

7 Approaching social media argumentation from a linguistics-informed perspective

Methodological aspects

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1 Introduction: discourse and argumentation research on social media

Several reports agree on the fact that the use of social media has significantly increased in the past decade. For example, Eurostat (2024) noted that the use of social media by enterprises “increased by 24.8 percentage points” between 2015 and 2023. In Switzerland, the Federal Commission of Media published a report on social media “power” in January 2025, worrying about the fact that a wide share of public debate happens on social media (COFEM, 2025, p. 4). These measures, among many others, show that social media discourse has become a significant companion of our personal and professional life. Not surprisingly, thus, research on social media has been prolific in a variety of disciplines, which consider not only technological aspects, but also communication and (multi-modal) discourse, to understand the opportunities offered by social media while critically examining potential dangers.

Within such a rich panorama of studies, in this chapter we aim at discussing some important methodological aspects that concern the study of social media argumentation from a qualitative perspective. To this aim, we make two choices. Firstly, we do not have the ambition to represent the whole body of research that has to do with linguistic and discursive approaches to social media. We therefore only consider those approaches that touch upon argumentation. Secondly, while the first part of this chapter is devoted to general methodological challenges, the second part focuses more narrowly on two (among many other) possible areas of research in this field.

So far, research on discourse and argumentation on social media has often considered political discourse and other public discourses, although opportunities to study private companies’ argumentation abound (e.g. Balabanova et al., 2023; Stachel et al., 2025). Given the broad use and specific characteristics of social media, perhaps not surprisingly, a lot of scholarly attention has been devoted to specific forms of manipulation that are present or made more visible

by social media (Pietrandrea, 2021; Macagno, 2022), such as for example disinformation (Paglieri, 2020) and polarisation (Gajewska et al., 2023). A prominent case within this field is represented by research on *hate speech* in linguistics, discourse analysis and argumentation (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017; De Cock et al., 2022; Serafis & Boukala, 2023; Dominiguéz Armas, 2024). This topic has attracted attention also due to the interest from public institutions to counter hate speech.

A smaller body of research has considered social media practices that are not necessarily manipulative and, on the contrary, could contribute to public debate in a positive way. Examples in this field often concern activism and social movements, given the affordances of social media to “amplify marginalized voices (...) outside of the restrictions of main media” (Dennis, 2019, p. 51). Lewiński and Mohammed (2012) have referred to “unintended consequences of designed communication tools” (3) to refer to creative or even “parasitic” (3) uses of platforms that go beyond the original intentions of the designers. In their work, these authors refer to activists appropriating some features of social media in the Arab spring. Later on, other cases of digital activism have been considered, including the anti-racist and anti-colonisation movement “Rhodes must fall” started in South Africa (Greco et al., 2018), and the #MeToo movement on Twitter¹ (Mohammed, 2019). More recently, a series of studies have concentrated on activism regarding climate (Goodwin, 2020; Foderaro & Lorentzen, 2022) and sustainability, especially in the field of fashion (Balabanova et al., 2023; Greco & De Cock, 2021; Greco, 2023; Greco et al., 2023; Mercuri, 2023; De Cock et al., 2024). Because the majority of studies consider potentially harmful effects of social media discourse, in this chapter (Section 4), we select two concrete examples of analysis of cases that can have negative effects but also explore potentially healthy aspects of argumentation on social media.

In this chapter, we will first discuss general aspects regarding opportunities for and challenges of doing research on social media (Section 2). Subsequently, important methodological aspects to be taken into account by researchers who are interested in discourse on social media are discussed (Section 3). In Section 4, by way of example, we select two promising research areas that have been investigated from the point of view of discourse and argumentation; by this doing, our aim is to show in practice some methodological challenges and suggestions proposed by the authors. Finally, Section 5 presents a brief conclusion of this contribution.

2 The complexity of social media data: methodological considerations

The analysis of discourses produced on social media has been prolific, reflecting the increasing presence of these media in our lives as sources of personal interaction, news gathering, professional communication, and entertainment.

This boost comes with a series of methodological opportunities and challenges related to the specificity of these media and the discourses produced on them.

In the first place, we are concerned with a variety of media and a variety of discourses. This is an important point to keep in mind, since social media are often discussed as if they were a homogeneous group of platforms or channels for discourse production. However, just like not all printed discourses are the same – there are novels, newspapers, textbooks, publicity leaflets, loveletters, law texts,... – not all discourses produced in social media are the same. The different platforms have different affordances (Hutchby, 2014) and guide users towards different types of actions, as we will detail below in Section 3.1. Thus, a platform like LinkedIn is rather conceived for communication concerning one's professional life, whereas Facebook was conceived for contact with friends and classmates (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 204). However, the actual uses can diverge from those originally intended, e.g. Facebook is often employed for professional communication as well. As a consequence, the analysis of discourses produced on social media requires to take into account some basic aspects of discourse analysis in general, namely who is addressing whom and for what purposes.

Second, the social media landscape evolves constantly. This includes new platforms being launched, but also new uses of existing platforms. These new uses can be induced by the platform itself, for instance abandoning the 140 character limit on Twitter in 2017, adding reaction types other than a mere 'like' (thumb up) on Facebook, changing the algorithm, or they can be induced by the users. Thus, Facebook has evolved from the initial platform to connect with classmates to a platform that increasingly also fulfils publicity or news spreading purposes (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019, pp. 45–46). The constant and rapid evolution of uses makes longitudinal comparative work, even over a shorter time period, very complex. Moreover, in social media, the multimodal aspect has become increasingly important, with posts containing photos or videos receiving more user attention and engagement than others. This calls for an increasing attention to multimodality in the analysis of these productions (see Section 3.2).

Finally, the analysis of social media raises a series of specific legal and ethical concerns for researchers who analyse argumentative discourse. In the following, we discuss some of these concerns which impact on methodological aspects of research on social media (for the connection with ethical and methodological aspects, see also Andone, this volume). Many popular platforms are created and owned by a company, meaning that they are a commercial product that can change its functioning but also data accessibility conditions. X (formerly Twitter) has considerably restricted data access for researchers since it came into the hands of Elon Musk in 2023 and Facebook restricted access following the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018. These changing access conditions hamper creating datasets over a period of time. Furthermore, different (inter)national bodies provide legislation that impacts the use of social media data. Legislation concerns the right to privacy, including the right to being forgotten (Cabezas del

Fierro et al., 2013), but also legislation concerning freedom of speech or, at the other end, concerning hate speech (De Cock et al., 2022; Assimakopoulos et al., 2017). This legislation is partly specific to a certain country or area (e.g. GDPR for the European Union), whereas social media are intrinsically a more transnational phenomenon, making law enforcement, which is normally geographically bound, at moments more complicated. This geographical boundedness makes it difficult to analyse data collected from countries falling under different legislations and/or to do joint work with researchers from different countries.

Also in terms of ethical concerns (see Andone, this volume), national requirements and/or traditions can imply diverging views. Thus, the fact that users post on a public platform implies that these data are considered as public in various national traditions. However, some researchers have pointed out the importance of informational norms within a specific (online) community and have shown highly variable individual positions of users to their discursive data being included in research and thus being made public to a broader audience than the more restricted circle of addressees they had in mind (Mackenzie, 2017; Beninger, 2016). This leads some ethics review boards to consider those discursive data not fit for use without the author's consent, but, this judgment varying on national traditions, joint work between researchers of different countries or publishing in venues following a different tradition can pose particular hurdles related to these diverging views. An intermediate solution is often the anonymisation of non-public persons, especially when discussing potentially sensitive issues (see also Franzke et al., 2020). A further question concerns whether anonymisation always represents the users' wishes or best interests. This is particularly a case in point when analysing minoritised or activist voices, who suffer from being erased and sometimes consider an anonymisation to be yet another form of erasure, going against their will to publicly and proudly assume certain discourses or parts of their identity (Schifano et al., 2025, p. 13). These examples call for a contextualised approach to ethical concerns, if possible in interaction with those concerned by the research.

The retrievability of social media posts makes the anonymisation or pseudonymisation discussion more complex, since an anonymised message can often be found on the platform in question through word searches (see Andone, this volume). Some disciplines suggest paraphrasing examples in order to reduce their retrievability (British Psychological Society, 2021). However, especially in disciplines with a strong focus on the analysis of linguistic phenomena, using created examples instead of authentic ones would be considered the unethical thing to do. Truncating or interrupting examples is a potential intermediary solution. In all cases, ethical guidelines recommend that researchers ask questions about the vulnerability of individual data producers throughout the process, and find ways to discuss anonymisation (or requesting informed consent to individual users), considering how retrievable data might be (Franzke et al., 2020; British Psychological Society, 2021) and discussing individual cases in a nuanced

way. By way of example, the British Psychological Society (2021) observes that, “if a user includes a hashtag or term that very few others have used – it can be very easy to identify the original source even if the rest of the message has been paraphrased” (19). In this sense, the responsibility about what data can be made public in scientific work and databases lies with the researcher, who needs to carefully consider the source of the data (an individual user is different from a public company or NGO), the situation in which the data has been produced and the retrievability of the original post.

3 Important aspects to consider in studying discourse and argumentation on social media

This section gives a general overview of two important aspects that need to be considered when designing empirical methods to research discourse and argumentation on social media, namely the presence of multiple activity types (3.1) and multimodality (3.2).

3.1 Activity types on social media

In the past 15 years or so, argumentation studies have increasingly considered the relevance of context to a full understanding of argumentative discourse (see the discussion in Rigotti & Rocci, 2006; van Eemeren, 2018; for some concrete applications, see also Greco Morasso, 2011; Andone, 2013; Palmieri, 2014). In line with this, scholars have considered the specificities of argumentation in a variety of contexts of spoken and written discourse, juridical and political speeches being two prominent examples. At the beginning of this stream of studies, Rigotti and Rocci (2006), citing research in “various strands of the language sciences” (157), note that “communication context not only constitutes an essential factor in the processes of production and interpretation of speech acts, but also is integral to the constitution of meaning itself” (157); this is relevant for an argumentative interpretation, as well as for any other approach to the analysis of talk and discourse. Van Eemeren (2018) notes that the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation has gradually seen “the incorporation of the contextual dimension” (144). Pragma-dialectics refers to clusters of activity types that make use of a certain genre in a specific domain (van Eemeren, 2018, p. 129ff): for example, a general debate in the European Parliament makes use of deliberation in the political domain (van Eemeren, 2018, p. 133, Fig. 8.1). What van Eemeren (2018) observes regarding pragma-dialectics, namely that “the incorporation of the contextual dimension (...) has considerably strengthened the connection between the theorizing and the study of argumentative reality” (144) can actually be generalised to all approaches to argumentation. For this reason, the consideration of contextual dimensions is often present in empirical approaches, including those detailed in some of the chapters of this volume.

Against this background, one could legitimately ask whether social media discourse corresponds to a single argumentative activity type. However, as anticipated in Section 1, the reality of social media discourse is more nuanced and complex. There are different individual and institutional actors with social media accounts. These have different goals, fine-tuned with the social media account (e.g. an institutional account of the European Parliament on Instagram is different from an individual private account on TikTok). Variations also depend on the platform design and its affordances, including the digital contents that are foregrounded (video, images, text, which might be permanent or ephemeral, etc.). Given such a plurality of actors, goals, and methods, it is important to stress that speaking of social media accounts is not speaking about one activity type.

On the opposite, a variety of activity types is present on social media, which, to our best knowledge, are still to be fully described from a viewpoint of argumentation. Some initial work has defined the characteristics and goals of digital activism as an argumentative activity type, considering activism that intends to foster social change, such as raising awareness on the #MeToo movement on Twitter (Mohammed, 2019) or advocating more sustainability of the fashion system on Twitter and Instagram (Greco et al., 2023; De Cock et al., 2024). Activists' protests often intersect with fashion companies' campaigns (Balabanova et al., 2023), meaning that, often, activists respond to claims put forward by brands in their communication campaigns, by presenting counter-arguments or challenging premises that brands take for granted (see Section 4.2 in this chapter). Other studies have considered political discourse on Twitter (e.g. Roginsky & De Cock, 2015). Future research could discuss the specificities of other argumentative activity types, such as advertising on Instagram. In this context, we argue that any analysis of social media discourse should first specify the contextualised dimension, taking into account that there are different activity types on social media, and defining the goals of the concerned activity type as well as the actors participating.

3.2 *Multimodality*

While some social media platforms initially rather privileged textual production (e.g. Twitter, especially in the earlier period) and others images (e.g. Instagram), at present virtually all social media allow for combinations of expression modes, including written text, images, videos, and audio fragments. Some also include interactive features, such as polls on X (formerly Twitter). The combination of modes can be used by users in order to convey more clearly a message (e.g. schematically represent an idea), but also for commercial purposes, or simply to attract attention. Multimodality can be intrinsic to the type of production itself, e.g. memes.

The multimodal nature poses some challenges, since the study of these different modes typically tends to be done separately, sometimes in different

disciplines. Thus, traditionally, linguistics research integrated only to a small extent or not at all the role of images, and several multimodal argumentation studies consider data that were not produced on social media (e.g. Groarke, 2017; Tseronis, 2021). Also when looking into the analysis of verbal production, the analysis of written vs. spoken data partly relies on different transcription systems and methods. Analysing multimodal data in social media then often requires combining different methods and/or disciplines in order to fully account for the multimodality, which is obviously also a challenge for multimodal production off-line. Moreover, merely combining existing methods and insights is not enough: new social media phenomena or new multimodal uses arise that require developing new forms of analysis.

Thus, Zappavigna and Logi (2024) describe emoji as “paralanguage” (7) in order to underline the importance of the relationship between emoji and language, rather than considering emoji as having an independent linguistic meaning. Bouko (2024, p. 224) proposes a framework to analyse how visual elements in social media can contribute to conveying appraisal or how they can represent visual arguments. Another popular social media phenomenon, namely memes, intrinsically relies on their iterative nature and therefore requires studying the meme in a broader discursive context. Indeed, memes “intersubjectively rely on the assumption that viewers will recognise certain sets of beliefs and certain frames, and also assume that viewers are likely to share the discourse viewpoint ultimately expressed by the whole construction” (Dancygier & Vandelandotte, 2017, p. 591).

Though visual elements can also be culture-specific, their being more detached from a specific language contributes to their circulating across languages and sometimes cultures, as is the case for many emojis or memes. This opens up an interesting research route since multilingual material is then at hand, in which one can also take into account changing cultural settings. The typical example of the “I want you for the U.S. army” poster with a man pointing at the reader used in early 20th century U.S. army campaigns, for instance, appears nowadays in many countries for a wide variety of causes.

Most work has focused on the synchronous co-occurrence of different modes, e.g. an image that includes text, is accompanied by text or illustrates a text, a video that includes both visual and verbal information. However, less attention has been given to the sequential use of different modes in an asynchronous way, e.g. alternating text and voice messages on WhatsApp (König, 2024). König proposes the term ‘transmodal interaction’ and points at some challenges, such as ethical concerns related to the recognisability of voices in voice recordings or the detailed spatiotemporal information needed to adequately analyse the interaction as it unfolds. Furthermore, one has to take into account how the interaction evolves and how the interlocutors actively engage in or comment on the choice of different modes in order to adequately analyse the co-occurrence of modes in such asynchronous contexts.

4 Promising entry points for analysing argumentation and discourse on social media

In the following sections, we discuss two promising research areas, including studies that adopt a linguistic perspective on discourse, mentioning aspects regarding argumentation: the discursive representation of agentivity (Section. 4.1) and the linguistic and argumentative role of hashtags (Section. 4.2). These two areas have been selected as *possible* entry points for research in this field, but they are not intended as exclusive; in this chapter, they play the role of examples of how research regarding argumentation on social media is ongoing, what types of methodological challenges it poses and what insights and new avenues for argumentation studies it can open.

4.1 *Agentivity and argumentation*

The linguistic expression of agentivity gives insights into who is being discursively constructed as responsible for a certain past, present, or future action. This is particularly relevant in contexts where the responsibility is not clear or debated. It can therefore be at the heart of argumentative misalignment, as we have shown to be the case in the public debate concerning who is responsible for the current lack of sustainability in the production of fashion (Greco & De Cock, 2021). In online communication concerning this topic via the hashtag *#fashion-revolution*, we have seen that the very vast majority of messages containing a call for action towards fairer fashion do not specify who is responsible for this action (De Cock et al., 2024). The call for action often uses a 2nd person form which is not further defined, thus leaving vague who is responsible. In activist discourse, this is a frequent strategy, leading to any reader feeling potentially addressed and being incited to action. However, it also dilutes the responsibility and it is striking that the messages in this campaign rarely explicitly portray the responsibility of major fashion brands, even though the Fashion Revolution organisation originated in reaction to the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster, very much a symbol of the problems of fast fashion production.

While the misalignment regarding responsibility in the context of the debate on sustainable fashion mainly remains implicit, social media are often a forum for discussion actively challenging the attribution of responsibility. Thus, Pécher (2024) shows how Twitter users actively challenged representations of human rights abuses during the 2019 social protests in Chili. Three major media outlets published an article concerning a man being hit by a truck from the *carabineros* (specific type of police). The analysis of the users' comments to these tweets show how they try to reframe the responsibility depending on their support or not for the victim. Thus, those in support of the victim underline the responsibility of the public forces and strengthen the intentionality of the action, by saying that they ran him over with the truck, rather than (potentially accidentally) hitting him. Those in support of the public forces rather construe the protesters as

agentive of violent actions towards the public forces, thereby inverting the agent and patient roles. These online discussions concerning agentivity – which are also frequently found in reaction concerning newspaper headlines on sexual abuse or domestic violence (e.g. Meluzzi et al., 2021) – show how the polylogical nature of social media allows for a broader discussion concerning alignment and disalignment on responsibility.

4.2 *Hashtags and argumentation*

One of the distinguishing aspects of social media discourse, which has attracted the interest of linguists and argumentation theorists, is the use of hashtags. Historically, as Zappavigna (2018) notes, the hashtag was coined in 2007 in a conversation between two users: Chris Messina, who first suggested to use the # symbol, and Stowe Boyd, who then used it “to refer to Messina’s original post” (5), picking up the idea. Later on, Twitter and other platforms introduced the hypertextual link function on hashtag, accepting the users’ idea (Sanzo, 2014).

The co-presence of a technological function and a semiotic function in hashtags makes them semiotic technologies, i.e. “configurations of technical affordances interacting with the discursive functions” (Zappavigna, 2018, p. 16). On the one hand, a technical function corresponds to the classification of messages according to a metadata. This function, Zappavigna notes, “may be traced to the origins of subject categorisation in the first ancient libraries” (Zappavigna, 2018, p. 19) such as the Great Library of Alexandria. On the other hand, the classification function goes hand in hand with a semiotic or communication function, which means that hashtags are also part of social media discourse. They can precede or follow the text of a post, or they can be “seamlessly integrated into the linguistic structure of the post” (Zappavigna, 2018, p. 31). As we might add, this combination makes hashtags quite unique discursive objects, with a function of data and of meta-data alike.

So far, hashtags have been the object of different classifications in the field of linguistics (not specifically in argumentation studies, as we will detail below), depending on their functions. Zappavigna (2018, p. 42) claims that “Most linguistic studies of hashtags take as a basic distinction a difference in meaning between ideational hashtags, marking topics, and interpersonal hashtags, indicating attitudes or alignments.” Taking the concept of linguistic metafunctions from Halliday (1973), Zappavigna proposes to consider two metafunctions of hashtags, namely “an experiential function of classifying the post as being of a particular experiential type” (Zappavigna, 2018, p. 42, *italics in the original*) and “an interpersonal function of construing relationship” and evaluative stances (Zappavigna, 2018, p. 43, *italics in the original*). These functions are “enacted simultaneously in any linguistic performance, and are not mutually exclusive” (Zappavigna, 2018, p. 43). Adopting the perspective of linguistic pragmatics with a particular focus on speech acts theory and illocutionary forces (Austin et al., 1976), Wikström (2014) derives categories of pragmatic functions of hashtags

from an empirical analysis of a dataset of around 1200 tweets collected in 2010. He distinguishes the following eight categories: topic tags (similar to the ideational hashtags mentioned by Zappavigna); hashtag games, which are similar to topic tags but, as we might say, more specific, because their function is “to mark it as participating in an ongoing communal game,” which is “often grounded in some kind of word play” (Wikström, 2014, p. 134); meta-comments, such as #itsajoke, “explicitly clarifying utterance intention” (Wikström, 2014, p. 137); parenthetical explanations and additions, which “supply additional information to help readers lacking relevant background knowledge make sense of the tweet” (Wikström, 2014, p. 138); emotive usage, referred to hashtags that have “clear emotionally expressive force” (Wikström, 2014, p. 139), expressed linguistically in different ways; emphatic usages, in which the hashtags replaces other ways to express emphasis, humorous, and playful usage and memes and popular culture references. Some studies propose linguistic classifications that are more specific, taking into account specific cases within specific activity types. For example, De Cock and Pizarro Pedraza (2018) analyse pragmatic functions of hashtags relative to the #jesuisCharlie hashtag, created following the attack on Charlie Hebdo in 2015. Other semantic and pragmatic classifications of hashtags are presented in Musi (2024, p. 273).

In contrast to linguistic classifications, argumentative classifications of hashtags are still to be determined. As segments of discourse, hashtags may also play an argumentative function. We have argued elsewhere that hashtags may play the role of issues, standpoints and arguments (Greco & De Cock, 2021); Musi (2024) elaborates on this point, proposing a systematic investigation of the argumentative functions of the hashtag #genocide as used on Twitter at the beginning of the Russia–Ukraine war in 2022 in combination with syntactic and semantic properties of the same hashtag. However, research in this field is still to be developed.

Despite the lack of comprehensive argumentative classifications of hashtags, some studies on their specific functions have been proposed. One of the functions of hashtags that has been considered so far is raising awareness on new argumentative issues in activists’ campaigns (Greco, 2023), which are often guided by “rallying hashtags” (Karamalak & Cantoni, 2021, p. 238), which are proposed by activist organisations and picked up by anyone who wants to participate in the campaign. Previous research in sociology and communication highlighted that one of the functions of activists’ hashtags is “drive discourse in particular directions” (Kuo, 2018, p. 497) and “raise awareness of an issue” (Tombleson & Wolf, 2017, p. 15). In terms of argumentation, this function has been interpreted and further clarified: hashtags give an opportunity to activists to open new discussion issues (Greco, 2023). Referring to the Latin term *quaestio* adopted in French (and other languages), we could say that activists open new questions around which the discussion may revolve or (Fr.) *questions argumentatives* (Plantin, 2021). In the case of activism advocating for more sustainability of the

fashion industry, some tweets and Instagram posts rediscuss the fashion brands' presupposed starting points.

For example, in the following retweet (Example I) published in 2021 by the organisation Labour Behind the Label and discussed in Greco (2023), activists use the hashtag #PayYourWorkers as a pragmatic standpoint, proposing an action (paying their workers) to the two mentioned brands (Primark and Mango) and others alike. This standpoint contradicts a statement that brands often employ in their communication campaigns, i.e. that, as part of their commitment to sustainability, they care about their workers. The text of the tweet directly rediscusses this premise employed by brands to support the standpoint that they are sustainable. In this way, the tweet opens a new discussion issue – “should brands such as Primark and Mango pay their workers?” that legitimises the standpoint “Pay your workers” expressed by the hashtag. This new argumentative discussion is opened by problematizing something that brands take for granted.

Example I

“Workers are literally going hungry because brands are failing to take responsibility for their supply chains. What are @Primark and @Mango doing to ensure that the workers who made their clothes before the pandemic started are receiving their full wages now? #PayYourWorkers” (LabourLabel, Retweet 15 February 2021).

In Example I, the opening of a new discussion issue is performed through the whole text of the social media message, in which the hashtag is inserted as part of the argumentation. In this specific case, as said the hashtag rediscusses the premises that brands take for granted, presenting a standpoint that implicitly contradicts the brands' presuppositions (#PayYourWorkers presupposes that workers have actually not been paid despite brands' claims to be socially sustainable). In other cases, the hashtag itself may include a question that opens a new discussion issue. A prime example of this latter category is the Fashion Revolution hashtag #WhoMadeMyClothes, one of the main rallying hashtags of this activist organisation, which is syntactically formulated as a question even though sometimes written without a question mark; this hashtag opens a discussion on the identity and social conditions of garment workers, which are normally not explicitly considered (or even made available) by brands.

Given the methodological focus of this chapter, what is particularly relevant here is that, in order to understand how hashtags and related social media messages contribute to argumentation, for example opening new discussion issues, one has to adopt a polylogical view of argumentation, taking into account public controversies that include multiple players, positions and places in which the discussion occurs (Lewiński & Aakhus, 2023, p. 81). Empirically, as noted in Greco and De Cock (2021), adopting a polylogical perspective on argumentation means constructing multi-genre datasets (see for example the discussion

in Mercuri, forth. and in Catenaccio, 2024). This point is important because a polylogical view of argumentation, if implemented empirically, can change the evaluation of how much argumentation is present on social media, a topic which has often been discussed (Schaefer & Stede, 2021). Empirically, studies on social media argumentation in a polylogical perspective (going beyond the boundaries of each single platform, and connecting messages to the ongoing polylogical debate) are still relatively scarce and this is probably one of the challenges for empirical argumentation research in the next few years.

5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we have aimed at reaching a double goal. On the one hand, we have given a broad picture of current empirical studies on social media discourse and argumentation, focusing on those that rely (also) on qualitative methods. While drawing this picture, we have discussed opportunities and challenges of this field (Section 2), taking into account also technological, legal, and ethical development. We have furthermore outlined some specific features of social media discourse that are particularly relevant for methodologies of argumentation studies, such as multimodality and the presence of different activity types. On the other hand, we have selected two examples of areas of investigation concerning the linguistic and argumentative analysis of social media discourse (Section 4). The goal of this second part of the chapter is to offer the readers an opportunity to reflect on the current state of research and to see how some methodological choices and challenges have been tackled concretely.

The constant evolution of social media, in terms of creation of new platforms, changes in popularity of platforms, changes of the activity types for which platforms are used, to name but a few, makes this field particularly challenging. However, it is clear that social media are here to stay and that the role they play in public argumentation is undeniable, thus justifying our continuous attention.

Note

- 1 The name of Twitter has since changed into X. We will refer to Twitter for research carried out prior to this change.

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