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Ad Populum (Appeal to Popularity): Lesson and Activity



Watch the video, and read the explanation below.
Then respond to the prompts in the video.

Albert Einstein once said, "What is right is not always popular, and what is popular is not always right." This perfectly illustrates the concept of the **ad populum fallacy**, also known as the **appeal to popularity**—the mistaken belief that if many people believe something, it must be true. At its core, this fallacy follows a simple but flawed logic: If many believe it, it must be so.

For example, consider the following statement:



"The president has exceptionally high approval ratings—higher than any president in the past 100 years. Therefore, the president is doing a great job."

This is a clear ad populum fallacy because it assumes that popularity equals quality. Just because many people approve of the president does not necessarily mean he is doing a great job. History provides a sobering example: Hitler and the Nazi Party once had high approval ratings. Does that mean Hitler was a great leader? Clearly not. Popular opinion can be—and often is—wrong.

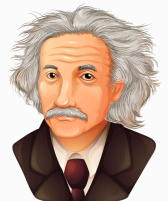


That said, widespread belief shouldn't be dismissed outright. A consensus among experts or the general public can indicate truth, but it cannot serve as the sole evidence for something being true or false.

Famed scientist Stephen Hawking illustrated this point when referencing Einstein's critics. When a book titled 100 Authors Against Einstein was published, Einstein famously responded,

"If I were wrong, then one would have been enough!"

His message? Truth is determined by evidence, not by a show of hands.



Ad Populum in Advertising

The **ad populum fallacy** is widely used in marketing because of a fundamental human tendency: the desire to belong. Advertisers exploit this by making consumers feel like they are missing out. Consider this slogan:

"Everyone loves Tasty Flake Breakfast Cereal!"



The implication? Since “everyone” enjoys it, you will too. But, of course, popularity doesn’t guarantee personal preference or quality.

The Role of Authority Bias

A related concept is authority bias—the tendency to place undue trust in authority figures. Advertisers often use this tactic by appealing to experts. For example, an ad might state:

"20,679 doctors recommend this product!"



The reasoning is clear: If thousands of doctors endorse it, it must be good. But does the sheer number of doctors automatically make the claim valid? Not necessarily. Authority bias plays on our trust in experts without requiring actual evidence.

Science and the Appeal to Popularity

A common **ad populum fallacy** involves appealing to the authority of "science." If most scientists support a particular idea, it likely has merit—but that alone does not make it true. Scientific truth is built on evidence, not consensus.

Your Task

Now that you understand the ad populum fallacy, put your knowledge to the test! Examine the following advertisements and statements. Identify the ad populum fallacy in each and explain why it qualifies as one. ?



1) Identify the ad populum fallacy and explain why it is an appeal to popularity.

2) Identify the ad populum fallacy and explain why it is an appeal to popularity.

3) Identify the ad populum fallacy and explain why it is an appeal to popularity.

4) Identify the ad populum fallacy and explain why it is an appeal to popularity.

5) Identify the ad populum fallacy and explain why it is an appeal to popularity.
