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English 101

Argument Analysis of Cory Doctorow's "Why I Won't Buy an iPad (and Think You Shouldn't, Either)

The opening seeks to catch the reader's interest through the contrast between today's perspective and a decade ago.

Mentions the author, title, and place of publication of the argument analyzed.

A teaser hinting at the argument's main point.

Background on the author's interests and credibility.

Summary of Doctorow's thesis.

Three sentences work together as the thesis. The first provides a negative assessment of the argument. The second explains the reason for the failure. The third suggests a way the argument could still inspire us.

iPads, like iPhones, are so omnipresent in 2020 that a critique of the technology almost seems futile. However, a decade ago at the time of its launch, the iPad actually sparked idealistic, energetic protest. Writers like Cory Doctorow lamented the way the iPad shut down possibilities for an open platform not controlled by a single company. [Doctorow's 2010 article "Why I Won't Buy an iPad \(and Think You Shouldn't, Either\)"](#) on BoingBoing critiques the iPad in the face of enormous media hype over its release. Apple proclaimed the iPad a technological revolution, but Doctorow thinks the real revolution would consist in opening up the hardware and software to consumers to modify.

Doctorow's perspective in this article grows out of his passionate advocacy of free digital media sharing. He got his start as a CD-ROM programmer and is now a successful blogger and author on the tech site BoingBoing. In this article, he argues that the iPad is just another way for established technology companies to control our technological freedom and creativity. Doctorow complains that Apple limits the digital rights of those who use its products by controlling the content that can be used and created on the device. While he cites valid concerns, his argument against buying the iPad will likely only persuade software developers. The disadvantages he cites for consumers are slight compared with the advantage of smooth user experience the

iPad offers. Yet his argument remains relevant to all today because it can revive a sense of excitement and possibility around open models that could still be developed with the right policies.

Topic sentence shows how one of Doctorow's strategies affects the reader. No technical rhetoric terms are needed, but we see from the wording that this paragraph focuses on an emotional appeal.

Doctorow draws readers in by encouraging them to side with him as a smart, hip techie. He builds credibility by quoting popular science fiction writer and technology guru William Gibson, known among techies as a brilliant expert, the one who coined the term "virtual reality." Doctorow joins with Gibson in scoring the idea that consumers are passive and stupid by quoting at length Gibson's satirical picture of this view of the consumer as a drooling mutant. The implication is that corporations that try to create a streamlined user experience are dumbing things down too much. Doctorow implies that smart and creative users will be offended by these assumptions. He appeals to readers' pride as he invites us to see ourselves as active, creative consumers who reject technology built for dummies.

This paragraph describes one reason Doctorow gives not to buy the iPad, but it also shows how he creates a feeling of excitement as he gives that reason.

Doctorow creates a sense of the wonderful, cheap variety that users could enjoy if they weren't bound by Apple's restrictive, expensive platform. He argues that consumers do not have to settle for limited digital rights; we have other options. According to him, "The reason people have stopped paying for a lot of 'content' isn't just that they can get it for free, though: it's that they can get lots of competing stuff for free, too" (4). Doctorow essentially says, "You could have this one thing...or you could have all of these things." Why pay for an expensive iPad and monitored apps, when you can get equal or better products and programs for free?

The transition refers back to the idea of the previous paragraph (summarized in the word "abundance") and introduces a complementary appeal.

He underscores this vision of abundance by appealing to the value of freedom. He writes, "As an adult, I want to be able to choose whose stuff I buy and whom I trust to evaluate that stuff. I don't want my universe of apps

constrained to the stuff that the Cupertino Politburo decides to allow for its platform” (3). By referencing the constricting forces of Communist Russia, the author appeals to a basic human fear of being controlled. He stirs up a natural rebellion against being told what to do. He appeals to our patriotism by implying that an open digital platform is more American, whereas Apple’s policies are more typical of a totalitarian regime like the Soviet Union.

This sentence summarizes the previous body paragraphs by pointing out that they all show the success of emotional appeals.

The paper turns toward critique with the word "however" and then undercuts the more positive assessment of the previous paragraph by citing a lack of evidence and possible bias.

Doctorow appeals effectively to our values and pride in the way he contrasts the open approach to the consumer with the Apple approach. However, he does not bother to support his claim that consumers can really get what they want from an open platform. He asserts that the free products available elsewhere are just as good as what the iPad offers, but are they really? Doctorow provides no evidence that this is so. Rather, he creates the suspicion that his interests as an independent software creator guide his assessment more than the actual consumer experience. As a software creator, he has something personal to gain from free digital media sharing and thus opposes digital rights management (DRM). He reminds us that he identifies as a developer when he writes, “It [Apple] uses DRM to control what can run on your devices, which means that...Apple developers can’t sell on their own terms” (3). He fumes, “Of course I believe in a market where competition can take place without bending my knee to a company that has erected a drawbridge between me and my customers!” (3). The problem is that not everyone is interested in making or modifying software, and, therefore, not everyone cares.

Doctorow wants consumers to take an active role like software developers, but that is his priority, not everyone’s. He overestimates how much intelligent consumers want to look under the hood of their device and their apps. He underestimates how much they want a streamlined experience so they can

focus on their own objectives. Doctorow could have been more fair-minded about the benefits of owning the iPad and, by implication, the benefits big corporations can offer consumers. His only positive mention of the iPad states, “Clearly there’s a lot of thoughtfulness and smarts that went into the design” (2). He could have

Doctorow's failure to recognize his readers' needs costs him readers' trust.

gone on to acknowledge that the iPad could be a great piece of equipment for people who are willing to commit to one platform. If he had conceded this, he would have built credibility as a person in touch with consumer needs.

A historical claim that doesn't reference the text introduces a larger perspective on the argument.

The last decade has shown that the iPad succeeded in convincing consumers. Doctorow’s idea of an open platform never materialized. Apple has encountered competition in the tablet market only from other huge companies like

A concluding meditation on the value of the argument.

Amazon, Microsoft, and Samsung that offer similarly proprietary platforms. Yet Doctorow’s article still has value because it reminds us of the possibility of a different model. He should follow it up today with a proposal for 2020, a longer

Suggests a way in which the argument could be made more convincing by changing its focus to one that it can achieve.

range vision for replacing these closed corporate platforms with an open marketplace. After all, his real enemy is not the iPad, but the laws that allow for digital rights management and monopolistic power. It remains to be seen whether, given the right government regulation, an open platform could give consumers

Final reference to the value of the argument, using language intended to inspire.

ease of use at the same time as it gave everyone access to create and sell and modify software. Maybe a glance at Doctorow’s vision from 2010 will yet help us move toward that vision.

Work Cited

Doctorow, Cory. "Why I Won't Buy an iPad (and Think You Shouldn't, Either)."

BoingBoing. 2 Apr. 2010. Web. 10 November 2014.

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