

Identification and Analysis of Fallacious Argument of Socio-political Discourse: A Case Study of Computer-mediated Discourse on *Quora*

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Abstract

Nowadays, social media content has become one of the main sources of information to feed the mind of social-media users. However, the reliability on social media for information may be problematic due to the doubtful credibility of its content. There are two ways to overcome this problem: fact-checking and fallacy identification of the argument. The paper has attempted to address this problem by identifying the fallacious argument of social media's textual content.

The study has been divided into two parts: fallacious argument identification and its division according to their characteristics. For the fallacious argument identification, the study has adapted the concept of fallacy as a hindrance to the goal of conflict resolution and wrong moves in the communication process.

The study has employed a fallacy taxonomy framework to classify fallacious arguments into different categories. The fallacy taxonomy framework has been prepared based on popular informal fallacies with the help of Walton's pragmatic theory of fallacy. The data for the study has been collected from the social media platform Quora. The data collection process only extracted the textual data related to the discourse of the socio-political domain, which is generated in Hindi.

The study has analysed socio-political discourse to address the following objectives: 1. Identification of fallacious argument, 2. Categorisation of fallacious argument into different types.

Keywords: fallacy, rationality, social media, Hindi discourse, socio-political, argument analysis

1. Introduction

Argumentation is traditionally known as the process in which two or more interlocutors engage in debate or discussion with each other due to differences of opinion about something. One of the most well-known and influential definitions of argumentation comes from the philosopher Stephen Toulmin. He defined argumentation as “the process of providing reasons for supporting or criticising a claim” in his book “The Uses of Argument” in 1958 (Toulmin, 1958).

Argumentation is a very common and frequent phenomenon that exists in our life. In the process of argumentation, reasoning plays a great role in reaching a conclusion. The role of argumentation in daily life starts even with the early morning of the day, deciding what food should be for today. The sphere of argumentation has broadened from the personal to the public sphere. Argumentation take place among people on personal issues like deciding carrier field, movie selection for watching, where to go on vacation, and public issues like evaluating whether government policy is good or bad, deciding whether education should be free or paid etc. In the age of digital communication, social media provide a platform for people to do argumentation with individuals or many people. When people engage with one another by sending messages via a network of computers, that communication is known as computer-mediated discourse (CMD) (Herring et al., 2015). The age of digital communication has made easy the process of sharing and accessibility of information. It enables us to talk or argue about any topic in order to find common ground. In this sense, the digital revolution makes it easier to communicate with a wide range of audiences to exchange information and knowledge. Yet, it is not just restricted to only casual chats with known and unknown common people. Instead, it enables us to communicate openly and directly with national and international authorities. These are the benefits of computer-mediated communication that we experience. Yet, it has also been used to distribute false information and rumours. The social media platform has also been used to manufacture consent, set a particular narrative, and publish communal posts using logical and argumentative tricks. That raises the possibility of a breakdown in concord and brotherhood, and more crucially, it makes it harder to cultivate a democratic society and logical temperament.

There are two methods to tackle this problem fact-checking and fallacy identification. Examination of factual information confirms the authenticity and truthness of information, but inferential information is produced by employing reasoning in the available information to reach the inferential conclusion. The study has focused on the error in inferential information. The study checks whether the method of inference applied to the conclusion is correct. The discrepancy in the reasoning of argumentation is traditionally known as fallacious argumentation. The study focuses on the identification of fallacious arguments. It examines Hindi socio-political discourse generated on the social-media platform *Quora*.

The analysis of socio-political discourse has been done through the analysis of arguments in the discourse. The study has focused on the pragmatic aspect of the argument for their analysis and

classification between fallacious and non-fallacious. Further, the study has classified the fallacious arguments into their subtypes. The study used a fallacy taxonomy framework, based on the pragmatic theory of fallacy (Walton, 1995), to categorise the various types of fallacious arguments. Three steps have been taken in the argument analysis: the extraction of arguments, the detection of fallacious arguments, and the classification of those fallacious arguments. In the section under Fallacy, the study also conducted a quick assessment of how fallacies have been studied over time. Then the study treated the fallacy by employing a fallacy taxonomy framework.

2. Understanding Fallacy

The concept of fallacy has emerged in the Indian logic system and Aristotle's organon of Greek. Nyaya Sutra (650 B.C. – 100 A.D.) and Vaishesika were two of the six Indian schools of philosophy that addressed logic and fallacies (Sarma, 1994). Aristotle was one of the earliest philosophers who extensively worked on argumentation, logic and reasoning. He explored persuasive argumentation and fallacy in his work "De Sophisticis Elenchis" (On Sophistical Refutations) in Greek philosophy (Krabbe, 2012; Hasper, 2013). Aristotle takes account of the fallacy in *Sophistical Refutation* in terms of the argument. He said that argument appears to be a refutation, but it is a fallacy, not a refutation (Hasper, 2013). He introduced thirteen mere lists of fallacies in his initial work. Further, he also worked on structuring this list, as he categorized them into two groups: language-dependent and language-independent fallacies. Language-dependent fallacies are homonymy, amphiboly, intonation, combination, division, and form of expression. Language-independent fallacies are accident, consequence, qualification, petitio principii non causa, many questions and ignoratio elenchi (ibid).

The book "Fallacies" by Charles Hamblin is seen as marking the boundary between the conventional and the novel approaches to fallacies. The book questioned the standard approach to handling fallacies and provided a new definition of a fallacy as an argument "that seems to be valid but is not so." However, the definition was still debated and wasn't widely accepted (Hansen, 2002). Three important theories are put out by the new method to address arguments. The first theory offers 10 rules for critical discussion and approaches argument from a pragmatic-dialectic perspective (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1987), the second theory suggests an argumentative scheme and theme for debunking fallacies (Walton, 1995), and the third theory proposes the concept of the "illative centre" and the "two-tier criteria" for recognizing fallacious arguments (Johnson, 2012).

The main purpose of argumentation is to resolve the conflict. In the process of resolution of conflict, interlocutors have to justify their thesis. Moreover, interlocutors want to resolve differences of opinion in their favour. To accomplish these goals, people use various argumentation strategies when presenting their arguments. However, some argumentation strategies distract the audience from the focus of argumentation and irrelevance to the topic. Such cases may result in increased difficulties in resolving the conflict. These obstacles in argumentation are considered as wrong moves, known as fallacies (Van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2008). Fallacies in the debate or discussion cause derailment

of the argumentation from the path of a topic that randomizes the direction of the discussion. Sometimes it results in the form of endless discussion and never reaches the goal.

The study of fallacy has been done and examined from several angles by philosophers, logicians, and linguists (Zurloni and Anolli, 2013). The idea of a fallacy forms the basis of every comprehensive argumentation theory, and how fallacies are handled may arguably be seen as the litmus test for any given method of argumentation (Hamblin, 1970; Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; Walton, 1995; Van Eemeren, Meuffels & Verburg, 2000; Tindale, 2007). Walton emphasizes the idea that fallacies are not necessarily obvious mistakes but can often be subtle and difficult to detect. He defined fallacy as “A fallacy is an argument that seems to be correct, but is not, because it has a flaw in it that is not immediately apparent (Walton, 1995).” He says that the definition of a fallacy can be the result of an error in reasoning, but it is limited to simple logical error, however, it is misleading or deceptive in some way, and is often used to manipulate people's beliefs or opinions (ibid).

3. Fallacious Argument in Socio-Political Discourse

Socio-political discourse refers to the discussion and exchange of ideas related to social and political issues within a society. It involves exploring and debating issues such as power, inequality, justice, freedom, democracy, governance, and human rights. Socio-political discourse can take many forms, such as public debates, media coverage, social media discussions, academic research, political speeches, newspaper editorial articles, and textual vlogs. It involves expressing and exchanging diverse opinions, perspectives, and arguments related to social and political issues.

In the age of digital communication, people can participate in debates or discussions with anyone through social media platforms. Social media provide a great platform for debate or discussion. It also allows people to publish their thoughts on the public forum. These processes contribute to shaping public opinion. However, the credibility and authenticity of social media discourse are questionable on socio-political issues. That could be tackled by fact-checking and validity or soundness-checking of the argument.

In order to check the validity and soundness of the argument of socio-political discourse, several studies have been done. The study has analysed the political speeches, interviews, and debates (Al-Duleimi et al. 2015, Al-Hindawi et al. 2015, Hidayat et al. 2020). The analysis of Obama's interviews demonstrates that strategic manoeuvring is the consequence of a variety of linguistic devices, including conversational implicatures, hedges of the cooperative principle, and politeness employed during the interview (Al-Duleimi et al. 2015). David Cameron's speech was examined using the pragmatic technique, and it was found that he uses a linguistic technique that makes the listener feel close to the speaker. He used the principle of influence, deixis, rhetorical devices in the speech, and the standards of a strong argument (Al-Hindawi et al. 2015). The study of political debate among Indonesian political figures examines the dialogue with the intention of identifying fallacies using a fallacy taxonomy framework (Hidayat et al. 2020). The study identified four types of

fallacious argument: a fallacy through linguistic manipulation, a fallacy through the emotional appeal of fear, a fallacy through the manipulation of red herrings as distractions, and an inductive fallacy through the manipulation of illogical inconsistencies and contradictions (ibid).

4. Fallacy Taxonomy Framework

Fallacious arguments can be categorised in several ways. The broad taxonomy of fallacious arguments is formal and informal. Formal fallacy depends upon the error in reasoning due to discrepancy in the structure or form of arguments like non-sequitur. Informal fallacy depends upon the content, meaning and contextual information of arguments. It is not related to the structure of the argument and is committed due to the flawed content of arguments, either because of faulty reasoning or deceptive rhetoric. Informal fallacies can take many forms and be difficult to identify, as they often rely on common misconceptions or emotional appeals rather than formal logic. Some examples of informal fallacies include ad hominem and ad misericordiam. The fallacy has also been categorised from the angle of logic, ethics, credibility, force, and passion. According to this view, it is categorised into three categories ethos, pathos and logos (Demirdöğen, 2010).

The study has prepared a fallacy taxonomy framework for the classification of fallacious arguments in a different category. Walton's "A Pragmatic Theory of Fallacy" served as the foundation for the study's creation of a fallacy taxonomy framework (Walton, 1995). The study took 16 common fallacies into account when creating a taxonomy framework. Table 1 describes the fallacy taxonomy framework for the identification of subtypes of fallacious argument in CMD.

S.No.	Type of fallacy	Explanation
1.	Ad Hominem	Attacking on person rather argument.
2.	Ad Baculum	Appeal to force to assert or justify a thesis.
3.	Ad Populum	Appeal to popularity to assert or justify a thesis.
4.	Ad Misericordiam	Appeal to sentiment instead of reason.
5.	Ad Ignorantiam	Truthness or falseness of argument based on inability to prove.
6.	Ad Vercundiam	Appeal to authority to propose an argument.
7.	Complex Question	Loaded question with the implicit presupposition.
8.	Begging the Question	A premise based on a conclusion and vice-versa, i.e. circular reasoning.
9.	Hasty generalization	Conclusion based on insufficient evidence.

10.	Slippery Slope	Actions are described as triggers of a chain of bad consequences.
11.	False Cause	Conclusion based on the false cause.
12.	Straw Man	Misrepresentation of facts or persons.
13.	Ad Consequentiam	Arguments are evaluated based on their good or bad consequences.
14.	Faulty Analogy	The wrongful comparison to justify or refute the thesis.
15.	Linguistic Fallacies	Error in reasoning due to language.
16.	Ignoratio Elenchi	Irrelevant conclusion.

5. Data

The data for the identification of fallacious arguments are collected for the present study from the social media platform *Quora*. On this platform, content is mainly generated to answer the asked question by users. However, independent articles are also written on Quora to express an opinion or thought about an event, policy, or principle. The study focuses on the socio-political discourse of computer-mediated discourse. In order to extract data on socio-political issues, the study has selected specific keywords related to the socio-political issues. The rationale behind selecting specific keywords is the frequent occurrence of a certain specific word in the socio-political discourse. The data has been collected manually by entering following keywords: समाजवाद (*Samajwad* - Socialism), साम्यवाद (*Saamyawad* - Communism), धर्मनिरपेक्षता (*Dharmnirpekshata* - Secularism), महिला - (*Mahila* - Woman) and राजनीति - (*Rajneeti* - Politics). The study has collected six articles which were written for the purpose of giving answers to asked questions and expressing thoughts on related issues in Hindi. The study has extracted 43 arguments from these articles.

6. Identification and Analysis of Fallacious Arguments

The study has analysed six articles by considering the pragmatic aspects of the argument. In the first step of the analysis, the study extracts the occurred arguments of the articles on the basis of the existence of necessary elements of argument, i.e., conclusion and one or more premises in favour of the conclusion. In this way, the study has extracted 43 arguments employing the strategy. The analysis of arguments has been done by employing the concept of fallacy, which helps to categorise arguments between fallacious and non-fallacious arguments. The study moves to classify the identified fallacious arguments in their subtypes. The fallacy taxonomy framework, which is prepared with the help of Walton's pragmatic theory of fallacy, has been employed to divide fallacious arguments according to their pragmatic nature. The analysis of the argument has been shown through the illustration of sample arguments from the dataset. Since the data has been collected in Hindi language, it is translated into English for illustration. The translation has been done carefully to preserve the original meaning of the arguments.

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1. पूंजीवादी समाज में ऐसा क्यों है कि हर प्रकार की सुख सुविधा से लैस व्यक्ति कुंठित व पतित जीवन जीने लगता है,, विषय बहुत लंबा है इसलिये हम इस मानसिकता को कारण जौहर की हाई प्रोफाइल ड्रग पार्टी से समझने की कोशिश करेंगे,, (*Punjiwad samaj me aisa kyo hai ke har prakaar ki such suvidha se lais vyakti kunthit wa patit jivan jine lagta hai,, visay bahut lambaa hai isliye ham is mansikta ko Karan Johar ki high profile drug party se samajhne ki koshis karenge,,*)

[Why is it that in a capitalist society, where a person laced with all kinds of comforts and luxuries starts living a frustrated and degenerated life... The subject is very long therefore, we will try to understand this mentality through the high-profile drug party of Karan Johar.]

Argument – Fallacious

Fallacy – Complex question.

Explanation – The claim in this argument has been presented in the form of a question, and the question is loaded with a hidden question. The main question is, “Why do people in a capitalist society with all kinds of comforts and luxuries start living a frustrated and degenerated life?” in this question claim is “People of capitalist society live a frustrated and degenerated life.” The question is loaded because it contains the other unanswered question “Do people of capitalist society live a frustrated and degenerated life?” In this argument, the author has presented a loaded question that leads to an error in reasoning. The author, in the question, committed the fallacy of a complex question.

2. इस पड़ाव पर आकर मनुष्य अपनी आदिम अज्ञानी मानसिकता के आगे अपने तमाम ज्ञान विज्ञान मान सम्मान पद प्रतिष्ठा को पीछे छोड़ एकाकी हो अपनी कुंठा को जीने लगता है,, आर्थिक सुरक्षा उसे अमर्यादित कर देती है,, क्योंकि वह अपने को हर प्रकार से सिद्ध कर चुका होता है इसलिये उसके पास अब पाने की कोई उच्च बिंदु बाकी नहीं होती,, ऐसे में पूंजीवादी मानसिकता कुंठाओं की शिकार हो ही जाती है ऐसा हमें विश्व के हर विकसित समाज में नजर आता है,,

(*Is padav par aakar manusya apani aadim agyaani maansikta ke aage apane tamam gyan vigyan maan sammaan pad pritistha ko pichhe chhod ekaki ho apni kuntha ko jine lagta hai,, aarthik surakshaa use amaryadit kar deti hai,, kyoki vah apane ko har prakar se sidha kar chuka hota hai isliye uske paas aba paane ki koi uchh bindu baaki nahi hoti,, aise me punjiwadi maansikta kunthao ki shikaar ho hi jaati hai, aisa hame visva ke har viksit samaj me najar aata hai,,*)

[After reaching this stage, people start living their frustration in solitude, leaving behind all their knowledge, science, honour and prestige adjacent to their primitive, ignorant mentality. Financial security makes them immoral because they have proved themselves in every way, so they no longer have any higher aspirations to pursue. In such situations, the capitalist mentality becomes a victim of mental agony. We see this in every developed society of the world.]

Argument – Fallacious

Fallacy – False cause

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Explanation – There are five claims proposed in this piece of text: 1. At this stage (stage of economic prosperity), people start living their frustration in solitude, leaving behind all their knowledge, science, honour and prestige adjacent to their primitive, ignorant mentality, 2. Financial security makes them immoral, 3. At this stage, they no longer have any higher aspirations to pursue, 4. In this condition, the capitalist mentality becomes a victim of mental agony, 5. These indications are visible in every developed society of the world. The argument has a reason for the second and third claims. It says that financial security makes them immoral because they have proved themselves in every way and have nothing left for them to achieve. The interlocutor has not presented any evidence or supportive statement that proves the cause of becoming immoral due to financial security. In the third claim, the interlocutor says that financial security is the epitome of achievement, and after that, there is nothing to achieve in life. But besides financial security, many goals could remain untouched in any person's life, like making society equal and abolishing social evil. Apart from these goals, maintaining financial security is also a tough task for anyone if they are in this situation. In this argument, the interlocutor has provided the wrong reason for the claim, which is responsible for the commitment of the fallacy of false cause.

3. यदि अधिकतम महिलाओं को राजनीति में आने का अवसर मिले, तो वो महिलाओं के मुद्दों को जोर शोर से उठाएंगी और तब शायद महिलाओं से जुड़ी दिक्कतें कम हो सकती हैं। "डेबरा डॉडसन" नामक शोध के मुताबिक अमरीका में महिला स्वास्थ्य सम्बन्धी बिल सिर्फ इसलिए पास हुआ क्योंकि वहाँ कांग्रेस में महिला उम्मीदवारों ने इसके लिए आवाज़ उठाई।

(Yadi adhiktam mahilao ko rajniti me aane ka avasar mile, to vo mahilao ke muddo ko jor shor se uthayengi aur tab shayad mahilao se judi dikkate kam ho sakti hai, Debra Dodson naamak shodh ke mutabik America me mahila swasthya sambandhi bil sirf isliye paas hua kyoki waha congress me mahila ummidwaro ne iske liye awaj uthayi)

[If maximum women get an opportunity to come into politics, then they will raise the issues of women loudly and then perhaps the problems related to women can be reduced. According to Debra Dodson's research, the women's health bill was passed in America only because their women candidates in Congress raised their voices for it.]

Argument - Non-fallacious

Explanation – The argument has concluded the claim that women will raise women-related issues loudly if they get the opportunity to come into politics. The evidence supports the claim. In this argument, the interlocutor has cited the research of Debra Dodson that says, the women's health bill was passed in America only because of the representation of women in American Congress. From this claim, the interlocutor has reached the inference of argument. Inference has been proposed in an argument on the basis of research evidence. In this argument, the interlocutor did not commit a fallacy.

4. महिला की कमाई की परिवार में ज़रूरत नहीं इसलिए आज भी कई पुरुष अपने घर की औरतों को नोकरी नहीं करने देते।

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(Mahila ki kamai ki parivaar me jarurat nahi isliye aaj bhi kai purush apne ghar ki aurto ko naukri nahi karne dete.)

[Women's earning is not needed in the family, that's why even today, many men do not allow the women of their house to work.]

Argument – Fallacious

Fallacy – False cause

Explanation – The argument has given a reason for the question of why women are not allowed to do paid jobs. The interlocuter says that women are not allowed to paid job because their earning is not required in the family. But it is not so. There could be many reasons behind the prohibition of women's jobs, like social, cultural, and religious reasons. Apart from these reasons, the family structure and family work responsibilities like childcare, home care, and food cooking also could be reasons for the prohibition. The requirement of women's earnings in the family could also be one of the reasons for the prohibition from doing paid work for women. The argument committed the fallacy of false cause because the interlocuter has presented a partial reason or cause for the conclusion.

5. पढ़ी लिखी महिलाएं शादी के बाद अपनी इच्छा से काम नहीं कर सकती। अगर आपको लगता है कि अब ऐसा नहीं है तो ज़रा यह सोचिएगा कि आप भारत कि वो 30 प्रतिशत जनसंख्या है जो शहरों में रह रही हैं। अभी भी 70% लोग गांवों में रहती हैं जिन्हें न ठीक से शिक्षा मिलती है न इंटरनेट वाले वायदे पूरे होते हैं।

(Padhi liki mahilaaye shaadi ke baad apni ichchha se kaam nahi kar sakti. Agar aapko lagta hai ki tab aisa nahi hai to jara sochiyega ki aap bhaarat ki vo 30 pratishat jansankhya hai jo shaharo me rah rahi hai. Abhi bhi 70% log gaavo me rahti hai, jinhe na thik se shiksha milti hai na internet vale vaayde pure hote hai.)

[Educated women are not allowed to work of their own volition after marriage. If you think this is not the case now, then you are the 30 per cent of India's population living in cities. Still, 70% of the people who live in villages do not get a proper education or internet promises are fulfilled.]

Argument – Fallacious

Fallacy – False cause

Explanation – This argument has two claims: 1. Urban educated women can do paid work/job of their own volition after marriage, and 2. Rural women can not do paid work/job of their own volition. The interlocuter has given a reason for the second claim. It says that rural women can not do paid work because they are not getting proper education and internet facility. The prohibition of women from doing paid work has many reasons, as explained in the illustration of the fourth example. Socio-

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cultural and religious reasons play the main role in the way of women's liberation for their paid work. Patriarchal social systems resist becoming an economically equal society regarding men and women. Lack of access to education and the internet may be a factor, but it is not the whole reason behind the problem. In this argument, the interlocutor has committed the fallacy of false cause because he/she presented only partial cause for the second claim.

7. Conclusion

The study has analysed six articles related to the socio-political discourse of the social media platform *Quora*. The data has been collected only in Hindi. The argument of the article has been extracted on the basis of premise and conclusion in the piece of text. However, sometimes argument only contains a conclusion without a premise. Such arguments are based on universally accepted premises. This way, the study has extracted 45 arguments from the article in available collected data.

The examination of arguments has found that most of the arguments are non-fallacious in the articles. However, the study has also found some fallacious arguments that belong to different categories. The analysis of fallacious arguments has found six types of fallacious arguments. These are the types of found fallacious arguments: False cause, Ad Hominem, Faulty analogy, Ad Misericordiam and Hasty generalisation. The false cause indicates that the conclusion of arguments is based on false or hazy premises. The study has found that articles contain such arguments that target interlocutors rather than their argument, which leads to the Ad Hominem fallacy.

The availability of faulty analogies indicates that interlocutors have tried to justify their thesis on the basis of false comparisons. The study has also found that interlocutors tried to justify their thesis with the help of sentiment rather than valid logic. The article also contains arguments whose conclusions are based on insufficient reason.

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