

# Logical Fallacies in Social Media Misinformation

**Drishti Bansal, Harshika Sharma, Harshit Chitkara, Yogita Thareja**

Drishti Bansal VSIT, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies

Harshika Sharma VSIT, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies

Harshit Chitkara VSIT, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies

Yogita Thareja, Assistant Professor, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies

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## Abstract

Social media has rapidly transformed the way people create, share, and consume information. It allows instant communication and participation from a wide audience, but it also makes it easier for false information and weak arguments to spread. This study explores how logical fallacies influence discussions on social media and contribute to misinformation. The authors focus on both deductive and informal reasoning, highlighting that informal fallacies are far more common online. Through qualitative analysis, they identify frequent fallacies such as ad hominem attacks, false dilemmas, straw man arguments, and emotional appeals. They explain how platform structures, algorithms, and the focus on engagement often encourage oversimplified and misleading narratives. The study also presents a conceptual model showing how different social media platforms promote different types of flawed reasoning. While emotions can play a role in persuasion, relying on them without logical evidence can weaken arguments and mislead audiences. Overall, the research emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and digital literacy. Teaching these skills is essential to promote evidence-based discussions and reduce the spread of misinformation in today's digital world.

**Key Words:** Social Media, Logical Fallacies, Misinformation, Digital Literacy, Critical Thinking, Informal Reasoning, Algorithms, Online Communication

## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, social media has become one of the primary forms of information for people all over the world. Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, have completely changed the way that we access information, discuss opinions, and form opinions about political issues, social issues and

cultural issues. Unlike traditional media, which often takes a long time to share and disseminate information, social media platforms can share and disseminate information instantly and contain user-generated content; thus, making them much more accessible to everyone, but also less regulated. As such, public discussion today is being conducted in a new, faster, more interactive way, and less driven by fact than ever before.

This rapid flow of information, however, has also resulted in a wide reach of misinformation and poorly constructed arguments. Many times, people will share information about either something that they do not know is true or false, and many times people will share things that contain an emotional appeal, rather than factual evidence, and many times persuasive forms of reasoning will outweigh logical forms of reasoning. Because of the speed in which social media information can be shared, and viral aspects of social media content, it is easier for misleading arguments to be shared and spread before people can evaluate the validity of them, or before they can determine if they are logical.

Because of this, critical thinking and logical analysis have become key skills for people to navigate the communication environment created by the digital world. Through critical thinking, individuals can evaluate claims to establish their truth or falsehood through available evidence supporting the claim, and through logical analysis, they can determine whether an argument is logically sound or whether it contains flawed reasoning in the middle of its argument.

Logical evaluation involves one specific form of logical error known as a logical fallacy. A logical fallacy is an error committed systematically within a logical evaluation process, and it has the effect of weakening an argument's degree of validity. A logical fallacy may

look to be correct when it is first viewed. However, when evaluated in accordance with the logic process, a logical fallacy distorts logic (or the law of identity) and uses tactics (many times emotional in nature or appeals to authority or majority) to persuade an audience.

This study argues that logical fallacies are prevalent in social media discourse and significantly contribute to the spread of misinformation. By analyzing common types of fallacies and their frequency, this research aims to highlight patterns of flawed reasoning and emphasize the need for stronger logical literacy in digital communication environments.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

### 2.1 WHAT IS AN ARGUMENT?

An argument, in academic terms, is not simply a disagreement; it is defined as a conclusive collection of statements that support an assertion. An argument consists of two essential parts: premises and conclusions. The premises are evidence and statements that support and provide justification for the assertion, and the conclusion is the assertion's primary purpose. The strength of an argument depends on how logically the premises supports the conclusion.

Arguments are generally classified into two categories: deductive, informal, or inductive) reasoning. Deductive reasoning follows a structured and logical form wherein the conclusion must be true and follow from the premise, if the premise is true. For example, using the classic syllogism form of deduction, if all humans are mortal and if Socrates is human, then Socrates must be mortal; therefore, the validity of a deductive argument lies solely in the structure of the argument itself.

In contrast to deductive reasoning, informal reasoning is very commonly used in conversational English and through social media. Informal reasoning does not use strict logical structure and relies on example, probability, analogy, or the concept of persuasion (i.e., rhetorical strategies) to arrive at a conclusion. While informal reasoning is practical and widely used, it is also more prone to reasoning and judgment errors than deductively structured arguments, making it vulnerable to fallacies.

### 2.2 WHAT ARE LOGICAL FALLACIES?

A logical fallacy is an error in reasoning that negatively affects the logical validity of an argument. Fallacies may appear to persuade or create an emotional appeal

without providing reasonable and logical support for the conclusion. Fallacies will affect reasoning in either an incorrect manner due to improper structure or an incorrect manner due to misleading content.

Logical fallacies can be grouped into two categories: Formal and Informal. Formal fallacies are found when an argument has a flawed logical structure that means that regardless of the truth of the premises, the conclusion is invalid. You will find formal fallacies when you look closely at strictly structured deductive arguments.

Informal fallacies, on the other hand, occur due to errors in reasoning due to content/context/language and not structure. They normally have some type of emotional appeal, misrepresentation, exaggeration, and/or appeal to authority or popularity. Because informal fallacies occur so often in conversation, political debates, advertising, and especially on social media, they are much more likely to be present in real-life communication.

The reason for the prevalence of informal fallacies in daily communication is due mainly to cognitive bias (or thinking errors) caused by emotional persuasion, digital communication constraints (time), and the desire for quick and impactful communication messages. Social media promotes brevity and the desire for virality; therefore, arguments are very frequently oversimplified and less likely to have logical fallacies.

This theoretical framework serves as an academic basis for understanding the presence of and identifying the characteristics of logical fallacies in digital discourse today.

### 2.3 COMMON LOGICAL FALLACIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA MISINFORMATION

Messaging apps like WhatsApp, along with social media platforms including Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube, have become critical to Indians' sources of political and social information. The fast pace of news, emotional outrage techniques, and algorithm-driven recommendations engage illogical fallacies, thereby clouding public understanding, oversimplifying issues further, and driving up polarization. There are structural and psychological reasons why logical fallacies flourish online. Social media algorithms are designed to maximize engagement and tend to promote emotionally charged content. Echo chambers play into confirmation bias, with users following others who

share similar ideas and joining groups whose ideologies are quite similar. Short-form video culture creates a demand for simplification, not nuance. Moreover, political polarization around elections amplifies emotional involvement and weakens fallacy's workability.

Being conversant with the mechanism of these fallacies is crucial in enhancing media literacy and safeguarding informed democratic discourse. We'll look at four important fallacies - Ad Hominem, False Dilemma, Straw Man, and Appeal to Emotion and examine how they appear in a social media context.

#### **2.4 AD HOMINEM ATTACKS SHIFT FOCUS FROM POLICY TO PERSONALITIES**

Ad hominem occurs when an individual has a personal issue with and attacks the character and identity of a person rather than the argument they make or the evidence they present. During the 2024 Indian General Elections “

Short videos on social media and WhatsApp forwards targeted individual candidates personally rather than talking about unemployment data, inflation, welfare schemes etc. Viral “Bombay based leaders are anti-national/ corrupt/ puppets” types of posts were common i.e. edited visuals of people acting “crazy” more than actual explanations of parties and agendas, simply.

In 2023-24, vaccine and disease prevention scientists and doctors were also questioned about being “paid by pharma companies” as opposed to analyzing science around vaccines etc.

Such personal attacks are persuasive precisely because they stir up strong emotions. Anger and distrust make us engage, and Algorithmic systems may reward highly reactive content. And these arguments are logically flawed, as what matters about a claim isn't the personality or intention of the person saying it. The evidence needs to be separated from the politicians arguing on their behalf.

#### **2.5 FALSE DILEMMAS BIOL PUBLIC DEBATE DOWN TO ONE OF TWO EXTREMES**

A false dilemma reduces the complexity of a public debate down to: You are either for us and must stand behind an extreme position, or you are against us.

In the renewed farmers' policy debate starting 2023–24, social media posts presented: “Either you stand with the

farmers on the street, or you are anti-farmer”. This did not mention more balanced positions like standing for farming reform and standing with farmers by negotiating and compromising.

Similar binary tracks happened in security debates. “Either you support strict government action, or you support separatism.” Such narratives were widely shared through WhatsApp forwards and short political commentary reels. Platforms that consistently promote one ideological perspective will tend to demonize the other for allegiance.

They are persuasive because they allow for audiences to have a good and simple decision (this is public policy when generally it isn't), they fit well with the fast-paced nature of social media consumption, and they allow a closer group identity which helps us justify bias via emotional distance. However, they are logically flawed because public policy rarely operates in absolutes. Most issues involve multiple perspectives, stakeholders, and possible solutions beyond two extremes.

#### **2.6 STRAW MAN ARGUMENTS DISTORT OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS TO MAKE THEM EASIER**

A version of the straw man fallacy involves distorting the positions of opponents in order to criticize a weaker version of their beliefs. This often takes the route of simplistic reductionism, where a more complex position is flattened down and rejected easily. In the 2024 discussions about electric vehicle incentives and how those might relate to climate/environment policies, there were claims that climate activists “want to ban all petrol and diesel vehicles immediately.” In actuality, official policy discussions center around gradual transition/long term targets, rather than sudden bans.

In discussions about press freedom vs government regulation of the digital space, some suggest that those arguing for media freedom “support fake news and anti-national propaganda”. Here, the reasonable call for more regulated, responsive reform is painted as deviant absurdity.

Such distortions are persuasive because they are easier to attack as people don't see the exaggeration of fallacy; rather, people reject a false position that they're misled into believing was said. This reasoning is flawed therefore, in that it refutes the position the other person proposed (but never actually said). When this happens,

people cease to have an actual discussion and instead mislead themselves.

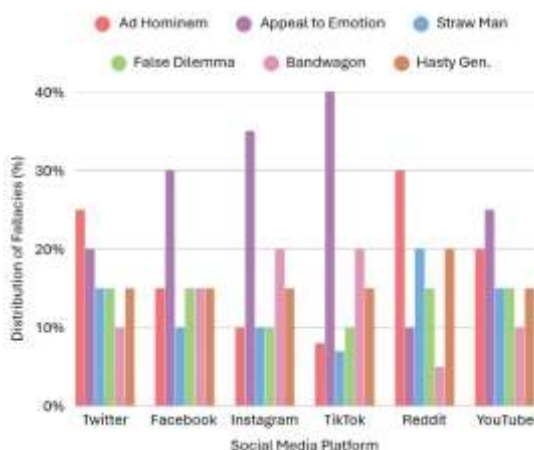
### 2.7 APPEALS TO EMOTION RELY ON FEAR AND SYMPATHY RATHER THAN VERIFIED EVIDENCE

An appeal to emotion attempts to convince the audience by scaring them or making them angry or feeling sympathy etc., not by using verifiable facts. Viral posts during the 2023 monsoon floods in Kerala and Maharashtra claimed that “entire cities were destroyed”, with some images appearing to match up to that. Many turned out to be red herrings, including recycled content from previous years presented without context or number closed before they were in fact verified and were captioned in emotionally charged ways to convince immediate share.

Likewise, in 2023–24, algorithmically amplified short-form content alleged terrible vaccine side effects by relying on emotionally charged personal stories and vividly told accounts that frequently do not come accompanied by medical verification. These posts spread like wildfire, purely on the basis of their emotional content.

Emotion-based appeals are persuasive, in part because emotionally salient material spreads more quickly than neutral material. Fear and urgency disable critical thinking and facilitate impulsive sharing. However, emotion-based arguments are fallacious, as emotional intensity does not justify factual validity, and the general public ought not to base their understanding on the basis of empathic stories.

### 2.8 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Model of the Distribution of Logical Fallacies in Social Media Misinformation\*

*\*Note: This figure represents a conceptual analytical model constructed for discussion purposes and does not reflect quantitative survey data.*

In Figure 1, a conceptual model depicts the logical fallacies of misinformation being distributed in-proportionally, across the major social media channels. As an analysis rather than an empirical study, this model communicates general patterns regarding the differences between how rhetorical techniques will vary due to both the structure of the platforms and their style of communication.

Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram have higher proportions for the use of appeals to emotion as a means of persuasion because of their visually oriented content and shorter formats. Since there is an emotional immediacy to these two types of social media content, it is easy to see how the use of aesthetic framing and the way that the algorithm determines what content is most engaging, will have an effect on the amount of emotionally persuasive misinformation that is used in these spaces. Conversely, Reddit and Twitter have higher relative proportions of ad hominem and straw man fallacies, because they are more debate-oriented and use heavier text in their communication. The increased anonymity offered by these platforms as well as the ability to quickly share messages may support users attacking each other personally and falsely representing what their opponents have stated.

Facebook and YouTube show a more balanced use of all fallacy types; however, bandwagon appeals and hasty generalizations are evident across all four platforms. This indicates that the virality of the content in relation to mechanisms supporting community-generated content may reinforce viral-based narratives and simplistic conclusions.

In general, the model indicates that misinformation is not uniform, but rather that it depends upon the affordance (aka the nature of what the platform allows) of a platform. The physical/digital structure of each platform—whether it be visual, conversational, or community-based—directs the fallacies that are used to persuade/influence an audience. Understanding the fallacies being used by users of individual platforms is important when developing targeted programs to build media literacy among technology users. When trying to address misinformation, interventions can be more effective when they incorporate the mechanism of persuasive influence being used by the people using the digital platform in question.

## 2.9 COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Acknowledging the counterargument to the research presented in this study on the prevalence of logical fallacies expectedly found within social media discourse is imperative. There will be many forms of counterarguments, one of which might be that while persuasive elements are a significant factor in compelling an audience, not all forms of persuasiveness contain flawed reasoning. While persuasive communication is inherent in communication, persuasive communication is inherently a critical element of public speaking, marketing, and advocacy communication. A logical premise can be presented with a persuasive intention without the presence of a fallacy throughout the logical chain of the overall argument.

Emotionally charged arguments can still be valid logically. Persuasive Emotional Language is used as a rhetorical device to display urgency, moral obligation, or social relevance; arguments related to public health, social justice, or environmental improvements have the potential to create an array of emotional responses, such as fear, compassion, and anger but can still have a basis in factual evidence. Using emotional language as a persuasive tool may improve a listener's level of involvement with the message without degrading their logical ability.

Emotional Persuasive Language becomes flawed reasoning only to the extent to which emotional language replaces or diminishes the logical evidence within the arguments presented within a message. The emergence of logical fallacies as evidenced by this study results from the weighting of persuasive elements and emotional elements within a message overshadowing or diminishing the logical reasoning of the argument presented within the message. When arguments include a reliance upon attacks on the motive of another individual (character), a reliance upon the authority of an individual without corroborating evidence, and a reliance on oversimplification of cause and effect within the overall argument, the integrity of the argument will be completely compromised.

Therefore, the recognition of counterarguments to the results of this study serves to substantiate the limits of the current research while eliminating the potential for the elimination of persuasive communication from the online environment; this establishes the goal of this research as the promotion of reasonable, logical evidence-based argumentative discourse.

## 3. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the occurrence of logical fallacies in social media communication and assess the role of flawed reasoning in the dissemination of misinformation. The results of the study show that informal fallacies, such as False Cause, Appeal to Authority, and Ad Hominem, occur with significant frequency in the content examined. The results also show that many arguments prioritize persuasion and emotive appeal over clear reasoning and evidence.

The results also show that logical fallacies are not isolated phenomena in modern digital communication. The preponderance of causal fallacies and appeal to authority reasoning suggests a difficulty with distinguishing correlation from causation, authority from expertise, or critique from attack. Such reasoning is likely to cause confusion and polarization and promote the spread of misinformation.

The results of this study also underscore the urgent need for critical thinking education. Improving logical reasoning skills—such as identifying the premises of an argument and recognizing fallacies—can empower people to engage with online content in a more responsible fashion. The results also have significant implications for digital literacy. As social media increasingly influences public opinion, it is essential for users to develop the capacity to critically evaluate arguments. Promoting awareness of logical fallacies can be a first step toward reducing misinformation and improving communication practices.

In conclusion, improving critical reasoning skills is not only an academic imperative but also a social necessity in the digital age.

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