Can the 60 Minutes brand recover?

I have been a loyal *60 Minutes* viewer for years. Every Sunday night at 7:00 p.m. you'll find me watching CBS (unless of course there is a football game…).

This season, I barely recognize the program that I used to love. First, there was a bizarre disjointed piece ostensibly about humpback whales but I was unclear on the point. Then there was an infomercial for Lamborghini, where Scott Pelley pretty much used *60 Minutes* in order to test drive the world's most expensive car.

A couple of weeks ago, we learned how Amazon will be using drones to deliver packages (maybe), and in the process the Internet behemoth got lots and lots and lots of publicity.

Then, there's the political stuff. Lara Logan based her reporting on an unvetted and unreliable source to excoriate the Obama administration's response in Benghazi. She has since been "disciplined." And last night there was a fluff piece on the NSA. CBS promoted the NSA piece as the first time journalists have ever been let into the secretive agency. In fact, the "journalist" in question was John Miller, a former intelligence guy.

Given the controversy surrounding the NSA and its tactics in light of Edward Snowden's revelations, you'd think *60 Minutes* would want to try to find out what is actually going on. Instead, Miller barely questioned Keith Alexander (the head of the NSA). He actually fed him lines, to the effect of "so, you don't actually listen to people's conversations." There was no counterpoint to Alexander's assertions. No push back. No interviews with people opposed to NSA tactics. Miller seemed to agree with everything Alexander said. Both men thought it

was “weird” that Snowden would cover himself and his computer screen when working on it at night. He probably was aware that he was being spied on by the NSA! Esquire has a great piece on it, worth a read: 60 Minutes Weird NSA Propaganda Wasn’t Even Good Propaganda.

In my opinion, *60 Minutes* has failed its brand promise, that is, to provide tough investigative journalism or original reporting on interesting subjects (in fairness, Bob Simon’s piece last night about Egypt’s Copts was good). Will *60 Minutes* be able to recover? If it continues on this editorial trajectory it will not. There was a lot of angry and dissatisfied chatter on Twitter about the NSA story. And there has been pushback on the Benghazi report and the Amazon piece too.

News organizations depend on trust. If you don’t trust them, there is little point to what they are doing. You would never pick up a tabloid and believe everything you read there. You know its gossip and its meant to entertain. But when you watch *60 Minutes*, you expect well researched stories. Well, maybe not any more.

Thoughts?

UPDATE:

The New York Times Media Equation column has an excellent look into this:

“When 60 Minutes Checks Its Journalistic Skepticism at the Door.”