



# **Analysis of the Arguments Presented in Response to the Allegations against an Online Education Website**

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## **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to analyze the arguments in an article written by an online education website in response to accusations of fraud and misconduct levelled in another article published by a popular news magazine. This paper aims to analyze the arguments by applying Damer's model of argument analysis. The analysis follows the arguments criteria of structure, relevance, acceptability, sufficiency and effectiveness of rebuttal. The paper also aims to unravel the fallacies used in the arguments that violate the criteria of construction of good arguments. The analysis may help to find out whether the arguments presented by that website were strong enough or simply deceptive in trying to prove the accusations as false.

**Keywords:** *Argument analysis; online education; Damer's model; news magazine; allegations.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to [1], manipulation through advertising is an issue being faced by the consumers on daily basis. [1], mentioned two classes of advertising where one is non-manipulative while the other is manipulative advertising. The non-manipulative advertising presents the products or service in the best possible light while the manipulative advertising exploits the emotions of the consumer and influences the consumer's decision-making ability. He further classified manipulative advertising into deceitful advertising and the argumentative advertising. The deceitful advertising uses deceptive facts while the argumentative advertising uses bad arguments where emotive persuasion can be used.

This paper aims to analyze the arguments presented by an online education marketing website to defend itself against the allegations raised by an American news agency. The real names of the organizations are not revealed in this article due to the ethical reasons. To maintain confidentiality, the term “-Online Website-” or “OW” for short, has been used. This organization provided online education to many customers. The customers were not aware of the facts till a journalist (name withheld for ethical issues) investigated all the matters related to the organization's education system and published a report in a news magazine. The journalist exposed the website as a huge online fraud. Because of this exposure, a legal action was taken against the website and it was banned. Some of the notable objections raised against the online website as mentioned by an American News Agency (Real name withheld for ethical reasons) report [2], are the following:

- i. The online website sells fake degrees and has turned it into a global business.
- ii. Due to the people taking interest in online education, it attracts international customers by making its website prominent. It runs false online institutes in the name of prominent American institutes such as Berkley and Columbia University.
- iii. Many of its educational websites are linked with fake accreditation bodies and betray people through graphics and offers of chatting services. The professors and students shown on the websites are actors who are used to betray the people easily.
- iv. It deceives the people through its sales agents who are available all the time on

telephone. In order to boost the profit of the company these sales agents also impersonate American government officials so as to increase the sale of expensive certificates. They are fluent in English and Arabic and sell everything ranging from high school diplomas to doctoral degrees where the price ranges from 350 US dollars to 4000 US dollars.

- v. It makes revenues of millions of dollars per month by selling fake degrees and makes its servers obscure by using proxy internet services, combative legal tactics and lack of regulation in Pakistan.
- vi. It never responded to the requests for interviews made by the investigative journalist and denied offering any response.
- vii. It runs three hundred and seventy fake websites including school sites. It also runs a number of search portals, fake accreditation bodies, recruitment agencies and even a law firm.
- viii. It has built a broadcast studio by recruiting prominent journalists but it is not clear where the funding come from to support this venture. It's chief executive officer has been denying accusations by the other media channels that offering fake degrees is the main source of its business.
- ix. It sold dozens of fake degrees to the people from other countries including the Gulf States, United States, Britain and many other countries.
- x. It is involved in blackmailing the customers by urging them to pay more. It uses deceptive and threatening tactics in order to force the customers into paying more money.

The online educational organization [3], responded to these allegations through its website in the form of an article and shared the same article with the people through social media including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other media channels. The purpose of the response was to convince the readers that the objections raised against it were baseless and were simply a result of the personal grudges against the commercial organization. Surprisingly, the organization succeeded to attract a small group of people and convinced them that whatever it claimed was right. This group started commenting against the news channel, he journalist who reported the event as well as against all those people who raised their angst against the organization.

[4], named internet as a disinformation superhighway. Addressing the same, [5], says that it is a big challenge for the audience to determine the credibility of an online resource. Giving reference to [6], he states that online misinformation has many types such as outdated and incomplete information, information without facts, biased information and improperly translated information. [5], suggests that critical thinking and better information skills can help the audience solve of these problems.

This paper aims to analyze the arguments presented by an online education marketing organization in response to the accusations raised against it regarding the marketing of fake degrees and diplomas. The article aims to find out whether the arguments fit properly to the criteria of construction of good arguments or whether the arguments were simply a deceptive effort to prove that the organization was not guilty. For this purpose, the research uses Damer's model of argument analysis. Damer's model not only provides a suitable method to analyze the argument structure but also provides a classification of the fallacies related with the bad arguments.

## 2. DAMER'S MODEL OF ARGUMENT ANALYSIS

[7], defined an argument as a claim supported by the other claims. An argument performs a persuasive function and tries to make others accept a claim by demonstrating the truth or falsity of a particular claim. [7], further explains that an argument is a group of statements which can also be called "the premises" that support or provide evidence for another claim called the "conclusion". The premises provide the reasons given for believing a conclusion to be true. More precisely, [7], defines the argument as follows:

An argument is constituted by two or more explicit and/or implicit claims, one or more of which supports or provides evidence for the truth or merit of another claim, the conclusion.

Definition of argument given by [7], is almost the same as given by [8] who defines an argument as a set of claims which provides the reasons for another claim called "the conclusion" with the help of premises or supporting claims. [8], further states that arguments are very important than descriptions, stories and jokes because they are the attempts to justify the claims.

[7], further posited that:

The conclusion of an argument should be the statement or claim that has at least one other statement in support of it.

[7], provided a much comprehensive model of argument analysis as compared with [5], and [9], by focusing on the components and fallacies within an argument. [7], explains the nature of well-formed argument or the standard form of an argument as the one which is reconstructed from its original source in a clear and concise language. This language has to be consistent with the intention of the person who makes the argument. All the implicit parts of a well-formed argument must be explicitly stated and the premises and sub-premises should be separated from the conclusion in an orderly manner.

[7], further divided the arguments into inductive and deductive components. According to him, a correctly formed deductive argument is the one in which a conclusion follows with logical necessity from its premises. On the other hand, a well-formed inductive argument is the one having a form in which the premises provide good evidence for the truth of a conclusion but the truth of a conclusion does not have to logically follow from its premises.

A good argument has the following characteristics, [7]:

- "A well-formed structure"
- "Premises that are relevant to the truth of the conclusion"
- "Premises that are acceptable to a reasonable person"
- "Premises that together constitute sufficient grounds for the truth of the conclusion"
- "Premises that provide an effective rebuttal to all anticipated criticisms of the argument"

The following principles, based on the above features provide the context on which an argument can be analyzed:

### i. The Structural Principle

[7], defined a well-structured argument as the one that meets the structural requirements of a well-formed argument. It does not use the

reasons that contradict each other or contradict the conclusion. It does not use reasons that explicitly or implicitly assume the truth of the conclusion. It also does not draw invalid inferences. Explaining further, he says that an argument must look like an argument providing reasons to accept the conclusion. A well-structured argument must not make a claim which resembles the conclusion. Moreover, the premises must not be incompatible with each other. It must also not violate the rules of deductive logic.

[7], proposed a list of questions to be applied to an argument in order to decide whether it is well-formed or not. These questions are being stated below:

- i. Does an argument fulfill the criteria of the basic structure of an argument by providing at least one claim called premise whose truth may facilitate another claim or conclusion's truth?
- ii. Is it possible to reconstruct the key premises of an argument in order to reach the same conclusion?
- iii. Do any of the premises of an argument contradict another premise?
- iv. Do the conclusions of an argument contradict any of the premises of the argument?
- v. In case of a deductive argument, does the structure of the argument fails to fulfill the laws of deductive logic?

## ii. The Relevance Principle

Defining the relevance principle [7], stated that the relevant argument should present the reasons whose truth provides some evidence for the truth of the conclusion.

To consider a premise or a reason to be relevant, [7], proposed the following set of conditions:

- i. To consider a premise as true it is necessary to believe that the conclusion of the argument is true. If the premise fulfills the criterion, it is relevant otherwise it is irrelevant.
- ii. Even if the premise is true, it should contribute to believe that the conclusion of the argument is true.

- iii. If a premise fulfills the above-mentioned criteria, it is relevant, otherwise it can be considered as irrelevant.

## iii. The Acceptability Principle

[7], defined an acceptable argument presented for or against a position as the one which provides the reasons likely to be accepted by a mature or rational person and must also meet the standard criteria of acceptability.

A premise is acceptable to a mature or a rational person if it has the following qualities:

- i. It is related with the general knowledge and is undisputed.
- ii. An individual has confirmed it through personal experience or observation.
- iii. It is defended enough in the context of the argument or it can be defended by an available source.
- iv. It possesses an eyewitness testimony which is not open to disputes.
- v. The uncontroverted claim has been made by a relevant authority.
- vi. The conclusion of another good argument is available.
- vii. There exists a reasonable assumption keeping in view the context of the argument.

[7], also explained certain conditions under which a premise acceptability can be challenged which are the following:

- i. If a claim lacks the credible evidence, it is not well-established and does not have a legitimate authority, it cannot be accepted.
- ii. Any claim that is inconsistent with one's own experience or observations can be rejected.
- iii. Any questionable claim which cannot be defended enough in the context of an argument and it also lacks suitable evidence from an available source.
- iv. A claim that contradicts itself or it creates confusion due to linguistic aspects.
- v. A claim that is based on any assumption that can be scrutinized.

According to the acceptability principle, the premises of an argument can be regarded as acceptable if each of them conforms to at least one of the standard of acceptability, [7].

[7], proposed following questions to assess the acceptability of an argument.

- i. Is the premise supporting a conclusion which is acceptable to a rational person without being questioned any further?
- ii. Does the premise possess enough clarity to be understood by a mature person?
- iii. Does the premise hold any unstated assumption that a mature and a rational person would have reservations to accept?

#### iv. The Sufficiency Principle

Defining the sufficiency principle [7], stated that a sufficient argument for or against a position should provide the relevant and the acceptable reasons of right kind that are sufficient enough in number and weight and also stand together to justify the conclusion to be acceptable.

[7], proposed following questions to be asked while evaluating the sufficiency of an argument.

- i. Are the given acceptable and relevant reasons adequate to reach an argument's proposed conclusion?
- ii. Does the evidence possess any faulty causal analysis?
- iii. Is any crucial evidence missing from the argument that should be included as one of the premises to accept the argument's conclusion?

#### v. The Rebuttal Principle

[1], defined the rebuttal principle. He stated that an argument for or against a position should provide an effective rebuttal to all the criticisms against it or against the positions or state of affairs it holds.

[1], proposed the following aspects to judge the effective rebuttal:

- i. Strongest arguments against the position being defended.
- ii. The argument should address the counterarguments effectively.
- iii. Identification of serious weaknesses in the argument that might be recognized by an opponent.
- iv. Whether the argument itself can recognize and address those possible weaknesses.
- v. The ability of the argument to indicate why arguments for alternative positions on the issue are faulty.

## 2.1 Fallacies in the Arguments

[7], also defined the term "fallacy" about the arguments. He defined it as the violation of any

criterion of good argument. He stated that a fallacy can arise if any of the five given criteria of a good argument are violated. The violated arguments can take the following form as stated by, [7]:

- i. "A structural flaw in the argument"
- ii. "A premise that is irrelevant to the conclusion"
- iii. "A premise that fails to meet the standards of acceptability"
- iv. "A set of premises that together are insufficient to establish the argument's conclusion"
- v. "A failure to give an effective rebuttal to the anticipated criticisms of the argument"

A fallacy can violate even a single criterion in one or multiple ways. All these ways are integrated because they share certain features with different violations of the same criterion. Some of these violations are of the above-mentioned criteria are quite common and a name can be easily attached with them. There is a need for having a comprehensive theory of fallacies so that good arguments can be easily differentiated from the bad arguments, [7].

### 2.1.1 Taxonomy of fallacies

[7], presented following taxonomy of fallacies:

**1. Fallacies that violate the structural criterion:** Violating the structural criteria in a fallacious manner means that there are structural problems that prevent an argument's conclusion to follow the premises from which it was deduced or in other words there exists a weak connection between the premises of an argument and its conclusion. These fallacies have been subdivided into the following categories:

#### i. Begging-the-Question Fallacies

These fallacies assume the truth of a conclusion in different ways in their premises and there is no good reason to accept the conclusion. They have been divided into the following types:

- a. "Arguing in a Circle": In this fallacy, whatever is asserted in the conclusion of an argument is also asserted in the premise of an argument either explicitly or implicitly.
- b. "Question-Begging Language": In this fallacy, an issue is discussed by using a language that assumes a position on the

very question at the issue and then directs the reader or the listener to the same conclusion.

- c. "Complex Question": In this kind of fallacy a question is formulated in such a way that it presupposes a definite answer that has already been given to a question that has not yet been asked or a question asked in a series.
- d. "Question-Begging Definition": It means using a definition that is questionable and is also masked as an empirical premise although, the premise can be refuted and has an effect of making the empirical claim (although, the claim is not empirical) at an issue that is true by definition.

## ii. Fallacies of Inconsistency

These fallacies are found in self-contradictory arguments in the following forms:

- a. "Incompatible Premises": It means drawing a conclusion in an argument from inconsistent or incompatible premises.
- b. "Contradiction Between Premise and Conclusion": It means drawing a conclusion that is inconsistent with at least one of the premises of an argument.

## iii. Fallacies of Deductive Inference

These fallacies violate one of the established rules of deductive reasoning and can have the following types:

- a. "Denying the Antecedent": These fallacies deny the antecedent of a conditional statement and then infer the denial of the consequent.
- b. "Affirming the Consequent": It means affirming the consequent of a conditional statement and then inferring the affirmation of the antecedent.
- c. "False Conversion": It reverses the antecedent and consequent or the subject and predicate terms in a universal affirmative statement and then infers that the converted statements retain their original truth value.
- d. "Undistributed Middle Term": It means drawing a conclusion in a syllogism in which a distributed end term in the conclusion is not distributed in the premises.

**2. Fallacies that violate the Relevance criterion:** They employ irrelevant premises or make appeals to factors irrelevant to truth or merit of their conclusions. A premise is relevant if its acceptance provides the reasons to believe and irrelevant if there is no reason or evidence. This condition is also called "non-sequitur" or "argumentative leap". These fallacies have been subdivided into the following types:

### i. Fallacies of Irrelevant Premise

These arguments use premises having no connection with their conclusions. These fallacies can exist in the following different ways:

- a. "Genetic Fallacy": If something is evaluated in terms of some previous context and then applying the evaluation drawn based on that context is applied to the thing in present, it is called genetic fallacy.
- b. "Rationalization": Rationalization fallacy happens when the fake reasons seeming apparently plausible are used to justify a position that is being held on less respectable grounds.
- c. "Drawing the Wrong Conclusion:" In this fallacy a conclusion is drawn that is different than the one supported by the evidence presented in an argument.
- d. "Using the Wrong Reasons": It is an attempt to support a claim with the irrelevant or the reasons other than the ones appropriate to support the claim.

### ii. Fallacies of Irrelevant Appeal

These fallacies attempt to support a claim by making questionable appeals to authority or to emotions which do not support truth of a claim. Following are the types of the fallacies of irrelevant appeal:

- a. "Appeal to Irrelevant Authority": When a claim is supported by appealing to the judgment of a biased or unidentified authority or an authority that is irrelevant with the field, this fallacy happens.
- b. "Appeal to Common Opinion": In this situation, the acceptance or rejection of a position is simply based because most people accept it or only a few people refuse to accept it.
- c. "Appeal to Force or Threat": This is an attempt to persuade others to accept

something by threatening them with an undesirable state of affairs instead of providing appropriate evidence.

- d. "Appeal to Tradition": If the people are persuaded by appealing to their feelings of respect for a tradition instead of providing appropriate evidence, then this is called appeal to tradition.
- e. "Appeal to Self-Interest": In this fallacy, an opponent is urged to accept or reject a particular position or argument simply by appealing to his/her personal circumstances or self-interest and the important issue is kept aside.
- f. "Manipulation of Emotions": In this fallacy, people are persuaded to accept position by exploiting their emotions instead of providing evidence.

**3. Fallacies that violate the Acceptability criterion:** Such fallacies use a premise that fails to meet the conditions of acceptability criterion of an argument. These fallacies have following types:

**i. Fallacies of Linguistic Confusion**

These fallacies have lack of clarity in the meaning of a keyword or phrase used in the premise of an argument.

- a. "Equivocation": If a word or phrase can be used in two different senses, apparently having same meaning in an argument, then a person can be directed to an unwarranted conclusion which is called fallacy of equivocation.
- b. "Ambiguity": In this context, a person is taken to an unwarranted conclusion by presenting an argument using a word, phrase or a grammatical construction having two different interpretations without clarifying the actual meaning.
- c. "Misleading Accent": In this case a person is forced to accept a conclusion by putting too much or improper emphasis on a word, phrase or a particular aspect of an issue or a claim.
- d. "Illicit Contrast": In this case an inference is deduced from someone else's claim which is related to the claim being presented but contrasts the claim by placing improper emphasis on a word or a phrase in a speaker or writer's given statement.
- e. "Argument by Innuendo": In this case derogatory conclusion is drawn choosing

the words skillfully that suggest a conclusion but do not assert a conclusion.

- f. "Misuse of a Vague Expression": By misusing certain words or phrases, an inappropriate conclusion is drawn in an argument which is not the actual conclusion but the result of play on words.
- g. "Distinction without a Difference": In this case an action or a position is defended which is different from another action or a position with which it is confused by using distinctive language while the different action or position is actually no longer different in substance from the one from which it is distinguished.

**ii. Unwarranted Assumption Fallacies**

These fallacies employ unstated but highly questionable assumptions in their premises violating the acceptability criterion. These fallacies can be found in the following forms:

- a. "Fallacy of the Continuum": Presenting the small differences between a thing and its contrary as having a minimum effect and in this way the differences are hidden leading to wrong conclusions.
- b. "Fallacy of Composition": This is simply an assumption that what is true of the parts of a whole is therefore true of the whole.
- c. "Fallacy of Division": It is an assumption that what is true of the whole is therefore true of its parts as well.
- d. "False Alternatives": When the number of alternative responses to a problem or a situation are restricted too much, in this case one of the suggested alternatives is assumed to be true.
- e. "Is-Ought Fallacy": It is an assumption that because something is now the practice, it should remain the practice or is something is not the practice it should cease to be the practice.
- f. "Wishful Thinking": It is an assumption that someone wants something to be true or not, therefore it should be considered true or false on the basis of his/her opinion.
- g. "Misuse of a Principle": It can be defined as an application of a rule in a particular situation by assuming that it has no exceptions or rejecting a principle by assuming that it is an exceptional case and cannot be applied to certain situations.
- h. "Fallacy of the Mean": In this case a moderate view is selected as the best between the two extremes in an argument.

- i. "Faulty Analogy": In this case two things are considered similar on the basis of sharing similar properties while ignoring the significant differences between them.

**4. Fallacies that violate the Sufficiency criterion:** Insufficient evidence can cause an argument to go wrong. Such fallacies can be found in the taxonomies given below:

**i. Fallacies of Missing Evidence**

These arguments have little or no evidence. This lack of evidence can take the forms given below:

- a. "Insufficient Sample": It happens when a conclusion is drawn on the basis of a small sample of cases.
- b. "Unrepresentative Data": Sometimes, a conclusion is drawn from the data based on unrepresentative or a biased sample.
- c. "Arguing from Ignorance": When the truth or the falsity of a claim is established based on lack of convincing evidence against an opponent's claims, this fallacy takes place.
- d. "Contrary-to-Fact Hypothesis": In this fallacy, a hypothetical claim is treated as a statement of fact by making a claim with insufficient evidence about a past event under a condition that was present and may be repeated in future.
- e. "Fallacy of Popular Wisdom": It means making an argument appeal others by referring to the insights expressed in aphorisms or clichés, folk wisdom or common sense instead of providing the relevant evidence.
- f. "Special Pleading": This is the application of rules or principles to another person while refusing to apply them to one's own self or to a situation of personal interest without providing evidence for treating one's self as an exception.
- g. "Omission of Key Evidence": It comes when an argument is constructed without key evidence necessary to support the conclusions.

**ii. Causal Fallacies**

These fallacies are related with inferring faulty casual explanation from premises that do not provide support for such explanation. The faults can be found in the ways given below:

- a. "Confusion of a Necessary with a Sufficient Condition": It happens when it is assumed

that a necessary condition or a set of conditions in the absence of which an event cannot occur are also the sufficient conditions or the conditions in the presence of which an event can occur.

- b. "Causal Oversimplification": In this fallacy, the casual antecedents of an event are oversimplified by specifying casual factors which are insufficient and do not contribute to the event in question.
- c. "Post Hoc Fallacy": Building an assumption on the basis of wrong reasons that an event B is caused by another event A because B follows A in a particular instant of time.
- d. "Confusion of Cause and Effect": It happens when the cause of an event is confused with the effect of an event.
- e. "Neglect of a Common Cause": It means failure to recognize that two related events may not be casually related at all but are the result of the effects of a common cause.
- f. "Domino Fallacy": Assuming without sufficient evidence that a particular action or event is usually the first in a series of events or steps that will lead inevitably to specific, undesirable consequences.
- g. "Gambler's Fallacy": Building an argument on the basis of a happening that occurred by chance and that the possibility of its occurrence in the future is significantly altered.

**5. Fallacies that violate the Effectiveness of Rebuttal criterion:** These fallacies are ways of arguing that cannot provide an effective rebuttal to criticism of one's argument and of the position that it supports. The effectiveness of rebuttal can be violated in the following ways:

**i. Fallacies of Counterevidence**

These are committed by those attempting to escape the request of an effective rebuttal by failing to deal honestly with counterevidence or claim.

- a. "Denying the Counterevidence": It is the refusal to seriously consider the evidence brought against a person's claim or minimizing the evidence in an unfair way.
- b. "Ignoring the Counterevidence": Arguing in a way that ignores or omits any reference to important evidence unfavorable to one's position giving false evidence of no sufficient evidence against it.



## ii. Ad Hominem Fallacies

These arguments fail to reach effective rebuttal by attacking the critic of an argument unfairly instead of presenting counterevidence. These fallacies can in turn take three different forms mentioned below:

- a. "Abusive Ad Hominem": It means attacking an opponent by adopting a personal or abusive way and by ignoring the opponent's criticisms of an argument.
- b. "Poisoning the Well": It means the rejection of a criticism or an argument presented by another person on the basis of his/her personal circumstances or improper motives.
- c. "Two-Wrongs Fallacy": In this kind of fallacy the criticism of one's argument or actions is rejected by accusing one's critic or others of thinking or acting in same way as the critic himself or herself does.

## iii. Fallacies of Diversion

These fallacies fail to meet the rebuttal criterion by attempting to divert attention from weakness of argument in various ways. These ways are the following:

- a. "Attacking a Straw Man": In this fallacy, an opponent's position or argument is misrepresented to attack the opponent easily.
- b. "Trivial Objections": In this kind of fallacy an opponent is attacked by making a minor point as a point of critical concern in an argument.
- c. "Red Herring": This can be called as an attempt to hide the weakness of a position by diverting the attention from real issue to an unreal or side issue.
- d. "Resort to Humor or Ridicule": Sometimes, humor or ridicule is inserted into an argument when the argument fails to respond to the criticism in a appropriate manner.

[10], conducted a research in which they analyzed the use of different fallacy based persuasion strategies in e commerce websites. They found several fallacies in websites and application features. They found that the bestseller products used the fallacy of "Argumentum ad populum". Improper testimonials used fallacy of "Argumentum ad verecundiam". For personalization, the fallacy of

audience agreement was used. Similarly, for the public visibility of purchased and browsed items "argumentum ad baculum was used". "Argumentum ad consequentium" was used for cause effect simulations and the fallacy of accent was used for emphasizing or hiding the information. [10], argue that there is a scarcity of research conducted on the computer technologies and persuasion. They also found that fallacy based persuasion strategies are extensively used in mobile and web technologies and are quite effective in influencing the users' behavior and facilitate in decision making.

## 3. APPLICATION OF DAMER'S MODEL TO ARGUMENTS ANALYSIS

Model given by [7], has been preferred for analysis as compared with [11] and [8], due to its comprehensive nature and suitability as a tool of argument analysis. In order to apply the model to the arguments, data have been collected from OW website ([www.OW.com](http://www.OW.com)). Only the article in which OW has responded to the above-mentioned allegations has been selected for the analysis. The arguments made by OW in response to a journalist's allegations have been analyzed using [7], model of analysis. Data has been collected from OW's official website. The article has been divided into different segments according to the topics covered in every paragraph. A total of ten arguments have been selected for the analysis.

The first step in the analysis was to reconstruct an argument into a form where the premises and the consequences are easily distinguishable from one another. Later, the criteria proposed by [7], for the classification of good and bad arguments have been applied. If an argument fails to accommodate the structural principle, then the other criteria cannot be applied to it. A total of ten arguments have been analyzed which are mentioned below along with the analysis. The relevant fallacies have also been pointed out in the arguments failing to conform to the above-mentioned criteria.

### 3.1 Reconstructed Argument No. 01

OW condemns this story (Conclusion) because:

- i. It is baseless (premise 01)
- ii. It is substandard (premise 02)
- iii. It is maligning (premise 03)
- iv. It is defamatory (premise 04)

- v. It is based on false accusations (premise 05)
- vi. It is only a figment of imagination (premise 06)
- vii. It has been published without taking the company's point of view. (premise 07).

**Analysis:** The argument conforms well to the structural principle. The premises do conform to the principle of relevance as they do not contradict each other, rather, lead to the same conclusion. It violates the criterion of acceptability. In order to be acceptable to a mature or rational person, it does not present clear ideas. It is not easy to figure out how the bad name has been brought to the company by not considering the company's point of view. Even the last premise is questionable as no media house is bound to publish a story with permission. It lacks the criterion of sufficiency as there is no sufficient information in any of the premises except the last one to conclude how can the story against OW can be considered baseless, substandard, maligning, defamatory or based on false accusations as there are no standards provided or comparisons drawn to convince the audience. Similarly, it is not easy to figure out how the fame has been hurt or how the accusations can be false. No effective rebuttal can be found in any of the premises against the above-mentioned accusations.

### 3.2 Reconstructed Argument No. 02

The news agency (fictitious name) has published this story to get revenge from OW (conclusion) because:

- i. The news agency and ABC media group (Fictitious name) are business partners (premise 01)
- ii. ABC media group cannot tolerate XYZ media group's (Fictitious name) success (premise 02)
- iii. ABC media group wants to circumvent the punishment by Sindh high court for publishing defamatory articles against OW (premise 03)
- iv. Hidden owner of ABC media group has been involved in data theft of OW in past (premise 04)

**Analysis:** There appear to be no structural problems with the argument because according to the principle of structure there should be a conclusion and there must be premises in support of that conclusion. The argument fits well to the criterion of structure as there are four

premises in support of one conclusion that do not contradict each other.

The second criterion to be applied is the criterion of relevance. The first, second and third premises seem interrelated as the author has argued that the news agency and ABC Media Group are media partners, so one media partner can work for the benefit of the other partner. The last premise fails to conform to the relevance principle as the wrong premise is being used to support the conclusion. In this way, the last premise commits the fallacy of using the wrong reason as the arguer is trying to defend the conclusion by using the evidence that does not support the conclusion. The relationship of a person involved in data theft of OW does not relate with the response being provided against the accusations. Such kind of person may design any other way to take revenge instead of presenting arguments to the people related to a matter that does not include any defensive against data theft. The argument tries to conform to the principle of acceptability and sufficiency by providing some detailed evidence in support of accusing the news agency of theft. At the same time, the argument is not an effective rebuttal against the above-mentioned accusations against OW as the premises of the argument do not relate with the accusations and commit fallacies.

### 3.3 Reconstructed Argument No. 03

The story against OW has been written by the journalist (conclusion) because:

- i. He was expelled from Pakistan for damaging Pakistan's national interests (premise 01)
- ii. Express tribune wrote a story against the journalist (premise 02)
- iii. Some other organizations have written about him (premise 03)

**Analysis:** As the argument seems structurally well formed having premises in support of the conclusion, the next step is to apply the principle of relevance and acceptability. The argument clearly violates the criteria of relevance as well as acceptability as the second and the third premise do not relate with the conclusion. The first premise uses the fallacy of manipulation of emotions in an attempt to convince Pakistani audience that he wrote against Pakistan. The second and third premises are based on personal attack against the journalist, similarly the second and third premises are also based on

personal attacks against the same person. The argument written by the author implies that a person having a bad name or bad past must not write a defamatory article because it will not be valued. This argument clearly violates the effectiveness of rebuttal criterion by committing the fallacy called "Abusive Ad Hominem". The journalist has been criticized by calling attention to his personal characteristics instead of providing an appropriate response to his criticism against OW. The arguer has tried to ignore the journalist's argument against OW by calling him unpatriotic to Pakistan and calling a person who does not have a good image in the media.

### 3.4 Reconstructed Argument No. 04

The story written by the reporter is one sided (conclusion) because:

- i. He did not request any input from OW (premise 01)
- ii. He did not mention that the news agency is getting revenue from express media group (premise 02).
- iii. The news agency did injustice to readers by omitting the necessary information (premise 03)
- iv. There are criminal cases against ABC media group (premise 04)

**Analysis:** The argument not only seems to be structurally well formed but hardly conforms to the criterion of relevance. Structurally, all the four premises seem well connected as they lead the reader to the same conclusion. A statement can be one sided when it does not get information from more than one source. Similarly, the omission of necessary information again leads to the one-sided stories or statements. The first three premises of the argument try to conform to the criteria of relevance, acceptability and sufficiency except the last premise which hardly relates with the conclusion. The last premise contains the fallacy of using the wrong reasons as the last premise does not properly support the conclusion which says that the story was one sided. On the other hand, it focuses on missing information. The argument does not ideally conform to the criterion of effectiveness of rebuttal as it does not properly answer the questions posed by the journalist.

### 3.5 Reconstructed Argument No. 05

The author displayed poor journalistic skills and yellow journalism (conclusion) because:

- i. Accusations are without proof (premise 01)
- ii. Fake degrees and images have been displayed as evidence (premise 02)
- iii. No proof has been given how the fake sites are linked to OW (premise 03)
- iv. John Kerry's name has been used to create impact of the story (premise 04)
- v. The author did not mention the previous responses given by OW to the allegations. (premise 05).

**Analysis:** The argument has a sound structure. The principle of relevance can be applied to it. The first premise is strong as accusations without any proof have no value. Similarly, in second and third argument, the arguer has given reference to fake data that was used to support the fake story by a journalist. The third argument also supports the conclusion by referring to a technique used by poor journalists that is using big names to support their stories. The premises also fit to the criterion of acceptability as enough information has been provided in the argument in order to support the conclusion. It also seems fit to the criterion of sufficiency as the premises give sufficient information to support the conclusion. The argument fails to rebut the accusations against OW as it does not provide any response to them.

### 3.6 Reconstructed Argument No. 06

The author of the story has expressed personal grudge against OW (conclusion) because:

- i. Pakistan has been represented negatively (premise 01)
- ii. References to Silicon Valley providing best facilities to its employees has been presented as a shame (premise 02)
- iii. It resembles a story made by Forbes against the news agency's reporters. (premise 03).

**Analysis:** The argument is structurally well formed but it does not fit well to the criteria of relevance, acceptability and sufficiency. First premise does not relate with the conclusion. The second premise relates with the conclusion but the third premise again fails to conform to the criterion of relevance. After the application of the criterion of acceptability a question arises that how can the negativity expressed against one institute equal the negativity expressed against all the institutions of the country. Fallacy of manipulation of emotions has been used in the first premise. Similarly, fallacy of using faulty analogy can be found in the last premise where

the writer has tried to convince the readers without giving sufficient information about the resemblance of one story to another. The writer has tried to support his conclusions using fallacies instead of providing effective rebuttal against the arguments criticizing OW.

### 3.7 Reconstructed Argument No. 07

OW education system is comprehensive (conclusion) because:

- i. It provides benefits to diverse bodies of students (premise 01)
- ii. It caters to all types of educational institutions—online and traditional (premise 02)
- iii. It is a 360 degree solution for students and faculty around the globe (premise 03), available on multiple educational platforms being its core capability. (subpremise)
- iv. OW's Online Education Management System is World's Leader outside North America. (premise 04)
- v. OW is now collaborating with other renowned education groups in the USA to provide its Education Management System (premise 05)
- vi. All ten business units of OW are completely legitimate, legal and committed to enhancing the quality of IT services across the world. (premise 06)

**Analysis:** The argument is well formed having a number of premises supporting the conclusion. The first premise supports the conclusion as it refers to the facilities provided to a diverse number of students. In the second premise which is a complicated one there is a sub premise which again supports the same conclusion. The third and fourth premises gain support the conclusion as a comprehensive education management system also needs to have global presence. The last premise deviates from the conclusion as it refers to business units not the academic units and thus violates the criterion of relevance. The premises relate with the criteria of sufficiency and acceptability except the last premise where no information about the legal credibility has been provided. This argument is also not an effective rebuttal against the accusations as it does not relate with them by any means.

### 3.8 Reconstructed Argument No. 08

Certain elements such as ABC and XYZ media group have started defamation campaign against FC (conclusion) because:

- i. They are the direct competitors of FC media group. (premise)

**Analysis:** The argument can be termed as structurally sound. After the applications of the principle of relevance, it becomes clear that the premise supports the conclusion as the competitor may adopt any strategy to defame the other competitor. The premise seems relevant as a reference has been given to support the conclusion and it is an established fact that the competitors use tactics against other competitors to win. The argument conforms to acceptability and sufficiency criteria but fails to conform to the effectiveness of rebuttal. The accusation was related with the confirmation of the funding resources of FC media group to which no answer has been provided in the argument.

### 3.9 Reconstructed Argument No. 09

The story against OW was pre-planned by other media groups (conclusion) because:

- i. Within less than 60 seconds of the publishing article against OW, these media outlets started spreading this maligning campaign via different means.(premise 01)
- ii. It has also been noticed that they (ABC & XYZ media groups) are planning with other foreign media groups to publish this story with different angles. (premise 02)

**Analysis:** The structurally sound argument easily passes the test of relevance as both the premises supporting the conclusion are interrelated. Second step is to apply the criteria of acceptability and sufficiency. In the first premise, it is not clear that through which means the maligning campaign was spread as no facts or data have been provided. Same problem exists in the second premise as it is not clear which media partners are involved with XYZ and ABC media group in supporting the maligning campaign. The argument not only violates the criterion of acceptability but also that of sufficiency as there is no sufficient information provided to convince the reader that which foreign media groups were involved with express news in a maligning campaign against OW. It is also not clear what means have been used to spread the wrong information against OW. Similarly, it is also not clear which angles are focused in publishing the story as the dimensions of publishing have not been specified.

### 3.10 Reconstructed Argument No. 10

FC is a pro Pakistan channel (conclusion) in that:

- i. It takes care of its employees (premise 01)
- ii. It does not spread hatred in Pakistan like the traditional media houses. (premise 02)
- iii. It has pursued those elements who are against FC and OW (premise 03)
- iv. It has provided proofs of defamation and criminal activities against OW (premise 04)

**Analysis:** The argument has a sound structure. The first premise does not conform to the principle of relevance as a media channel taking care of its employees fulfils a moral not a national responsibility. The second premise again seems irrelevant as FC media group is being termed different than other channels as it does not promote hatred but the media channels have not been specified rather blamed which is fallacious. Pursuing other elements against for the sake of defending one's self is for one own benefit, not the benefit of the nation. Similarly providing proofs against a channel is for personal, not the national interest. The criterion of acceptability and sufficiency has again been violated by providing insufficient information in premise two, three and four. It is not clear which traditional media channels have been discussed as there are so many media channels in Pakistan. It is hard to specify which ones are traditional. Similarly, it is hard to find out which elements have turned against FC and OW. Once again, no link or reference has been given to the proofs of defamation or criminal activities. A fallacy of manipulation of emotions has also been used to defend the argument by calling FC media group as pro Pakistan and others as anti-Pakistan elements. The argument fails all the criteria of a good argument except structural criteria.

### 4. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper is to find out whether the arguments presented by OW online company in its defense were good enough to fulfill the criteria of good arguments provided by Damer. For this purpose, the criteria of structure, relevance, acceptability, sufficiency and the effectiveness of rebuttal were applied to the arguments. All of the arguments fitted well to the criterion of structure as they provided the premises that neither contradicted each other, nor contradicted the conclusions of the arguments. The second important criterion was relevance. Not only frequent violations of the criteria of relevance

were observed but certain arguments also used fallacies in order to make the premises convincing enough. The third criterion of acceptability was not met as the necessary logic accepting the arguments as truthful or convincing was missing. Most of the arguments contained insufficient information in order to support the conclusions which therefore, violated the sufficiency criterion. Necessary data and evidence were found missing except for a few cases. On the criterion of effectiveness of rebuttal. This was determined in the light of the information about the accusations mentioned against OW. None of the arguments could provide an effective rebuttal against any of the accusations mentioned in the introductory section of the article.

The analyses also found several fallacies that were used to support the conclusions while violating the criteria of good arguments. Most of the fallacies were related either with the violations of the criterion of relevance or with the violations of the criterion of effectiveness of rebuttal. The use of fallacies of manipulation of emotions and ad hominem fallacies was found common in most of the arguments.

The insufficient evidence, the irrelevant premises and the use of fallacies in the arguments indicates that the article written by OW in response to the accusations published by the news agency was fallacious and was simply an attempt to deceive the audience.

As mentioned earlier, manipulative marketing is a challenge faced by the customers using online products and services. This study can be helpful in recognizing the deceitful language used in the websites promoting different products and services related to education. This analysis can also be extended to the study of many other products and services to raise awareness about how language is used to manipulate the thoughts and feelings of the people.

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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## **APPENDIX**

**This appendix contains all the original arguments used for analysis**

### **Argument No. 01**

OW condemns this story as baseless, substandard, maligning, defamatory, and based on false accusations and merely a figment of imagination published without taking the company's point of view.

### **Argument No. 02**

It is clarified that the news agency in Pakistan is partnered with Express Media Group to publish International the news agency in Pakistan and receive earnings from the group. ABC Media Group was under a restraining order and contempt of court proceedings by Sind High Court for publishing a defamatory news item and further from anything detrimental to OW's reputation. Hence Express Media Group to counter the success of FC and to circumvent the court order has got this story published via its partner the news agency in collaboration with some reporter called Declan Walsh. It should also be noted that a few months back in a registered criminal case by OW for Data Theft (Criminal case No.561/2015), Police investigations led to Mr. Sultan Lakhani as the ultimate hidden owner of that company involved in Data theft of OW and other IT companies and his name was included in the interim police Challan. After which Mr. Sultan also tried to transfer the investigations to another Police department of his choice but on 12th May 2015 that transfer was also suspended by Sind High Court and the criminal investigation again started against Mr. Sultan Lakhani.

### **Argument No. 03**

The story is authored by some reporter of the news agency who was expelled from Pakistan as "Persona nongrata" by Pakistan Interior Ministry allegedly due to his involvement in damaging Pakistan's national interests. Even the media group he is affiliated with, the Express Tribune, published a story against him ([click here to read more](#)). Several other organizations have also written about him ([click here to read more](#)).

### **Argument No. 04**

This reporter has worked and devised a one sided story without taking any input from the company. A last minute, haphazard elusive email was sent to the company demanding an immediate response by the next day to which the attorney for OW responded. Moreover, this reporter has not mentioned the conflict of interest which the news agency has due to its association with XYZ Media as its revenue source in Pakistan. This necessary disclosure regarding the criminal cases on the news agency Partner in Pakistan was deliberately omitted and is an injustice to the reader not expected of a publication like the news agency.

### **Argument No. 05**

In an exemplary display of poor journalistic skills and yellow journalism, the writer quoted references from several imaginary employees to corroborate accusations made out of thin air. None of these accusations have been substantiated with any real proof. Search engines have been used to type 'fake degrees' and whatever images have turned up have been portrayed as evidence. Additionally, no proof has been given linking any of these sites and allegations to OW and widely recognized names such as that of John Kerry have been used to increase the impact of the story. In fact the writer himself admits that when he approached these universities, they denied having any links with OW. Furthermore, in a glaring display of bias, he didn't even mention the fact that all these previous published allegations have been more than adequately addressed by OW earlier in the civil suit 907/2013 filed against ABC news and others.

### **Argument No. 06**

One aspect that stands very clear from all this is that a personal grudge has been displayed by the writer. Parallels laded with negativity have been drawn with the portrayal of positive Pakistan and also including references to the Silicon Valley as if offering world class facilities to employees is something that we should be ashamed about when it is our pride. This reminds us of the story made by Forbes against the news agency reporters of publishing false stories.

### **Argument No. 07**

For information on OW Education Unit, it is hereby clarified that OW provides a comprehensive education management system that benefits diverse bodies of students and caters to all types of educational institutions—online and traditional. It is a 360 degree solution for students and faculty around the globe, available on multiple educational platforms being its core capability. Furthermore, OW's Online Education Management System is World's Leader outside North America. And OW is now collaborating with other renowned education groups in the USA to provide its Education Management System and is poised to be a major player in the online education industry of USA by 2018. All ten business units of OW are completely legitimate, legal and committed to enhancing the quality of IT services across the world.

### **Argument No. 08**

From the very first day of announcement of FC, certain elements have started campaigning against OW and FC. ABC media group and XYZ Media Group being direct competitors of FC (initiated by OW) have started a defamation campaign and other criminal pursuits since last 2 years accusing FC of belonging to multiple groups, sometimes establishment, sometimes a real estate tycoon and sometimes other controversial personalities and were coining all kind of conspiracy theories.

### **Argument No. 09**

Now they have planned this story in collaboration with this reporter as evident from the fact that within less than 60 seconds of the publishing of this article, these media outlets started spreading this maligning campaign via different means. It is also come to our notice that they are planning with other foreign media groups to publish this story with different angles.

### **Argument No. 10**

It should be noted that the announcement of FC as a positive and pro Pakistan channel in Pakistan who cares for its employees has shaken these traditional media houses who have promoted hatred, despair, negativity and hopelessness in Pakistan. OW and FC have vigorously pursued these elements that are desperate to malign FC and OW. FC has addressed this in the past and the following link on its website gives details of these defamation and other criminal activities and how OW and FC have addressed these legally.

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