

# Living in a post-truth world: Building your personal baloney detection kit

Easton White  
Alan Hastings

Winter 2018

# Living in a post-truth world: Building your personal ~~baloney~~ **bullshit** detection kit

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## World

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## EUROPE

# Russia claims it can wipe out US Navy with single 'electronic bomb'



Published April 19, 2017



# What happened?

- April 12, 2014, a Russian Warplane flew close to the United States Navy destroyer ship the Donald Cook
- Pentagon issued statement that the ship was fine, but the Russian's actions were "provocative and unprofessional"

Where did this story come from?

What are the facts?

# SHOCK TACTICS Russian media claims country can wipe out entire US Navy with a single 'electronic bomb' in bizarre propaganda report

Russian news report claims electronic signal jamming weapon can render planes, ships and missiles useless

By Tom Michael

19th April 2017, 12:12 am | Updated: 7th June 2017, 2:41 pm

# April 15, 2017: Russian television Rossiya-1 runs story about the 2014 incident

- Included information about the radio-electric waves that deactivated the destroyer's main systems
- Quote from Frank Gorenc, the former commander of the United States Air Force in Europe



# Posts spread on social media



**Andrey Dergachev** shared a [link](#).

April 18, 2014

My favorite Mary!

I'm sorry I didn't write you for a whole week. I was taking a course of psychological rehabilitation at our base in Romania. I can tell that something terrible happened. And not only with me but also with all our gallant crew of destroyer "Donald Cook".


Our destroyer armed with the best systems defeat the enemy, no such aircraft, missiles or submarines, which we could not catch. Our system "Aegis" can confuse even ballistic missiles. To serve this ship can only best sailors, brave and despising death, as buffaloes, Arizona.



Now, my dear, when our "Donald Cook" has entered the Black Sea to high to raise the flag of freedom and democracy, the captain put us on the deck and said in a speech: "Guys, we have a very important mission is to demonstrate the face of America before unbelted Russian bear. You all know that the Russians took away from democratic Ukraine half of the territory of Crimea and preparing to chop off her second half. This




# Parody website

Satirical piece wrote about the incident in the Black sea and included a fake description of a crewman's account of an electronic bomb

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[ДМИТРИЙ СЕДОВ](#) | 17.04.2014 | [МНЕНИЕ](#)


 1833



## «Этот проклятый русский металлолом...»

Моя любимая Мэри! Прости, что не писал тебе целую неделю. Я проходил курс психологической реабилитации на нашей базе в Румынии. Должен тебе сказать, что случилось страшное. И не только со мной, но и со всем экипажем нашего доблестного эсминца «Дональд Кук». Наш эсминец вооружен самыми лучшими системами поражения


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[главная](#) [политика](#) [экономика](#) [культура](#) [мнение](#)



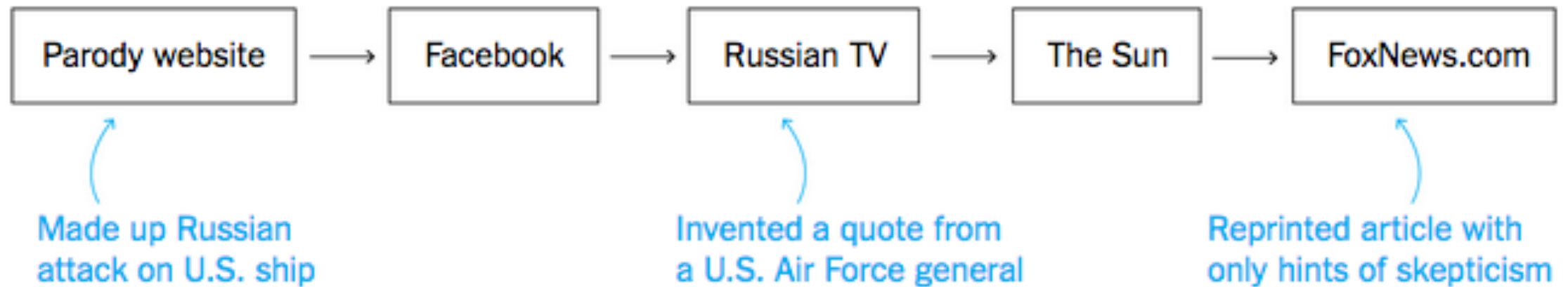
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# Timeline of fake news

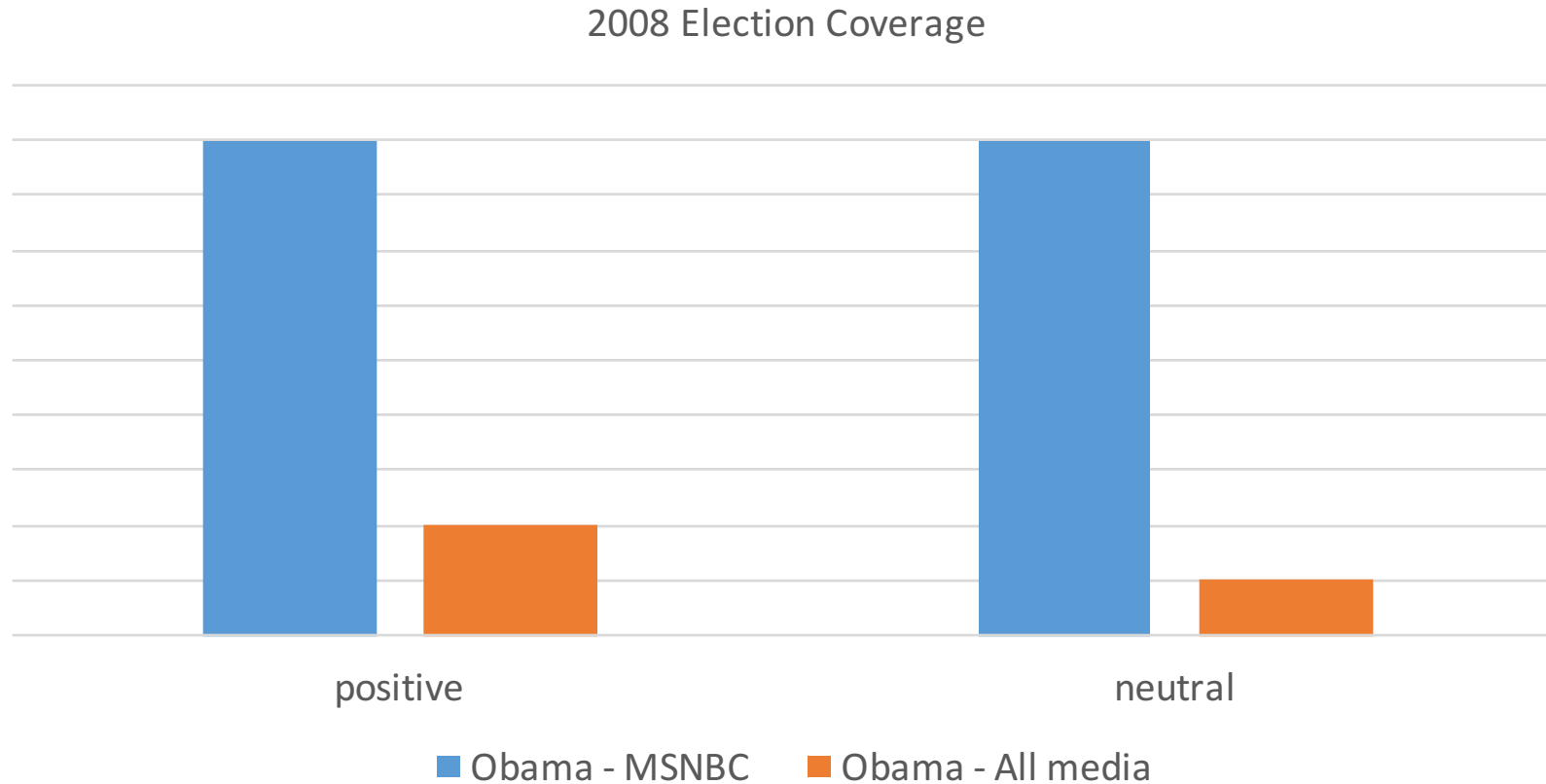


# Example of fake news and its consequences

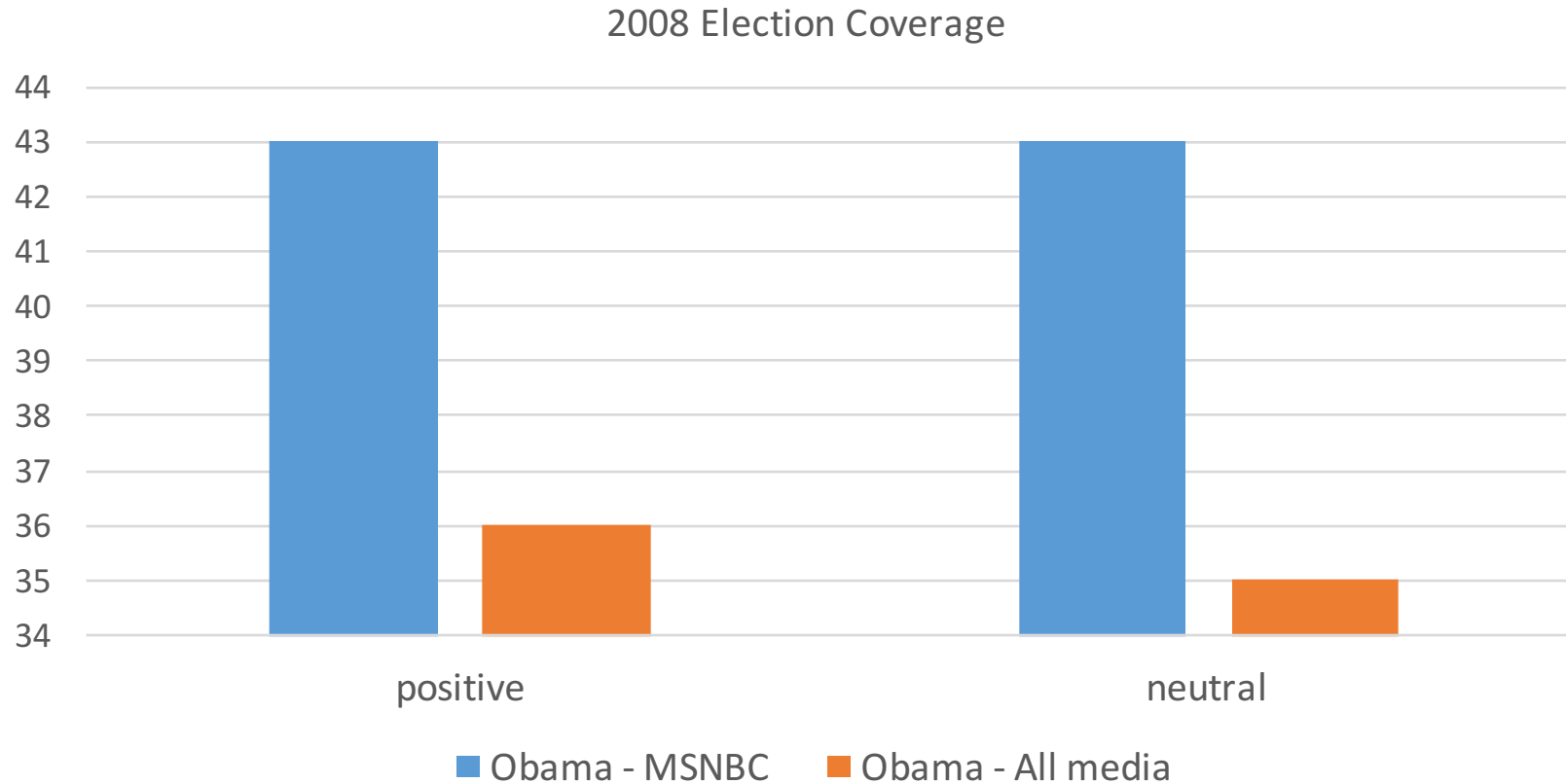
- Not just all fun and games

News and social media shape our perspective

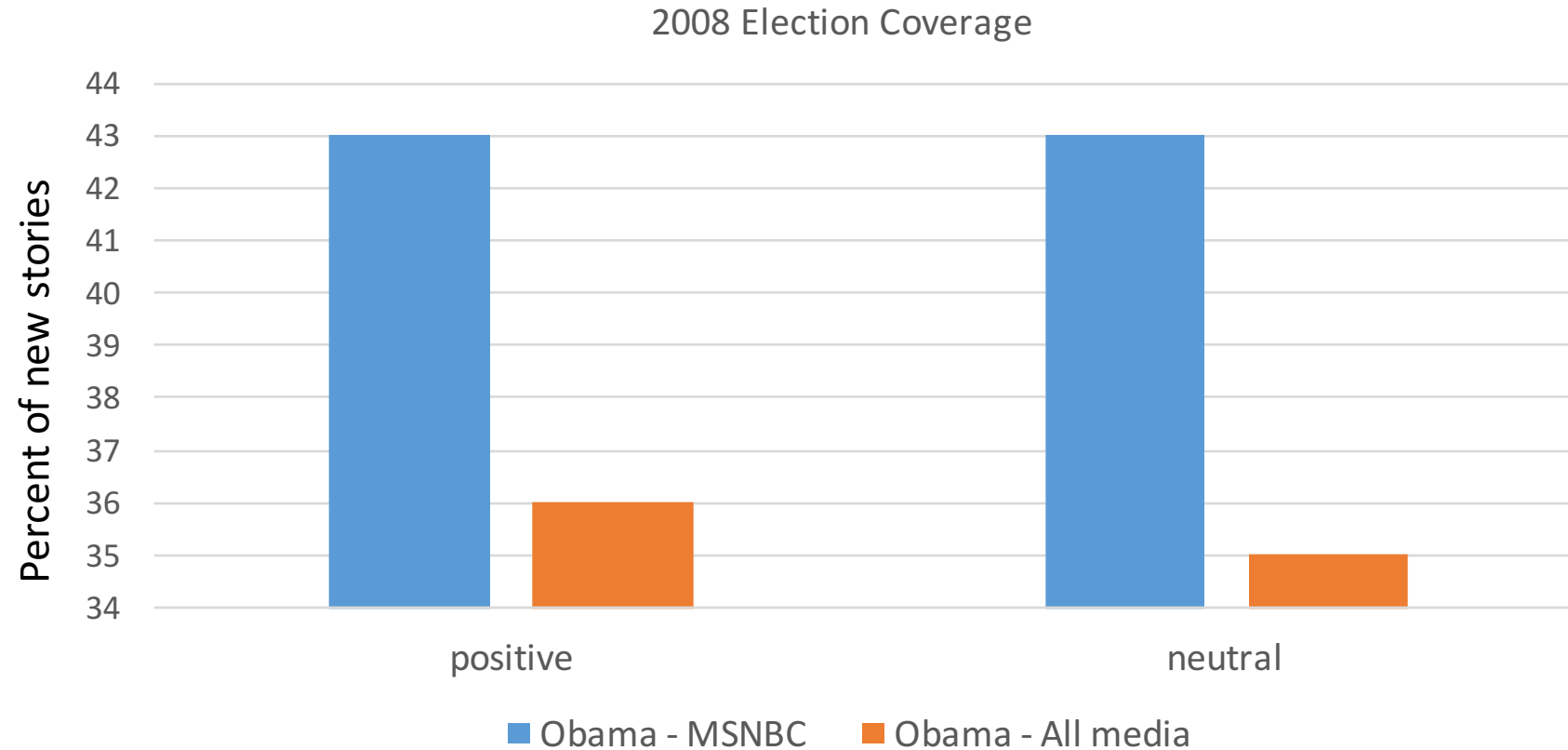
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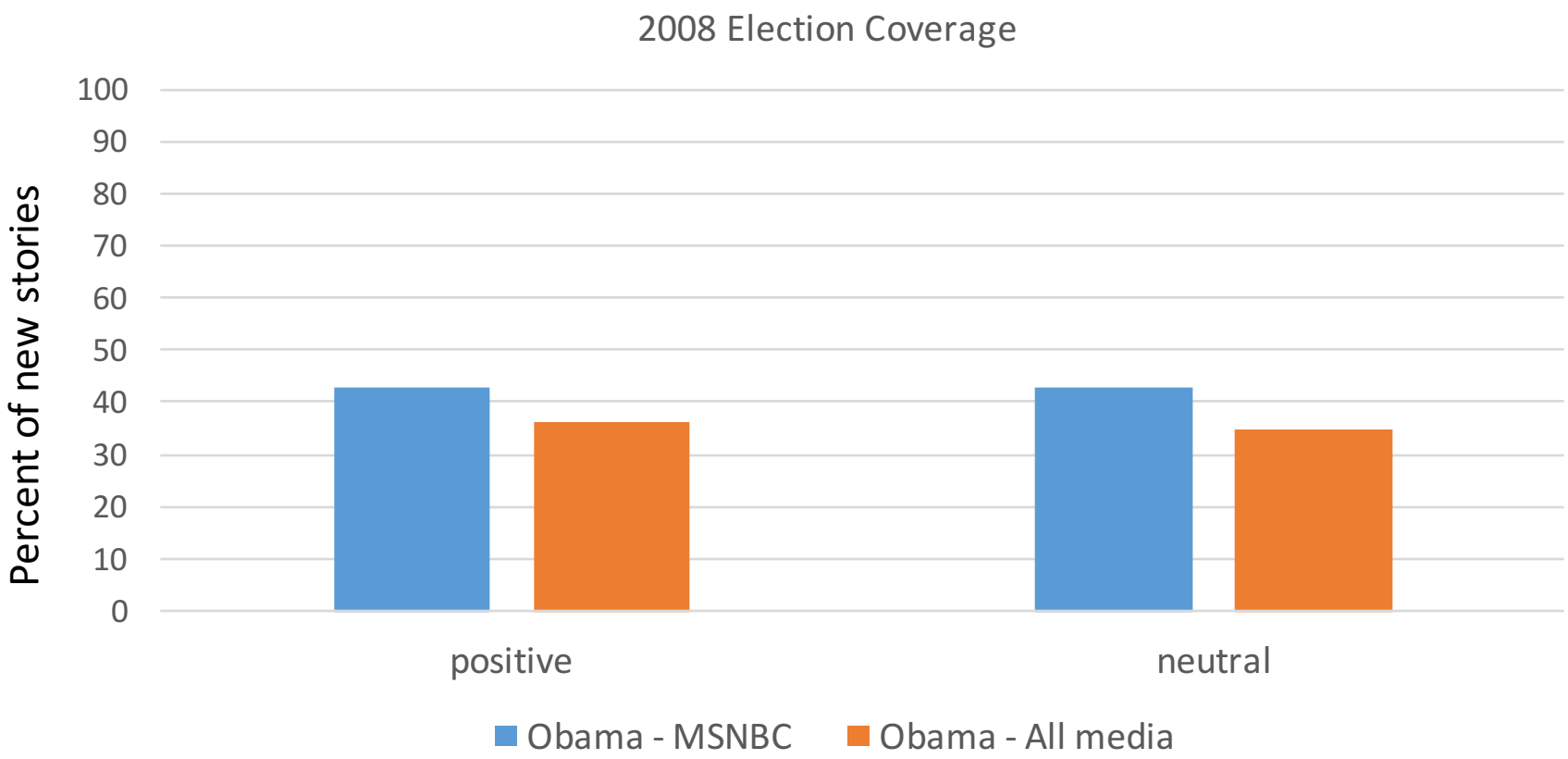


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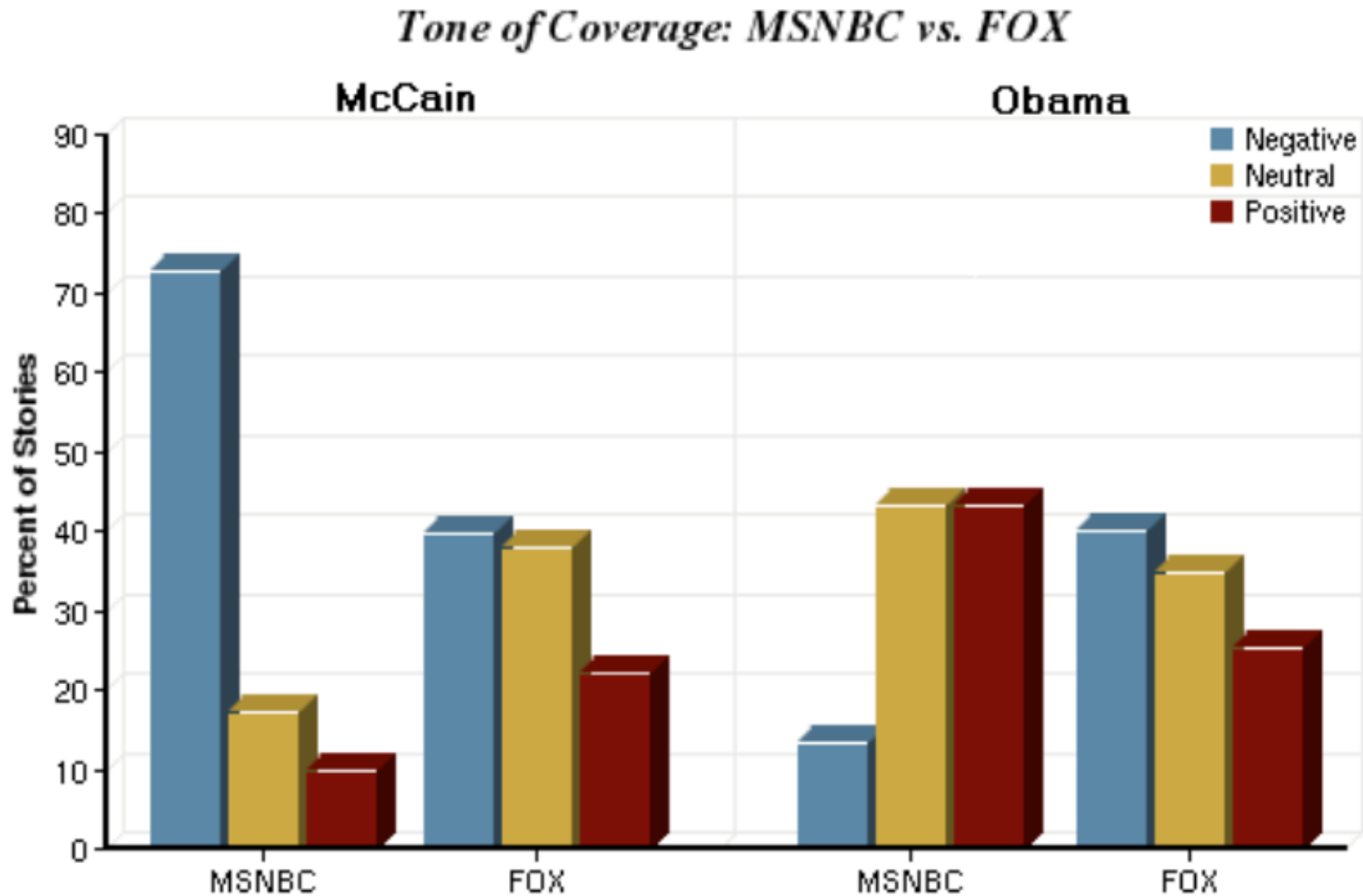




# News and social media shape our perspective



# News and social media shape our perspective



PEW research center



Turn on the news and see how we treat the Batman theater shooter and the Oregon mall shooter like celebrities.

Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris are household names, but do you know the name of a single 'victim' of Columbine?

— Morgan Freeman —

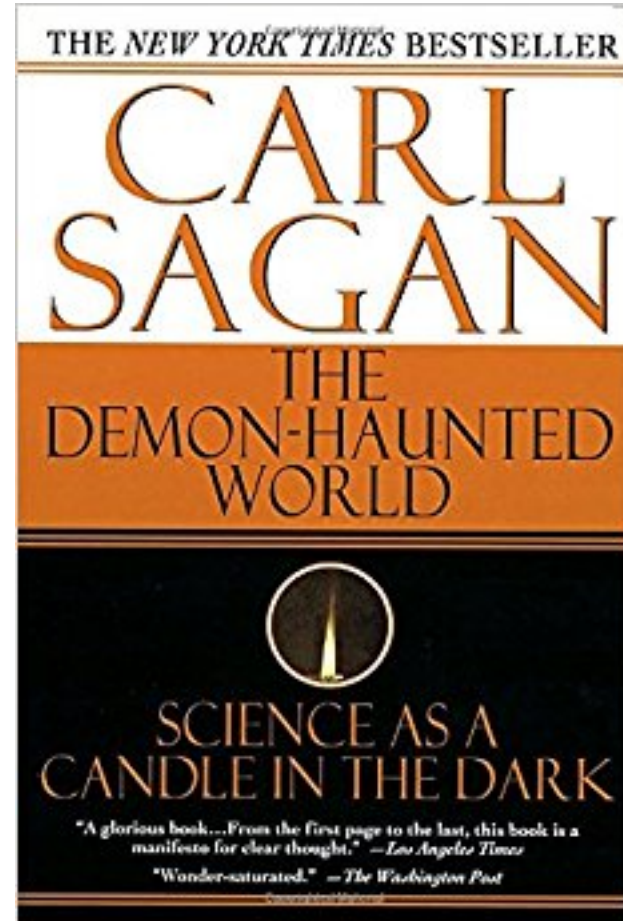
**AZ** QUOTES

We need a set of tools to sort through so much information

# We need a set of tools to sort through so much information

## Laid out a baloney detection kit

- Independent confirmation of the facts
- Occam's Razor
- Logical fallacies
- And others





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**AZ** QUOTES



# FAKE



Turn on the TV and see how we treat  
the Batman shooter and the  
Oregon man like celebrities.  
Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris are  
hold names. Do you know the  
singer of 'Columbine'?

*Greenman* —

QUOTES

# Class logistics and schedule

- We will meet every Tuesday from 3:10-4:00pm in this room
- Assignments, announcements, readings, and grades will be posted to the Canvas page
- Most weeks will involve reading or assignments at home in preparation for the following week



# Tentative schedule

Week	Date	Topic	In-class activity	Homework
1	9-Jan	Introduction, code of conduct, class goals		Read Baloney Detection Kit and answer questions on Canvas
2	16-Jan	Discuss Sagan's kit. Logical fallacies		Assignment: Logical fallacy detection
3	23-Jan	Quantitative thinking	Group project: thinking quantitatively	Finish group project
4	30-Jan	Scientific method	Group project: Black box activity	Finish group project
5	6-Feb	Common marketing strategies		Paper: Write about short video/news article
6	13-Feb	Navigating the web		
7	20-Feb	Prosecutors fallacy and the courtroom		Assignment: Breast cancer problem
8	27-Feb	Media and Politics Guest Lecture		
9	6-Mar	How to call out bullshit and teach others about detecting bullshit		Paper: Choose tool to add or expand on
10	13-Mar	TBD		

# How to be successful in this course

- Attendance and participation in class is mandatory. A large part of your grade comes from in-class participation during discussions
- Pay attention to due dates. Late assignments will lose points
- Attend office hours for help with writing or other course assignments
- The writing center (in the Student Academic Success Center) can help you with your writing as well

Grading: pass-fail course

Class participation: 20% of grade

Two quizzes (take-home): 5% each, 10% total

Two group assignments: 10% each, 20% total

Two writing assignments: 20% each, 40% total

Two short individual assignments: 5% each, 10% total

# Conduct of this class

- Lots of classroom discussion on potentially “hot topics”
- Classroom rules?

# Homework for next week

- Read Sagan's Baloney Detection kit chapter. Answer short-answer questions on Canvas