

**Zeitschrift:** Studies in Communication Sciences : journal of the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research

**Herausgeber:** Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research; Università della Svizzera italiana, Faculty of Communication Sciences

**Band:** 9 (2009)

**Heft:** 2

**Artikel:** Integrating content analysis and argumentative analysis to reconstruct a media-supported public debate

**Autor:** Ascaniis, Silvia de

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-791056>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 12.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

SILVIA DE ASCANIIS\*

## INTEGRATING CONTENT ANALYSIS AND ARGUMENTATIVE ANALYSIS TO RECONSTRUCT A MEDIA-SUPPORTED PUBLIC DEBATE\*\*

This paper discusses methodological issues about the use of content analysis, in order to show that if this empirical method is integrated with different techniques of argumentative analysis, it helps to reconstruct and analyze media-supported public debates. Content analysis is here integrated with the *analytical overview*, a method which allows to systematically consider every element of an argumentative text that is relevant to solve a difference of opinion, and with an argument evaluation by means of the *Argumentum Model of Topics*. The article argues that content analysis may contribute as a preliminary instrument to the argumentative analysis when dealing with large *corpora* of data, in that it allows to get a macroscopic view of the debate, thus laying the basis for the reconstruction, analysis and evaluation of the argumentative fabric. Mass-media platforms constitute, indeed, a special context of communication practices where argumentation assumes peculiar structures and dynamics, which have to be studied with the help of adequate tools, in order to understand their influence in opinion-making and building of consent. Relevant issues such as categories building and coder instruction are also briefly discussed.

*Keywords:* content analysis, argument analysis, public debate, reconstruction.

\* Università della Svizzera italiana, [silvia.de.ascaniis@usi.ch](mailto:silvia.de.ascaniis@usi.ch)

\*\* My sincere thanks go to all those persons who helped me in developing the research this article is based on. In particular I like to thank: Prof. Eddo Rigotti, Prof. Lorenzo Cantoni and Dr. Sara Greco.

## 1. Introduction

This article is based on a study conducted in 2007 (De Ascaniis) to reconstruct and analyze the public debate on euthanasia, which received widespread, renewed interest from the media during the first years of this decade, due to discussed news stories and normative decisions<sup>1</sup>. The study used a pioneering method of analysis, which integrated content analysis (henceforth: CA) and argumentative analysis, the first one allowing the reconstruction of the debate and the identification of the different parties' positions, and the second one providing a powerful instrument to analyze and evaluate those arguments. The paper intends to show that a methodological combination of CA and argumentative analysis allows to reconstruct and analyze media-supported public debates, by processing large *corpora* of data.

Euthanasia is always a "hot" issue in the ethical debate, where the two confronting parties hardly ever come to an agreement. If, on a general level, the pro-euthanasia movements collate with those against euthanasia, disagreement concerns a number of topics, which need to be identified in order to reconstruct the debate. Some of the most discussed topics relate to legal and moral aspects, medical infrastructures and assistance, family involvement and much more; all of them are, nonetheless, to be traced back to cultural and ideological dimensions: transcendent beliefs, the status of suffering, utilitarian ideas, freedom, authority, are the anchors of every dispute.

When the two parties recognize they have a difference of opinion and attempt to solve it, perhaps the most sensitive step to take is to identify those cultural and ideological elements, which often remain unstated but constitute values and beliefs, thus influencing the adopted position more than subject-knowledge and information do. This is especially true when bioethical issues are at stake: the confrontation field is here represented by

<sup>1</sup> In the cited study, two cases were considered in order to build the corpus of media articles to be content-analyzed: the story of the French boy Vincent Humbert, died in 2003, and the famous case of the American woman Terri Schiavo, died in 2005. Together with the stories of Ramon Sampedro (died 1998, Spain) and Piergiorgio Welby (died 2006, Italy), they marked the recent euthanasia debate because of their juridical and social consequences.

value dimensions, even if they are seldom explicitly addressed. A political-economical question such as, for instance, whether to invest public health money to improve palliative cares instead of using it for developing new plastic surgery techniques implies, in the last resort, a judgment about the value of life.

The analysis of arguments allows to highlight the reasoning process behind the adoption of certain positions on an issue. As Rigotti & Greco (2009: 11) explain, in fact: “to argue is a form of discursive move in which we do not limit ourselves to expressing or communicating ideas, opinions, proposals, wishes, projects etc., but we want to justify them, prove them by reasoning.”

The role of mass-media in forming public opinion is by now well-known, as is the frame of reality they create in “building” the meaning of messages; the words used, what is said and what is not said, rhetorical figures and other language strategies are used to make an *ad hoc* construction of reality. Mass-media must therefore be considered not only as a means of communication, but rather as a specific context for communication practices, where argumentation takes place according to proper features.

In order to reconstruct the public debate on an issue, especially if supported by the media, it is necessary to collect insights from a wide range of different sources over a long period of time, all in all, building a large *corpus* of texts to be put under the critical eye of the researcher. Among the methodologies usually adopted in the studies of mass-media effects on the building of public opinion, CA is without doubt any doubt among the most prominent ones. CA provides an effective tool for answering descriptive questions, such as, in our case: *how* do mass-media frame the euthanasia debate and act as information gatekeepers? Since the time of its founding fathers – Lasswell, Lerner and de Sola Pool – around the 40s, the technique has seen a surge in popularity in recent decades, as Riffe & Freitag (1997) highlight in a study in which they account for its use in social research from 1971 to 1995.

In the study conducted by De Ascaniis (2007), CA was used as a technique for identifying and measuring the argumentative parts of newspaper articles about euthanasia. Argumentation theory played a central role in the research, both in the elaboration of adequate CA categories to be applied to the sample, and in a second phase when, once the debate was

reconstructed, relevant arguments for or against euthanasia were analyzed and evaluated thanks to the *Argumentum Model of Topics* (Rigotti & Greco 2009; Rigotti 2006, 2008, 2009). The model allows to show in detail the inferential structure of arguments and to let the relationship between arguments and their premises emerge, thus revealing those hidden mechanisms upon which public debates are developed in the media.

In the first part of this article, the method of the *Analytical Overview* to reconstruct argumentative processes will be presented. Then, the technique of CA will be approached to point out its essential features. In the last paragraph, the salient parts of the study conducted by De Ascaniis in 2007 will be briefly discussed, in order to give evidences for the method presented.

## 2. Analytical Overview as a Means to Reconstruct the Process of Resolving a Difference of Opinion

A difference of opinion arises when two parties in a discussion do not agree on a standpoint<sup>2</sup>. This does not mean that the parties disagree on the reciprocal standpoints, but it is sufficient that one of them doubts the acceptability of the standpoint put forward by the other. Argumentation is the form of discourse move apt to resolve a difference of opinion, since the parties make a commitment to critically defend their standpoints, justifying them by reasoning (Rigotti & Greco 2009). Doing an argumentative analysis of a text or discourse means, therefore, to reconstruct those aspects of it that are relevant to resolve the difference of opinion, while at the same time neglecting other non relevant aspects (Greco 2009).

Within the Pragma-Dialectical approach, developed by Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, the argumentative discussion is seen, ideally, as a *critical discussion* aiming at resolving a difference of opinion. They propose a model of a “critical discussion,” which works as a normative tool to evaluate whether a real-life argumentative discussion has proceeded correctly, and to produce sound argumentative discourses. The

<sup>2</sup> Standpoint is the analytical term used to indicate the position taken by a party in a discussion on an issue. Standpoint is a synonym of the Aristotelian term *pròblema*, in expressing the fact of taking a position. As Rigotti & Greco (2009) puts it: “a standpoint is a statement (simple or complex) for whose acceptance by the addressee the arguer intends to argue.”

model constitutes also a theoretical instrument for analyzing a discussion and resolving a difference of opinion, by determining the acceptability of the standpoints at issue (van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck-Henkemans 2001). It has a heuristic function, since “all components of the discourse or text that are in any way relevant to the resolution are [...] taken into account” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004: 95). The analytical reconstruction applies to everyday conversations as well as to formal discussions, and to any other type of written or oral text which are, to some extent, argumentative in nature. It is carried out by means of an *analytical overview* of the critical discussion, which allows the emergence of “which points are at dispute, which parties are involved in the difference of opinion, what their procedural and material premises are, which argumentation is put forward by each of the parties, how their discourses are organized, and how each individual argument is connected with the standpoint that it is supposed to justify or refute” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004: 118). The analytical overview makes use of four reconstruction transformations, aimed at revealing the route that is followed in attempting to resolve the difference of opinion. In the case of *deletion*, irrelevant parts of the discourse are removed, while in the case of *addition*, implicit relevant parts are added; with *substitution*, ambiguous formulations are replaced with clearer ones; finally, *permutation* is applied when a rearrangement of some parts of the text is necessary to highlight their relevance for the resolution process.

The technique of *analytical overview* is a *micro* analysis, apt at reconstructing the argumentative deep structure of a single text or discourse. When dealing with great *corpora* of data, as a collection of newspaper articles, the debate between the parties has to be reconstructed first by means of a *macro* analysis. The technique of CA can play here a relevant role. In fact, it helps both in selecting articles that are particularly representative of the debate, and in identifying those arguments that are frequently put forward by the parties. The transformations of the analytical overview cannot be applied as such to each article of a large *corpus*, because it would require an enormous investment of time. The coder should rather be lead by the principles on which the transformations are based. For instance, the purely informative textual passages should not be considered (*deletion*), so to focus on the argumentative moves; if the author quotes



people directly involved in the case, it should be clarified if he joins or criticizes the reported argumentation (*addition, substitution*); when the article begins by putting forward arguments, and only later the issue of contention is introduced, the coder should have in mind the proper route of the confrontation (*permutation*).

### 3. Content Analysis to handle Large *Corpora* of Texts

The first recorded use of the label *content analysis* dates back to 1942, when it was employed by the sociologists Leites and de Sola Pool (Leites & de Sola Pool 1942) to address the studies about “symbolic aspects of society” carried out by Harold D. Lasswell and his students in the previous years. Lasswell spoke, indeed, of symbol analysis, to describe a method for accounting the meaning of words, which are signs conventionally provided with meaning. The new technique was supposed to provide “insights into the lives of others by showing us what has come to their attention.” (Lasswell 1941: 100). CA emerged during the World War II, as an attempt to analyze enemy propaganda, thus contributing to unmasking his plans, since “a principal source of information is what the enemy disseminates in his media of communication” (Lasswell 1949: 46).

Even if the content of propaganda and politics represents the initial as well as the main focus of CA studies (see Wilke & Reinemann 2000, 2001 among the most recent studies in political communication), the technique has been employed along the years to investigate different subject-matters as well as contents from different communication sources, e.g.: communication in non-expert contexts of scientific findings and theories (Kassarjian 1977), race and gender representation in music videos (Brown & Campbell 1986), perception of heavy metal and rap music in the media (Binder 1993), television broadcasts on HIV/AIDS prevention (Dejong et al. 2001), discourses of Women’s Lobby websites (Pudrovska & Marx Ferree 2004). Indeed, since CA deals mostly with written symbols and texts, it can be used by social investigators as a way for measuring social phenomena, nearly becoming an integral part of social inquiry. In a paper dated 1975, Markoff et al. already noted that “it appears to [them] that CA is integral to just about all social research. [...] Far from being a specialized or arcane approach to social science, CA is an integral part of the

vast majority of social inquiries” since they “consider text and attempt to place it in some set of categories – certainly the primordial and definitive content-analytic task” (Markoff et al. 1975: 272, 273).

What is, therefore, CA? Franzosi (2008) argues that it is *a technique of measurement applied to text*. A long debate distinguished between its use as a data collection or as a data analysis method, but the difference fades slightly if one considers that when data are collected from texts, a first analysis is required in order to identify those data, which fit the category of interest. The confusion, however, allayed when linguistic-based approaches were applied to the technique: it was clear that CA dealt not only with counting words (or signs) but also, and principally, with measuring text according to the categories of interest. This is, indeed, the way in which CA may be used if one has to analyze a media-supported public debate: the articles constituting the *corpus* should be first overviewed by the analyst to test and adjust the categories for the coding, and only later relevant data should be collected thanks to those categories. Since it is a method of measurement, CA cannot constitute a stand-alone mode of social inquiry, but rather it has to be embedded into a larger research design, otherwise it will remain a means to an end with no significance (Markoff et al. 1975).

CA is inherently a descriptive technique aiming at answering *how* questions on a body of texts. Franzosi (2008) comments that, if CA is usually used to address *how* questions, it can also be used to address *why* questions, that is to highlight mechanisms behind the described social phenomena. Such an explicative use, however, would require additional information from other kinds of data. For the aim of reconstructing a media-supported public debate, CA should be used with its “traditional” descriptive function, and *why* questions should be left to subsequent explicative analyses, for instance an argumentative analysis – as it is the case here – or a questionnaire survey.

Since the first studies conducted by Lasswell and his associates, a number of different definitions have been elaborated for the then-called *symbol analysis*. CA is born as a quantitative method, dealing with counting frequencies of manifest communication contents, as de Sola Pool (1959: 195) wrote: “Counting frequencies was the main activity of content analysts in the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, for many people that is how CA was defined.” It was later adapted for conducting qualitative studies, where



the latent content of messages had to be investigated. Some of them used very specialized approaches, which were no more to be labeled as CA, but rather as “discourse analysis,” “conversational analysis” or “semiotics.” In quantitative CA, inferences are drawn considering the frequency of occurrence of given content characteristics, while in qualitative or non-frequency CA, the mere presence or absence of such characteristics in a body of communication are relevant, instead of the number of times they occur (Franzosi 2008).

Greater emphasis has been put along the years on its inferential character: Stone (1966) defined it a technique to systematically and objectively identify specific characteristics within text; Krippendorff (1980) draw the attention on the inferences CA allows to make from data to their context. CA, in fact, may also be guided by an inferential intention, which is in turn oriented to a diagnostic end, i.e. aiming at the intentions behind the text. One of the latest definitions, precise and comprehensive, has been given by Riffe et al., who state that “[CA] is the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods” (1998: 2). Despite important differences among definitions, and sometimes clear-cut divisions between quantitative and qualitative CA, all of them agree on that the measurement process has to be systematic, objective and replicable (Markoff et al. 1975). To avoid the danger of irrelevant content coding, the choice of the units of analysis is essential. When it comes to analyze public debates, the unit of analysis should be the *argumentative move*, intended as a unity of standpoint and one or more arguments, since the debate has to be reconstructed right in terms of standpoints and arguments put forward by the two parties. Most of the times, argumentation is not explicitly expressed in all its elements, but the reconstruction of its deductive schema is left to inference. A CA of argumentative texts needs, therefore, to take into consideration latent content, and the coder has to be instructed in order to do the right inferences. In the following textual passage regarding the euthanasia contention, both the argumentative move of the quoted speaker and that of the article author emerge: “‘We had to have a law that respects not only the wishes of the patients but protects the doctor who follows the patient to the end of life,’ said Michel Ducloux, president of France’s National Council of Doctors [...]” (Smith 2005).

The standpoint at stake – that the French law regulating euthanasia was necessary – is explicitly expressed, as well as the two arguments in support to it. According to the first argument, the law allows to respect patients' will on their life; the second one, on the other side, states that doctors have to be protected from the accusation of murder. The two arguments represent, indeed, different utterances of the same argument type, that is the freedom of choice about life and death. Furthermore, the quotation itself functions as an argumentative move made by the article author to support his position in favor of the introduction of a law to permit patients to ask euthanasia.

The choice of the unit of analysis as well as the right codification of latent content is critical for the reliability and validity of measurement. The coder should only be an instrument of measurement, but when categories are highly abstract or when latent content has to be grasped to fit into them, the coder's role comes closer to that of the analyst. The problematic of coder's identity and training has always been a matter of discussion within the CA community. Many agree on that s/he may not be viewed as a surrogate scientist engaged in observation, but rather as a coding instrument whose assessment criteria are, as for any instrument, reliability and validity (Markoff et al. 1975). The coder, however, deals with human language, which hardly lends itself to a univocal coding, because of the many contextual and implicit elements influencing interpretation and understanding. The right interpretation of text passages needs some pragmatic knowledge, that is the knowledge about the context, the shared meanings of the public the author is referring to and the subject matter being examined. Besides linguistic judgments based on textual and contextual knowledge, the coder has to make substantive/thematic judgments based on the hypotheses of the study, as well as on the structural character of the study itself (Franzosi 1989). There is not a common solution to such kind of problems, in that every CA is different in objectives, hypotheses, sample, topics. Nevertheless, recommendations are always welcome, so that Franzosi's suggestion may be put to good use to help the coder in grasping and codifying the latent content, by defining "categories in terms of the function they performed either in the text or in the context of a researcher's substantive problem" (Franzosi 1989: 236).

In the study on the euthanasia debate, before coding the *corpus*, the coder were instructed about the euthanasia debate and on the essentials of argumentation theory, in order to allow him to make, respectively, substantive/thematic judgments and linguistic judgments. Furthermore, an experiment to test the reliability of codification was done, by asking to three different coders to codify the same five articles, and then matching their results with the results obtained by the analyst: no significant differences were found for what concerned inference and interpretation of latent content.

#### 4. Reconstructing the Public Debate on Euthanasia

The instrument used in the CA to systematically assign communication content to categories is the *codebook*. It is a coding protocol which defines, in the large, the objectives of the study and the methods used and, in the small, the coding rules to be applied to every element of the sample – i.e. to every article of the *corpus*. It allows the analysis to be reliable, since it gives other researchers the necessary indications to interpret results and repeat the analysis.

The codebook developed to reconstruct the debate on euthanasia was made up of formal categories, such as length of the article, author or editing date, and content categories, which were constructed in sight of the argumentative analysis. Categories were assigned an identification symbol, that was *K* followed by a number. The unit of analysis was twofold, since the levels of analysis were two. Formal categories (K1, K2, K3, K4) and some content categories (K5, K6, K7, K12, K13), in fact, served to codify general aspects related to the article as a whole, while other content categories (K8, K9, K10, K11) were created properly to measure argumentative aspects of specific textual passages. The unit of analysis for the first type of categories was the whole article, while for the second type it was the *argumentative move*.

The *corpus* of analysis was built collecting newspaper articles from an international press clipping on two cases of euthanasia: the story of the French boy Vincent Humbert, died in 2003, and the famous case of the American woman Terri Schiavo, died in 2005. Together with the stories of Ramon Sampedro (died 1998, Spain) and Piergiorgio Welby (died

2006, Italy), they marked the recent euthanasia debate because of their juridical and social consequences. Six newspapers were selected, following criteria such as language, circulation, geographic area of reference, political position; they were: *The New York Times* for English speaking international press, *Le Figaro* for French speaking European press, the German *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* for German speaking European press, *Corriere della Sera* and *Avvenire* for Italian speaking press. As far as the case of Terri Schiavo is concerned, all the articles between 500 and 2000 words of length, published between 25<sup>th</sup> March 2005 to 10<sup>th</sup> April 2005 were considered, except for *The New York Times*, whose enormous amount of publications about the American woman obliged to restrict the observation to the articles dating 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> February and 1st April 2005. The story of Vincent Humbert received less attention from the international press, so that every article between 500 and 2000 words of length were considered for the *corpus*, except for *Le Figaro*, from which only articles published from 24<sup>th</sup> September and 10<sup>th</sup> April 2003 and on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> February 2006 were taken. Articles shorter than 500 words were not included in the *corpus* because, after a first reading, they revealed not to have, in the most of the cases, an argumentative character. The dates chosen to restrict the *corpus* represent crucial moments in the two stories of euthanasia, corresponding to judicial decisions, public declarations or death. Overall, 63 articles were collected, 34 about Terri Schiavo and 29 about Vincent Humbert.

To identify univocally each article within the *corpus*, four formal categories were considered: [K1] *publishing newspaper*, [K2] *date of publication*, [K3] *story of reference*, [K4] *type of article* (e.g. interview, reader's letter, leading article).

In order to reconstruct the debate, standpoints and respective arguments had to be identified, codified and weight, and the two contrary positions in the debate had to be measured. Content categories were therefore built *ad hoc* to accomplish these tasks. Five categories were conceived to describe the general attitude of each article towards euthanasia. They were:

– [K5] *the sphere of interest*, referred to the conceptual frame, the domain in which the article can be set; the category helped to have an overview of the frameworks most frequently adopted to approach the debate, which were the ethical and religious one and the legal and political one.

– [K6] *the main problem approached*, asked for the coder to distinguish if the problem discussed in the article was about: legal procedures and ethical evaluations of euthanasia (which was dominant in 35/63 articles), medical care and patients' pains, biological will or vegetative state.

– [K7] *the quality of the message*, and

– [K12] *the argumentative relevance of the article*, were codified to help the identification of articles worth to be undergone to an argumentative analysis. To evaluate the quality of the message, two criteria were taken into account: the time the coder spent to read the article, and his/her understanding of the author's message. In order to evaluate the argumentative relevance, the coder was asked to take two steps: first, to count the argumentative moves in the article, second, to decide if the evaluation of the facts presented in the article were reliable, convincing and reasonable enough to join the author's position. The coding process pointed out 15/63 articles with a high quality as well as a high level of argumentative relevance.

– [K13] *overall orientation* of the article towards euthanasia, asked for the coder to distinguish between articles which were overall implicitly or explicitly in favor of euthanasia and related practices, and articles which were overall implicitly or explicitly against them. The judgment was determined by a quantitative observation, made by counting pro and against-euthanasia statements, and a qualitative interpretation, based on the tone of the article. Table 1 show that only 5/34 articles supported Terri Schiavo to be left dying (i.e. that her feeding and hydration tubes were removed), whilst 17/29 supported Vincent Humbert to be practiced euthanasia (i.e. that he was given a lethal injection or that his breathing tube was removed).

*Table 1: Overall Orientation – Story of Reference*

<i>Overall orientation</i>	<i>Story of reference</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Terri Schiavo</i>	<i>Vincent Humbert</i>	
Explicitly pro euthanasia	3	4	7
Implicitly against euthanasia	2	13	15
Explicitly against euthanasia	6	2	8
Implicitly pro euthanasia	7	2	9
Not assessable	16	8	24
<i>Total</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>63</i>



Four other content categories served specifically to codify argumentative moves, in order to identify and classify standpoints and arguments put forward by the two confronting parties.

– [K8] *explicitness of the standpoint*, distinguished if the argumentative move occurred in one of the following forms: having an expressed standpoint with respective expressed arguments, or presenting a standpoint standing-alone supported by unexpressed arguments, or giving arguments in support for an unexpressed standpoint. Two examples can be of help to clarify the codification mechanism:

- 1) “President Bush expressed sympathy to Terri Schiavo’s family’ and called on the nation to ‘build a culture of life, where all Americans are welcomed and valued and protected” (Goodnough 2005)
- 2) “‘Mr. Schiavo’s overriding concern here was to provide for Terri a peaceful death with dignity’, Mr. Felos said in an afternoon news conference.” (Goodnough 2005)

In the first argumentative move, the sympathy that president Bush expresses towards those people who were in favor of keeping Terri Schiavo’s alive, functions as a pointer to his implicit standpoint, that euthanasia is unjustifiable. This standpoint can be easily inferred from the explicit argument, according to which life is a value in itself. The wording Bush uses to express the argument is also a clue to identify the standpoint: the utterance ‘all Americans are welcome and valued’ puts forward that the value of life does not depend on the person’s physical conditions, therefore euthanasia can in no case be justified.

In the second move, instead, the standpoint occurs alone: Terry ought to have a dignified death. The expression ‘peaceful death with dignity’, indeed, functions as a condensed argument, since it directly points to the argument which supports the standpoint. Taking into account the context and the other information provided in the article, the argument can reasonably be figured out as that suffering hurts life dignity in a way that dying becomes preferable than living.

– [K9] *orientation of the standpoint* towards euthanasia. This category requires the coder to do a semantic interpretation – so as the before mentioned category K13 – particularly when the standpoint is unstated and has to be inferred from arguments. The codification asks for a distinction between active and passive euthanasia, willing and unwilling euthanasia,

assisted suicide and biological will. In the examples above, the first argumentative move is clearly against any form of euthanasia, while in the second one the practice is justified in specific cases (that is when life is no more considered dignified).

– [K10] *type of argument*. A first look has been taken to the *corpus* of articles in order to identify the recurrent arguments used by the confronting parties to support their positions. Arguments were then assigned a code and a description, to help the coder to classify them. In the first example, the argument used to support the standpoint – that life is a value in – was codified within the sub-category “dignity of life” and received the code number 27. The same argument was the matter of contention also in the second example, but there it supports the opposite argument; it was therefore codified as belonging to another sub-category, that was “dignified death” (code number 12).

– [K11] *judgment about actors and their actions*. Author’s judgments about the actors of the two euthanasia stories, or about their actions and choices, are both important clues to reveal his/her position and tactics to influence readers’ opinion. They are a sort of implicit arguments, thanks to which it is possible to infer the reasoning scheme underlying the writer’s position. Reporting the fact that president Bush ‘expressed sympathy to Terri Schiavo’s family’ is an indirect praise to the family itself and to what they did (they struggled for Terri to be left living). In the same vein, in the second example, quoting someone (Mr. Felos) who praised an action in support of euthanasia, is clearly a positive evaluation of the action described. Table 2 reports the frequency of the 31 types of arguments codified, grouped into 12 classes.

After the coding, articles with a high argumentative relevance were taken out of the *corpus*; among them, they were isolated those articles in which the arguments most frequently recalled in the debate appeared (according to the table above, they were: argument of patient’s will, argument of dignity of life, argument of pity). A simplified analytical overview was then made of such articles, in order to analytically reconstruct the discussion: relevant parts of the couple standpoint-argument were *added* or made, and irrelevant parts were *deleted*. Newspapers writing style is often rich of rhetorical figures such as ellipsis, euphemism, hyperbole, metaphor, which enrich and adorn the discourse but also make the meaning of

Table 2: Classes of Arguments

<i>Valid</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Com-putative percent</i>
Argument of will	58	20,6	23,5	23,5
Argument of dignity	33	11,7	13,4	36,8
Argument of charity	15	5,3	6,1	42,9
Weak arguments	14	5	5,7	48,6
Argument of equity	2	0,7	0,8	49,4
Other arguments	4	1,4	1,6	51
Argument of sacredness of life	47	16,7	19	70
Argument of assistance	11	3,9	4,5	
Argument of false charity	53	18,9	21,5	74,5
Weak counter-arguments	1	0,4	0,4	96
Argument of therapeutic alliance	2	0,7	0,8	96,4
Arguments against aggressive nursing	7	2,5	2,8	97,2
Total	247	87,9	100	100
Missing	34	12,1		
<i>Total</i>	<i>281</i>	<i>100</i>		

the message less immediate for the reader. The *substitution* transformation was therefore necessary in many cases to replace ambiguous or vague formulations, so that the communicative force of standpoint and arguments could be unequivocally caught. After the reconstruction, the *Argumentum Model of Topics* (Rigotti & Greco 2009; Rigotti 2006, 2008, 2009) was applied in order to show the inferential structure of those arguments which resulted to be the most relevant ones in the debate, and to evaluate them in terms of logical consistency and persuasiveness.

## 5. Conclusions

In the article, it has been shown that the integration of content analysis and argumentative analysis allows a likely reconstruction of media-supported public debates. It has been argued that content analysis should be firstly used to undertake a quantitative *macro* analysis of a large *corpus* of data representing the debate. In the second place, a *micro* analysis of

selected articles should be made through the *analytical overview*, that is a technique developed within the Pragma-Dialectical approach to argumentation, which enables to reconstruct the argumentative structure of written and oral discourses. The last step to take is to individually analyze and evaluate the arguments which content analysis revealed to be the most recalled ones by the confronting parties in the debate.

A study has been presented where the public debate on euthanasia were reconstructed and analyzed, with the aim of measuring the predominance of the opposing parties, weighing their positions, identifying and evaluating their arguments. The *corpus* of analysis was made up of newspaper articles concerning two recent stories of euthanasia, selected in the international press. Categories for the codebook were developed to accomplish two tasks: to point out the overall attitude of each article towards euthanasia, and to find out and measure argumentative moves. Articles relevant from an argumentative point of view were selected and arguments frequently put forward in the debate were identified. After the coding, the principles of *analytical overview* were applied to such articles and respective arguments, in order to reconstruct the discussion. At last, the *Argument Model of Topics* was applied to analyze and evaluate arguments, allowing to highlight their logic as well their pragmatic components.

## References

- BINDER, A. (1993). Constructing Racial Rhetoric: Media Depictions of Harm in Heavy Metal and Rap Music. *American Sociological Review* 58 (6): 753–767.
- BROWN, J.D. & CAMPBELL, K. (1986). Race and Gender in Music Videos: The Same Beat but a Different Drummer. *Journal of Communication* 36 (2): 94–106.
- DE ASCANIIS, S. (2007). Argomentazione nella bioetica. Due casi a confronto. Tesi di Master. Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano.
- DEJONG, W.; WOLF, R.C. & AUSTIN, S.B. (2001). U.S. Federally Funded Television Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to Prevent HIV/AIDS: A Content Analysis. *Journal of Health Communication* 6 (3): 249–263.
- EEMEREN, F.H. VAN & GROOTENDORST, R. (2004). A Systematic Theory of Argumentation. The Pragma-Dialectical approach. Cambridge University Press, UK.
- EEMEREN, F.H. VAN; GROOTENDORST, R. & SNOECK HENKEMANS, F. (2002). Argumentation. Analysis, Evaluation, Presentation. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- FRANZOSI, R. (1989). Collecting Textual Data. In: R. FRANZOSI (2008) (ed.). Content Analysis, London: SAGE 2: 227–266.

- FRANZOSI, R. (2008) (ed.). *Content Analysis*. London: SAGE.
- GRECO, S. (2009). *Argumentative and Other Communicative Strategies of the Mediation Practice*. PhD Dissertation, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano.
- GOODNOUGH, A. (2005). Schiavo dies, ending Bitter Case over Feeding Tube. *The New York Times*, April, 1, late edition.
- KASSARJIAN, H.H. (1977). Content Analysis in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research* 4: 8–18.
- KRIPPENDORF, K. (1980). *Content Analysis. An Introduction to its Methodology*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- LASSWELL, H.D. (1941). The Technique of Symbol Analysis (Content Analysis). In: R. FRANZOSI (2008) (ed.). *Content Analysis*, London: SAGE 1: 100–111.
- LASSWELL, H.D. (1949). Why be Quantitative? In: R. FRANZOSI (2008) (ed.). *Content Analysis*, London: SAGE 1: 3–15.
- LEITES, N.C. & SOLA POOL, I. DE (1942). On Content Analysis. In: R. FRANZOSI (2008) (ed.). *Content Analysis*, London: SAGE 1: 140–158.
- MARKOFF, J.; SHAPIRO, G. & WEITMAN, S.R. (1975). Towards the Integration of Content Analysis and General Methodology. In: R. FRANZOSI (2008) (ed.). *Content Analysis*, London: SAGE 2: 267–311.
- PUDROVSKA, T. & FERREE, M.M. (2004). Global Activism in “Virtual Space”: The European Women’s Lobby in the Network of Transnational Women’s NGOs on the Web. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 11 (1): 117–143.
- RIFFE, D.; LACY, S. & FICO, F.G. (1998). *Analyzing Media Messages. Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, London.
- RIFFE, D. & FREITAG, A. (1997). A Content Analysis of Content Analysis: Twenty-five Years of ‘Journalism Quarterly’. In: R. FRANZOSI (2008) (ed.). *Content Analysis*, London: SAGE 3: 3–16.
- RIGOTTI E. (2006). Relevance of Context-bound Loci to Topical Potential in the Argumentation Stage. *Argumentation* 20: 519–540.
- RIGOTTI, E. (2008). Locus a causa finali. In: G. GOBBER et al. (eds.). *Word Meaning in Argumentative Dialogue. Special Issue of L’analisi linguistica e letteraria* 2.
- RIGOTTI, E. (2009). Whether and how Classical Topics can be Revived in the Contemporary Theory of Argumentation. In: F.H. VAN EEMEREN & B. GARSEN (eds.). *Pondering on Problems of Argumentation: Twenty Essays on Theoretical Issues*. New York: Springer: 157–178.
- RIGOTTI E. & GRECO MORASSO S. (2009). Argumentation as an Object of Interest and as a Social and Cultural Resource. In: N. MULLER-MIRZA & A.N. PERRET-CLERMONT (eds.). *Argumentation and Education*, New York: Springer: 9–66.
- RIGOTTI, E. & GRECO MORASSO, S. (in press). Comparing the Argumentum Model of Topics to Other Contemporary Approaches to Argument Schemes: The Procedural and Material Components. *Argumentation*.
- SMITH, C.S. (2005). France let Terminally Ill refuse Care, but still bans Euthanasia. *The New York Times*, April, 14.



- SOLA POOL, I. DE (1959) (ed.). Trends in Content Analysis. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- STONE, P. et al. (1966). The General Inquire: a Computer Approach to Content Analysis. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- WILKE, J. & REINEMANN, C. (2000). Kanzlerkandidaten in der Wahlkampfberichterstattung 1949–1998. Cologne: Böhlau.
- WILKE, J. & REINEMANN, C. (2001). Do the Candidates matter? Long-term Trends of Campaign Coverage – A Study of the German Press since 1949. *European Journal of Communication* 16: 291–314.

*Submitted: 21 August 2009. Resubmitted: 16 November 2009. Accepted: 21 December 2009. Refereed anonymously.*