

## explainity explains: False Balance

Imagine a talk show where there is someone claiming that junk food is completely healthy. This person is slim and attractive, but has nothing to do with nutrition professionally. This one person is persistent with her opinion and gives seemingly insightful arguments in favor of junk food.

On the other side sits a scientist. She can cite numerous studies which prove that a diet solely based on junk food is not healthy in the long term.

The problem here is that the media presentation can give the false impression that the scientific consensus and the opinion of a person are to be valued equally.

This apparent equality is called a false balance.

We see a similar phenomenon, with the debate on coronavirus vaccinations. Like in this blog post, there are those who repeatedly criticized the vaccines due to their alleged side effects and want them banned.

And yet there are scores of studies proving that the vaccines can prevent serious illness.

Or you might see a TV report where a person vehemently claims that man-made climate change is completely made up.

While a scientist is presented who then explains that well-founded studies can provide the counterevidence to this assertion.

In all of these scenarios the minority opinion is elevated to the same level as the consensus opinion through the way they are presented in the media. You might come away thinking: „vaccination could actually be harmful“, „climate change might be made up“ or „junk food will not really make you fat.“

The phenomenon first came about because of the rule in journalism that one-sided reporting is a 'no-go', which is why now you always hear at least two opinions on a subject.

However, objective reporting can never be based on just opinions.

Scientific findings are usually based on extensive, objective studies performed by people who really know the topic.

Facts and opinions should therefore never be counterbalanced against each other and the presentation must clearly distinguish the difference between the two. Otherwise this creates false balance.

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