

AD HOMINEM FALLACY IN THE SECOND US PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE 2020: DONALD TRUMP, THE KING OF AD HOMINEM

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to reveal and identify the sorts of Ad Hominem fallacies used by one of the presidential candidates, Donald J. Trump, during the second US presidential debate in 2020 because Trump is named the king of ad hominem. This study applied Damer, (2009) classification theory of ad hominem fallacy, which includes three categories; Abusive, poisoning the well and two-wrongs fallacy was used in this study. The descriptive qualitative approach is used in this study by collecting, arranging, analyzing, and summarizing the data. Only two of the three kinds of ad hominem fallacy were found in this study. Based on the finding of two types of ad hominem fallacy using the theory from Damer, (2009), it can be concluded that the Abusive Ad Hominem fallacy became the most often appearing category used by Trump using the pronoun you and to attack directly his opponent. Donald J. Trump's second dominant type is poisoning the well using the future tense modal will and wouldn't. This research experimentally shows the formula of sentences that contains ad hominem fallacy which could help to ease the identification of each type of ad hominem fallacy.

Keywords: Logical fallacy, Presidential debate, Ad Hominem, Abusive, Poisoning the Well, Two-wrongs

INTRODUCTION

Presidential debate commonly contains logical fallacies from the candidates. Fallacies are common mistakes in logic that undermine the logic of an argument. Fallacies are either flawed arguments or irrelevant thoughts that are commonly uncovered due to a lack of proof to back up their claim. An example of a lack of evidence is when Trump claims he was awarded "Man of the Year" in Michigan. However, it is contrary to the fact. According to a former Republican congressman who planned the event, Trump did not get an honor, and the club has never chosen a "man of the year. The claim spoken by Trump serves as an example *"I don't know if you know this, but probably 10 years ago, I was honored. I was the man of the year by, I think, somebody, whoever. I was the man of the year in Michigan. Can you believe it? Long time, that was long before I ever decided to do this."*

The candidate may purposefully commit the fallacy to deceive others. According to The North Texas Daily (2016), Donald J. Trump is the king of ad hominem because he made frequent use of the logical fallacy that is an ad hominem attack. The fallacy spoken by Trump serves as an example: *"Bernie Sanders has argued in favor of free higher education for all Americans but Bernie Sanders is a communist so we should not support his policy"*. According to (Dahlman et al., 2013) instead of addressing someone's argument or viewpoint, this fallacy arises when you criticize the person or some feature of the person who is presenting the argument. Dahlman et al., (2013) also stated that ad hominem arguments are often used as counter-arguments to claims about an opponent's reliability.

Previous research on logical fallacies in presidential debates has been conducted. The first is the study from (Warman & Hamzah, 2019) aims to identify the sorts of logical fallacies made during the 2019 Indonesia presidential debates, notably by one of the presidential contenders, Joko Widodo using the theory of fallacy classification (Damer, 2009). This study used the qualitative method mixed with the qualitative method to strengthen the result of qualitative analysis. As per the findings of this study, the fallacy of abusive ad hominem is the most commonly encountered, followed by the fallacy of red herring and false alternatives.

The second is another study from (Warman & Hamzah, 2020) sought to evaluate and discover the sorts of logical fallacies used by one of Indonesia's presidential contenders, Prabowo Subianto, during the 2019 presidential debate using the theory of fallacy classification by (Damer, 2009) employs descriptive research with a qualitative methodology. This study

discovered thirteen different sorts of fallacies. The fallacy of false alternatives was the most prevalent, followed by the fallacy of drawing the wrong conclusion and appealing to irrelevant authority, which accounted for 15.62 percent and 9.37 percent.

The third is the study from Rizal et al., (2021) to determine whether the case is a fake, gimmick, or victim-playing, to determine the Indonesian government's concerns with the case, and to determine whether the problem is a logical fallacy or not. This study applies the false cause, a fallacy in which an argument asserts that a cause that is not the true cause is the outcome of certain issues using the theory of Hasty Generalization by Saunders (1993).

The previous researchers have examined and classified all of the committed logical fallacies by Damer (2009). However, there has not been much attention paid to the formula of the sentences that contain logical fallacies like the present study. Among three previous studies, this study is limited to the Ad Hominem fallacy spoken by Donald J. Trump known as the king of ad hominem in the second US presidential debate in 2020.

The objectives of this study are to investigate and evaluate the types of Ad Hominem fallacies in the second US presidential debate in 2020 uttered by Donald J. Trump using the theory of logical fallacy by Damer (2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

As part of this study, the researcher examines the theories about the ad hominem fallacy by Damer (2009). The theory has a specific role in ensuring the success of this study in a presidential debate, as will be detailed as follows:

Ad Hominem fallacy

According to Damer (2009), An ad hominem argument is one that is addressed "to the person." This can be accomplished by attempting to attack the opposition in such a "personal or abusive manner" (abusive ad hominem), claiming that the critique is poisoned by the critic's questionable motives or personal situation (poisoning the well), or asserting that the critic acts or thinks similarly to the way being criticized (two-wrong fallacy).

1. Abusive Ad Hominem

Damer (2009) defines a personal or abusive attack on an opponent as a technique of disregarding or dismissing his or her criticism or viewpoint. The aggressive or personal attack frequently takes the form of highlighting some objectionable personal trait of one's critic. Example:

"No wonder you think sexual promiscuity is all right. You know you've never had a really good relationship with a woman. So it's not strange that you'd resort to recreational sex." (Damer, 2009)

This argument is Ad Hominem because rather than addressing the merit of the opponent's argument about sexual promiscuity, the arguer is simply being abusive by the reason of the opponent's position stems from a lack of a good sexual experience. According to Dahlman et al., (2013), it is not just a flawed argument, but it is also an insult.

2. Poisoning the Well

According to Damer (2009) Rejecting a critique or argument provided by another individual because of personal reasons or bad motives. This fallacy is known as poisoning the well because its intended impact is to denigrate the source of an argument or point of view in such a way that there is no need to consider the merits of that stance. In other words, it "damns the source," such that nothing that comes from that source will be viewed as worthy of serious consideration because of the arguer's personal qualities or objectives.

Example:

"As a teacher, he would naturally be in favor of increasing teachers' pay."
(Damer, 2009)

The poisoning the good fallacy occurs when negative information about someone is supplied in order to influence the hearer (whether it's true or false). The word "would" indicates that the

claim is not yet known. According to (Walton, 2006) poisoning, the well is a good example of utilizing ad hominem since it works by disparaging the source. It accomplishes this by arguing from a negative stance of ignorance or biases.

3. Two Wrongs Fallacy

Rejecting a judgment of one's argument or conduct by accusing the critic or others of similar thinking or behavior (Damer, 2009). When a debater commits this mistake, he or she is arguing to the critic, "Because you are guilty of doing or believing the same thing that you are condemning me for, your argument is not worthy of my consideration." This counterattack on the critic serves to avoid having to refute his or her criticism or argument. Example:

Thurman: "At your age, you really shouldn't work so hard, Laura. You're going to exhaust yourself completely and end up in the hospital."

Laura : "You work just as hard as I do, Thurman, and you aren't one bit younger than I am." (Damer, 2009)

Laura has not really replied to Thurman's suggestion that if she keeps working at the same level, she'll have major physical difficulties. Instead, she's used the "you do it, too" argument to divert attention away from herself and avoid dealing with the problem. According to Groarke (1982), it is an endeavor to do the impossible in order to demonstrate that a wrong act is not wrong. A wrong act, no regardless of how often it is repeated, cannot become right.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The goal is to characterize the phenomena based on the data analysis and then form the study conclusion. The researcher used the descriptive approach to describe the phenomenon of logical fallacies in the second US presidential debate by Donald J. Trump in 2020 which discusses the possibility of solving problems by collecting, arranging or classifying, analyzing, and summarizing data and drawing conclusions about the type. The object of this study is utterances spoken by Donald J. Trump in the second US presidential debate in 2020 using a pragmatics perspective.

In conducting this research, the researcher used the YouTube video entitled Second 2020 Presidential Debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden by C-Span Channel and the transcript downloaded from the rev website entitled *Donald Trump & Joe Biden Final Presidential Debate Transcript 2020* as the source of the data. The researcher used the YouTube video entitled Second 2020 Presidential Debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden as the main source of the data, while the transcript was used to support the data in order to make the researcher understand the dialogs easier. The first step was watching the entire video while matching the transcript on the website, and then selecting the sentences that contain ad hominem fallacy based on the theory of logical fallacy by Damer (2009). The next step was analyzing the data and putting it into its category using the theory of logical fallacy by (Damer, 2009) which is abusive ad hominem, poisoning the good ad hominem, and two-wrong fallacy ad hominem. Furthermore, Data Reduction will be employed in this study in order to obtain only the relevant and accurate data from the video.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the data was used to reveal Donald J. Trump as the king of ad hominem. Trump committed 36 ad hominem fallacies in this debate with a duration of 1 hour 5 minutes 15 seconds. There are 26 data of ad hominem fallacy and 10 data of poisoning the good ad hominem fallacy. In this section, the findings will be analyzed.

Abusive Ad Hominem Fallacy

The fallacy mostly used by Trump is the abusive ad hominem fallacy. The abusive Ad Hominem fallacy is used in order to attack directly someone using an argument by using the

pronoun: you and he. In the presidential debate video, Donald Trump often used the abusive argument about Joe Biden in data (1) and (2):

- (1). *"**You** 'll destroy our country."* (1:48:00 – 1:48:01)
- (2). *"**You** don't know the law, Joe."* (1:28:18 – 1:28:19)

Those two examples are short and precise arguments used by Trump using "**you**" will destroy our country (1:48:00 – 1:48:01) and "**you**" don't know the law (1:28:18 – 1:28:19), directly to the person's personal capacity in order to make his opponent, Joe Biden look like he is going to destroy the country and he doesn't know the law. It can be seen that Trump is being aggressive or doing personal attacks frequently and doing some objectionable personal traits of attacking opponents.

- (3). *"**He** ran the H1N1 swine flu and it was a total disaster."* (32:49 – 32:54)
- (4). *"**He** did nothing except build cages to keep children in."* (1:26:39 – 1:26:45)

Unlike data (1) and (2), data (3) and (4) are short and precise arguments used by Trump using the pronoun "**he**" directly to the person's personal capacity in order to make Joe Biden's H1N1 look like it is a total disaster (32:49 – 32:54) and he did nothing but build the cages to keep the children in (1:26:39 – 1:26:45). It can be seen that Trump is being aggressive or doing personal attack frequently and doing some objectionable personal trait of attacking opponent.

Poisoning the Well Ad Hominem Fallacy

The other fallacy used by Trump is poisoning the well. According to Damer (2009), the poisoning-the-good fallacy happens when adverse information about someone is presented in order to inflict bias on the hearer so that they dislike the person whose information is being presented. This fallacy is distinguished by the presentation of biased information (whether true or false) about an opponent in an attempt to prematurely undermine the credibility of the opponent's evidence or argument by using the future tense "will" and "would".

In the debate, Trump used this kind of fallacy to make Biden look bad in the eye of the audience by presenting biased information, for example:

- (5). *"... **He'll be against it** very soon because his party is totally against it."* (1:50:44 – 1:50:52)
- (6). *".... And he wants to close down. **He'll close down** the country if one person in our massive bureaucracy says we should close it down."* (41:06 – 41:15)
- (7) *"They came out and said very strongly **\$6,500 will be taken away** from families under his plan, that his plan is an economic disaster."* (1:46:40 – 1:46:49)
- (8) *"They tried to meet with him. **He wouldn't** do it. He didn't like Obama. He didn't like him. **He wouldn't** do it"* (1:05:52 – 1:05:58)

In data (5) (6) and (7) Donald Trump used the future tense modal "will" in affirmative sentences. As in data (5), the sentence "**he'll be against it**" (1:50:44 – 1:50:52) is biased information (which is not yet known) presented by Trump". He made Biden as if Biden was against Pennsylvania without knowing whether Biden is actually going against it or not and Trump doesn't present the evidence. The data (6) is another example of poisoning the good ad hominem fallacy. The argument "**he'll close down**" is biased information. He made Biden as if Biden will close down the country if one person in the bureaucracy says he should close it down (41:06 – 41:15). In the data (7) the argument "**\$6,500 will be taken away**" is also biased information using the future tense modal spoken by Trump. Trump claims that \$6,500 will be taken away from families under Biden's plan which makes an economic disaster (1:46:40 – 1:46:49). He strongly made the statement even though his opponent might not actually take away the money because it is not happening yet. It can be seen that Trump wanted to make the audience dislike Biden based on the biased information he presented.

At the same time, data (8) shows that Trump used the future tense modal in the negative sentence “**wouldn’t**”. The argument “**He wouldn’t** do it” spoken by Trump is also biased information (which is not yet known). He made Biden as if Biden will not try to meet with Obama because Biden hates Obama (1:05:52 – 1:05:58) even before Biden confirms whether he likes Obama or not. It can be seen that Trump wanted to make the audience dislike Biden based on the biased information he presented.

Unlike the three previous pieces of research which focused on all types of fallacies and also showed percentages, this paper only focuses on ad hominem fallacies without calculating the percentages. In this study, pronouns and types of tenses used in committing ad hominem fallacies were also found using the theory of ad hominem fallacy by Damer (2009).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The study found that Donald Trump used 2 types of ad hominem fallacy in his argument. Trump used an abusive ad hominem fallacy by using the pronoun you and he in order to directly attack his opponent, Joe Biden. The other ad hominem fallacy used by Trump is poisoning the well by using the future tense modal “will” in an affirmative sentence and the future tense modal “wouldn’t” in a negative sentence which is biased information (not yet known). In addition, Trump did not use any two wrongs and ad hominem fallacy in his speech. Thus, the abusive ad hominem fallacy is the most used fallacy by Trump in the presidential debate speech. Further research is recommended to explore other aspects of logical fallacy such as the fallacy of counterevidence and the fallacy of diversions by Damer (2009) as well as the reason for the committed fallacy.

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