to six 30, then the nightly news from 6:30 to 7. It's continuous. So it all blurs together now. Right,

Bill Loveless ([15:11](#)):

Right. And people are getting by and lodge, they get their news from, uh, online, either online or from, uh, a TV or from someplace other than the newspaper. Um, where, um, you know, perhaps you would spend more time reading an article, a 1500 word article, uh, breaking down and explaining something. It takes time. And, and, um, and, and, and people's attention spans, I think are much different today than they might've been in the past. So, uh, the becomes that much more important to consider what's available online, what's available on screens of various sorts. Um, what do you hear from your students on this? You talk about this in class?

Jason Mollica ([15:52](#)):

Absolutely. Got it. Are we talking about, well, I teach a a 300 level public relations course, which is basically the intro to public relations. It's called a comm three Oh one. I teach a a digital and social media, a strategic analytics class, which we're looking at how conversations are held and what they mean to brands, but also political campaigns, news organizations. Uh, I teach any as well as I teach a street, I teach a communications and society courts. We'll be talk about how to listen and you know, through nonverbal communications and you know, how stories lean. So we get the gamut of not only from my background from news, but also doing public relations as well. Um, we talk about it a lot. We talk about not just impeachment, but politics in general. Uh, there are students that not, aren't necessarily political junkies, but there are a great number of them that enjoy talking about this because this does impact their futures and impacts yours and mine.

Jason Mollica ([16:45](#)):

But our students, much more so. So when in my, for example, in my digital and social analytics class, we talk about, you know, uh, we'll look at Google trends and see, uh, how a recent debate or w I recent topic was, uh, searched and to see, all right, what was the top one at a certain point in time. All right, then let's look on social media to see, can we equate to what was trending on Google to what's going on on Twitter? Uh, we can see, especially during, uh, when we have the caucuses and we have campaigns and we have these, uh, we end up having debates. We can kind of tell what the hot topics are, not just by looking at Google but also looking at Twitter and see, ah, there's a trending topic. But was the topic trending because of just the overarching discussion or people talking about it from a perspective of they believed it or they didn't believe it?

Jason Mollica ([17:34](#)):

And I, we look at that all the time. So the students are keenly aware of what's going on. Uh, they, they're, at least from my perspective and talking to other professors as well, there is an interest in talking about this all the time because it is an imp. It impacts us, not just because we're here in DC because when they move on from American University and this program, they're going to see what happens in this election, impact their lives five, six, seven, eight years down the road. So yeah, it's a, it's a night. It's a great conversation to have. We, I you get the students are, are very in tune, what's going on. It's no longer other days where it's just, Oh, what's going on? And they don't, they're paying attention very much so. Very much so.

Bill Loveless ([18:15](#)):

And they come in and they talk about it. I mean, they tell you what, uh, what they had been reading or watching or listening to.

Jason Mollica ([18:22](#)):

Oh yeah. We, I, many of my classes, we usually start off with a topic of the day and I like to bring that up because I want to hear what the students feel. I want one of the requirements for my classes and many of the others is they need to read a daily newspaper, whether it's digital or in print or keep up to date on the news that's going on in my classes. I have students follow along with a hashtag so we can share stories and whether it's, uh, the, you know, a digital angle to something or what's the social media impact on a certain topic we are talking about, you know, what's going on politically. So they, they do come in, they talk, they get, they freely give their opinions. I mentioned all my classes. I don't care what side of the aisle you're on. Let's talk about the issues. Let's talk about what you're seeing and why you think it impacts, uh, us on a greater scale and what, and what we're talking about in the classroom. How is it going to impact the country six months from now?

Speaker 3 ([19:10](#)):

Yeah. And so, I mean, do they think the, uh, did they have any sort of opinion on what they were seeing on what they're seeing?

Jason Mollica ([19:16](#)):

They'll, they'll make, you know, they'll make it, you know, as far as they'll tell, talk about, Oh, what they thought about a debate. Or they'll, you know, sometimes they'll even say, you know, after a while the debate just got, so it just back and forth. I couldn't even follow what was going on. You're talking impeachment. Exactly. Right. And after a while they, I think it was, I want to get the best information possible. And there are some that when we do we talk about topics in class. How do you feel about the

impeachment? Pete students will say it, drones on, I can't continue to keep up with it. It's not that I'm not interested, but it's, it's like it gets to the point where I can't watch eight hours of coverage because I have class to go to or I have an internship, uh, or there's a project due.

Jason Mollica ([19:56](#)):

So they are interested, they are invested in keeping in touch with what's going on. They don't want to feel like they're not getting all of the information. And I think that lends to, to, in my opinion, a bright future for the country. Because regardless of the side of the aisle you're on, they both, they, I've had number of students say in my classes how they want to see the sort of the partisanship gone. They want to see more being together. They want to see bipartisan, uh, behaviors. They want to see more agreement and working together instead of the separation of the Isles.

Bill Loveless ([20:30](#)):

Yeah. You're encouraged by what you hear from your student.

Jason Mollica ([20:33](#)):

I am. yeah. And it's nice because, you know, I think you can easily go on, whether it be the news and the newspaper or hop on social media and feel like things are negative. Everything, you know, it's, everything's going to hell in a hand basket per se. But I, when I talked to the students and I'm not just, you know, kind of painting it with a blue and bright brush, but I'm inspired by my students. I think the, the future is bright and I really do believe that, uh, they have the best interest of what is in store for them. But also if they choose to make an impact on this country in some bigger way, uh, they have a good heart and good mind, uh, to do that. Yeah.

Bill Loveless ([21:11](#)):

Well, Jason Mollica, let's leave it on that rather a happy note. Sure. Uh, and thank you for joining us on Update-1.

Jason Mollica ([21:17](#)):

it's a pleasure to be here. Thanks again, Bill

Outro Music ([21:24](#)):

[Outro Music]

Outro ([21:29](#)):

Update-1 is a production of the national press club's broadcast podcast committee. You can comment on this podcast or any episode of update one by sending an email to update one podcast that's update the number one podcast@gmail.com. Thanks for listening to Update-1.