

# Assessing Interactivity within Online-Deliberation: Argument Structures and their Persuasive Potential

## Research Questions

1. How can deliberative persuasion be conceptualised in contrast to other modes of persuasion?
2. Which argument types contribute to the establishment of deliberative persuasion?
3. To what extent and under which conditions does deliberative persuasion serve as a driving force for agreement-building?

## Theoretical Context

### Significance of Deliberative Reasoning:

Interpersonal reasoning on disputed issues resulting in **individual's rational opinion-formation** is one central notion of deliberation.

#### → Argumentative theory of reasoning: [1]

Reasoning primarily fulfils social functions  
Internal evaluation of raised diverging viewpoints

#### → Disagreements can serve as starting points for an exchange of justifications for individual positions

#### → Persuasion as a driving force for deliberative opinion (trans-)formation

### Conceptualisation of Deliberative Persuasion:

Agents have adversarial individual goals, whereby the **persuader aims to raise the likelihood for interlocutors to pursue a defined goal out of free choice** [2]. Agents within deliberation are allowed to argue in favour of their individual preferences, as long as they are willing to reconsider their position in line with the discussion's course and outcome [3].

Two main factors determine the normative permissibility of persuasive modes within deliberation:

- **Group structure:** homogeneity vs. heterogeneity
- **Function:** decision- vs. epistemic-oriented



## Pragma-Dialectics

- **Ideal-typical argumentation model:** Cooperation between two parties towards joint admissibility of a standpoint [4]
- **Four stages of the argumentation process:**
  - Confrontation Stage
  - Opening Stage
  - Argumentation Stage
  - Concluding Stage
- **Permissibility of strategic maneuvering:** [5]
  - Topical Potential
  - Audience Demand
  - Presentational Device

## State of the Art

The reasons and mechanisms behind opinion formation within deliberation are a central object of study. While the general deliberative quality and the role of platform designs of online discourses are well-researched [6/7], **our understanding of deliberation as a collective and interactive process is still limited**. Therefore, various research approaches need to be combined for a more thorough and systematic assessment of argumentative structures and effects within online-deliberation:

- Speech act analysis of deliberative processes [8]
- Role of disagreement for reason-giving [9]
- Comparison of individuals' pre- and post-deliberative opinions and preferences [10]
- Conceptualisations on the applicability of pragma-dialectical approaches to (online-)deliberation [11/12]

## Research Contributions & Implications

Following the diagnosis of **less inclusive "competing semi-publics" in the online sphere** [13], intra-group processes and the threat of **polarisation** move into the spotlight. Diverging positions within as well as between groups might move further away from each other and can potentially no longer be exchanged in public.

- Normative linkage between rational argumentation and persuasion within (online-)deliberation
- Development of an analytical framework enabling the empirical assessment of argumentative structures
- Inferences on the frequency, intensity and effects of deliberative persuasion based on the conditions of various online platforms
- Improvement of the understanding of intra-group agreement-building and decision-making

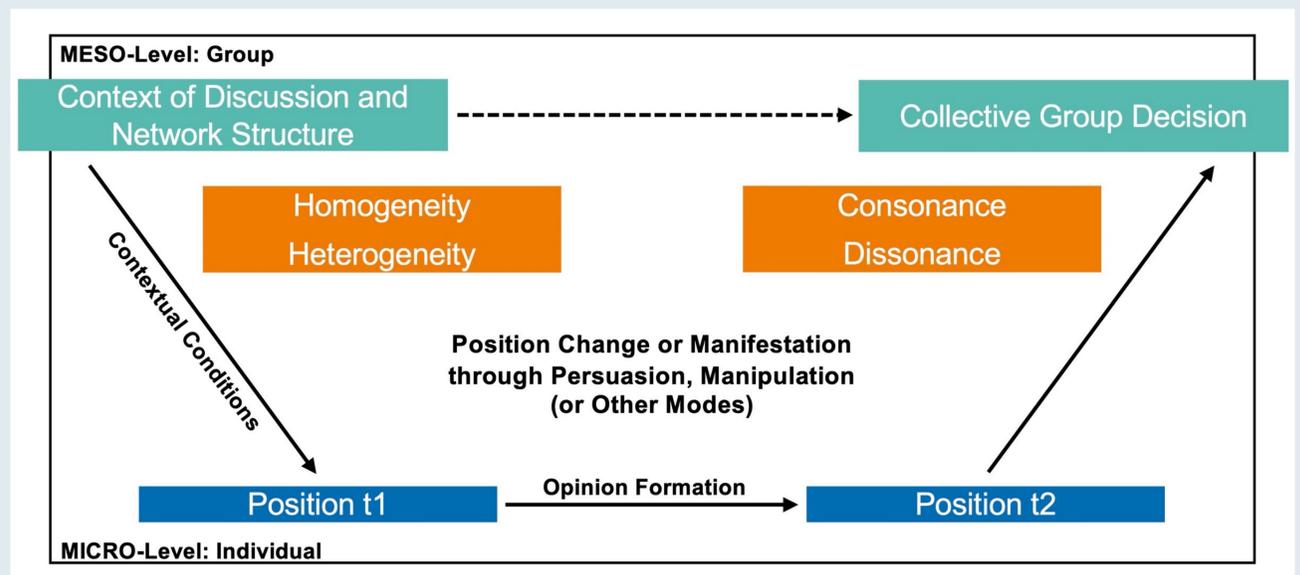


Fig. 1 Individual Opinion Formation and Collective Group Decision-Making in Online-Discussions

## Methodological Approach

### I) Qualitative Argument Analysis

Real-world debates on climate policies among climate activists (homogenous group) and within the interested general public (heterogenous group) are **captured and evaluated through an argument analysis based on the theory of pragma-dialectics**. The following aspects ought to be considered for the analysis:

- Forms of disagreements
- Argumentative structures (including logical and rhetorical elements)
- Position manifestations and changes of individual users (argument mapping)
- **Inductive approach**

### II) Experiments

The identified argument types are measured regarding their persuasive force on individual's opinion formation through scenario-based online experiments. Participants will be assigned to **two groups regarding their pre-deliberative opinion for one specific climate policy and then confronted with either supportive or opposing arguments**. Through a comparison with their post-deliberative opinion the specific argument types' effects on deliberative persuasion can be examined. Intervening variables (e.g. socio-demographic data and general political interest) will be considered as well.