Abortion Attitudes (Media Content, User Comments)

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION
The concept of „abortion attitudes" refers to an individual's or group's beliefs, opinions, and feelings regarding the practice of abortion (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003). Abortion here addresses abortion care in the form of medical (i.e., drug-induced) or surgical termination of an unwanted pregnancy, usually before the fetus is considered viable (i.e., able to survive outside the womb). People's attitudes towards abortion care can vary widely and are influenced by factors such as cultural, religious, moral, and personal beliefs, societal norms and values, as well as personal experiences and media representations (Adamczyk, Kim & Dillon, 2020; Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards & Rucht, 2002). Abortion and abortion attitudes are widely represented in the media, this includes news media, fictional media, and social media (Conti & Cahill, 2017).

Attitudes towards abortion as they are held in the population and represented in the media are polarized and can be categorized broadly as pro-choice versus pro-life (Krolzik-Matthei, 2019):

- The *pro-choice* or *pro-abortion* attitude focuses on the pregnant woman/person and acknowledges her human rights to life, health and self-determination. Hence, the pro-choice attitude demands access to legal and safe abortions as a reproductive right for all women/persons who seek abortion care as a reproductive health service. The pro-choice position morally accepts abortions and politically favors the legalization of abortions.
- The *pro-life* or *anti-abortion* attitude focuses on the embryo (weeks 0 to 9 of the pregnancy) or the fetus (from week 10) and acknowledges its right to life. Hence, the *pro-life* attitude demands complete prohibition or at least heavy restriction of abortions, regardless of the life, health, and self-determination of the pregnant woman/person. The *pro-life* position morally condemns abortions and politically favors the criminalization of abortions in most or all cases.

These two attitudes often manifest as general principles (or *absolutist positions*). But they also manifest in various shades of grey (*situational positions*), with some individuals and media representations supporting abortion under specific circumstances (such as cases of rape, incest, or severe fetal abnormalities) while opposing it in others (Rye & Underhill, 2020).

In the context of ongoing political debates surrounding the legalization or criminalization of abortion (e.g., the overturning of Roe v. Wade in the USA in 2022), measuring attitudes towards

abortion in media content remains a relevant and timely research topic, especially when it comes to popular and growing social media platforms such as TikTok (Wu & Byler, 2022).

FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

One line of research investigates the various values underlying pro-life/pro-abortion and pro-choice/anti-abortion attitudes as represented in different media. This research approach employs theories from religion, moral philosophy, medical history, and/or feminism to extract the distinct arguments, frames, and metaphors used to defend and rationalize pro-choice versus pro-life attitudes (e.g., Brysk & Yang, 2023).

Another line of research examines the associations between media representations of abortion attitudes on the one side and the audience's attitudes about abortion on the other side (Döring, 2023; Döring & Kubitza, 2023; Pleasure, Becker, Johnson, Broussard & Lindberg, 2023), particularly in the context of pro- or anti-abortion campaigns (e.g., Reidy & Suiter, 2023) and online abortion education (Duggan, 2023). One relevant theory often applied in this field is the *social cognitive theory* (Bandura 1986, 2009), which explains how media images of abortion can influence the audience's perceptions of abortions. Additionally, theories of persuasion and education are applicable in this context.

REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Manual and automated content analyses of news media, fictional media, social media content, and social media user comments are essential for monitoring the potentially changing prevalence of various abortion attitudes in the public media sphere. These media content analyses can be combined with population surveys to explore associations between *published opinion* and *public opinion* on abortion. Furthermore, experimental studies are useful for directly measuring how recipients perceive and evaluate different media representations of abortion attitudes, and whether and how these representations can affect their own attitudes toward abortion.

EXAMPLE STUDY FOR MANUAL CONTENT ANALYSIS

The example studies by Döring (2023) and Döring and Kubitza (2023) concentrate on the representation of abortion attitudes in German-language YouTube and TikTok videos, as well as the associated viewer comments (see Table 1).

The measures presented were developed for YouTube and TikTok, but they are generic enough to be used across various social media platforms and even mass media channels.

Depending on the research objective, more detailed measures can be developed and added. For examples, measures that cover the different circumstances under which people or media representations are willing to accept abortion as a moral and legal solution (such as in cases of rape, incest, or severe fetal abnormalities). This is relevant because abortion attitudes held by individuals and represented in the media are not always absolutist (i.e., categorical evaluations); sometimes, they are situationist, meaning that the specific conditions of the case play a significant role in the moral evaluation (Rye & Underhill, 2020).

Table 1. *Example studies for manual content analyses (Döring, 2023; Döring & Kubitza, 2023).*

Coding Material	Measure	Operationalization (excerpt)	Reliability
N = 167 top ranked German-language abortion videos on YouTube (*n* = 75) and TikTok (*n* = 92)	Type of Social Media Content Creator	Polytomous variable "content creator type" (1: media professional, 2: health professional, 3: political/religious actor, 4: lay person)	*n* = 117 pretest sample Cohen's Kappa = .84 Gwet's AC1 = .88
	Abortion Attitude in Social Media Content	Polytomous variable "abortion attitude represented in YouTube/TikTok video"(1: pro-choice or pro-abortion [video predominantly argues in favor of legalization of abortion and/or the rights of the pregnant person], 2: pro-life or anti-abortion [video predominantly argues in favor of criminalization of abortion and/or the rights of the embryo/fetus], 3: ambivalent [video partly argues in favor of both pro-choice and pro-life positions; e.g., video covers both the attitude of a pro-life and a pro-choice activist], 4: neutral [video neither argues for or against the legalization or criminalization of abortions; e.g., video explains the procedure of surgical termination of an unwanted pregnancy and does not address moral or political evaluations], 5: unclear [the abortion attitude represented in the video remains unclear])	*n* = 117 pretest sample Cohen's Kappa = .66 Gwet's AC1 = .82
N = 807 most liked on-topic public user comments related to the *N* = 167 top ranked German-language abortion videos on YouTube (*n* = 326) and TikTok (*n* = 481)	Type of Commenting Social Media User	Cannot be identified and coded due to practical and ethical considerations	n.a.
	Abortion Attitude in Social Media User Comments	Polytomous variable "abortion attitude represented in YouTube/TikTok user comments" (1: pro-choice / pro-abortion, 2: pro-life / anti-abortion, 3: ambivalent, 4: neutral, 5: unclear). Operationalization of the abortion attitudes in social media comments follows the same scheme used for social media videos (as described above).	*n* = 300 pretest sample Cohen's Kappa = .55 Gwet's AC1 = .81

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