



EUTHANASIA AND THE MEDIA IN SPAIN (2019–2021)

EUTANASIA Y MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN EN ESPAÑA (2019-2021)

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ABSTRACT:

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The regulation legal of euthanasia in Spain was preceded by an increase in media coverage. This study conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses of media coverage in the 12 most widely circulated Spanish media outlets between January 2019 and March 2021, immediately before the enactment of the law regulating euthanasia. In total, 281 news articles were examined. About 51.6% of the news articles supported euthanasia, 18.9% opposed it, and 29.5% were neutral. Qualitative analysis revealed a substantial distinction between pro- and anti-euthanasia groups. The semantic field of items in pro-euthanasia articles comprised "law," "death," "suffering," and "pain." In contrast, the semantic field of articles opposing euthanasia comprised "life," "death," "people/person," and "illness." The media predominantly favored euthanasia, albeit offering limited discussion of alternatives, such as palliative care. It is crucial to cultivate an ethical culture that empowers citizens to make end-of-life decisions based on clear-cut principles, rational reasoning, and diverse perspectives.

RESUMEN:**Palabras clave:**

eutanasia; medios;
opinión pública;
muerte digna

La regulación legal de la eutanasia en España fue precedida por un aumento en la cobertura mediática. Este estudio llevó a cabo análisis cuantitativos y cualitativos de la cobertura mediática en los 12 medios de comunicación españoles de mayor circulación entre enero de 2019 y marzo de 2021, inmediatamente antes de la promulgación de la ley que regula la eutanasia. En total, se examinaron 281 artículos de noticias. Aproximadamente el 51.6 % de los artículos de noticias apoyaban la eutanasia, el 18.9 % se oponían a ella y el 29.5 % eran neutrales. El análisis cualitativo reveló una distinción sustancial entre los grupos a favor y en contra de la eutanasia. El campo semántico de los términos en los artículos a favor de la eutanasia incluía "ley", "muerte", "sufrimiento" y "dolor". En contraste, el campo semántico de los artículos que se oponían a la eutanasia incluía "vida", "muerte", "personas/persona" y "enfermedad". Los medios favorecieron predominantemente la eutanasia, aunque ofrecieron una discusión limitada sobre alternativas, como los cuidados paliativos. Es crucial fomentar una cultura ética que permita a los ciudadanos tomar decisiones sobre el final de la vida basadas en principios claros, razonamiento racional y perspectivas diversas.

1. Introduction

In recent years, euthanasia has been legalized or decriminalized in various countries worldwide. Currently, seven countries (i.e., the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, Canada, Colombia, and New Zealand) alongside Australia and several states in the USA, permit this practice. As a highly contentious issue, the debate surrounding legalization persists in many countries¹.

The relevance of a topic is influenced by the media, which plays a dual role in reflecting and fueling social debates and impacting public opinion². Issues not

covered by the media attract less social interest and disappear from the public discourse. Hence, the media directly shapes when and how the public engages with these matters³.

In the Spanish press, euthanasia first emerged as a topic of interest in the second half of the 1990s, gaining prominence in 1998 following the case of Ramón Sampeiro, a quadriplegic individual who had long sought euthanasia. Six years later, in 2004, an Oscar-winning film chronicling his story was released. These two events precipitated a sudden surge of articles in the press on media and public opinion regarding euthanasia, marking a pivotal moment in Spanish society⁴.

Subsequently, the Spanish press began to discuss euthanasia in other countries. For instance, between 1993 and 1996, Dr. Jack Kevorkian received extensive coverage in the US media, as did the legalization of euthanasia in Oregon (USA) in 1997, and the Netherlands in

1 Cfr. Bodas, M., Ziv, A., Rubin, C., Oberman, B., Tawil, Y., Shaulov, A., Kaplan, G. & Velan, B. «Polarization in public attitudes toward end-of-life decisions in Israel – A cross-sectional study». *Palliative and Supportive Care*, 2023; 1–8; Borovecki, A., Curkovic, M., Nikodem, K., Oreskovic, S., Novak, M., Rubic, F., Vukovic, J., Spoljar, D., Gordijn, B. & Gastmans, C. «Attitudes about withholding or withdrawing life-prolonging treatment, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and physician assisted suicide: A cross-sectional survey among the general public in Croatia». *BMC Medical Ethics*, 2022; 23(1): 13; Inbadas, H., Zaman, S., Whitelaw, S. & Clark, D. «Declarations on euthanasia and assisted dying». *Death Studies*, 2017; 41(9): 574–584; Marcoux, I., Mishara, B. L. & Durand, C. «Confusion between euthanasia and other end-of-life decisions: Influences on public opinion poll results». *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 2007; 98(3): 235–239; Mroz, S., Dierickx, S., Deliens, L., Cohen, J. & Chambaere, K. «Assisted dying around the world: A status quaestionis». *Annals of Palliative Medicine*, 2021; 10(3): 3540–3553; Stolz, E., Großschädl, F., Mayerl, Rásky, É. & Freidl, W. «Determinants of acceptance of end-of-life interventions: A comparison between withdrawing life-prolonging treatment and euthanasia in Austria». *BMC Medical Ethics*, 2015; 16: 81.

2 Cfr. Díaz del Campo, J. «Los medios de comunicación social y su influencia en el debate sobre la posible despenalización de la

eutanasia». *Moralia: Revista de Ciencias Morales*, 2009; 32: 159–175; Jaye, C., Lomax-Sawyers, I., Young, J. & Egan, R. «The people speak: Social media on euthanasia/assisted dying». *Medical Humanities*, 2021; 47(1): 47–55..

3 Cfr. Díaz del Campo, *op. cit.*

4 Cfr. Díaz del Campo, *op. cit.* Olivares-García, F. J., Miguel, A. R. S. & Gutiérrez-Salas, R. «Twitter y medios de comunicación como agentes de poder: El caso de la Ley de regulación de la eutanasia». En: Álvarez-Chávez, M. P., Rodríguez-Garay, G. O. & Ramos, S. H. (Eds.), *Comunicación Y pluralidad en un contexto divergente*, Dykinson, 2022, pp. 1040–1069.

2001. Subsequently, euthanasia maintained a recurring, although somewhat peripheral, presence in the Spanish media until 2019. María José Carrasco, a woman with multiple sclerosis who was assisted by her husband in her death on April 3, 2019, reignited a fervorous social debate⁵.

These pivotal moments and other cases recurrently highlighted by the media have shaped narratives around euthanasia. Over the past three decades, the positive disposition of the Spanish population towards regulating euthanasia has increased⁶. However, this does not necessarily imply widespread support for practice⁷.

From the pivotal moment in April 2019 until the enforcement of Organic Law 3/2021 dated March 24 (Ley Orgánica, 3/2021), which regulates euthanasia, the issue was extensively covered across all forms of media. Nevertheless, widespread coverage of the polarizing issue has not been ethically neutral. Although determining the extent of media influence on public opinion is challenging, assessing the favorability or unfavorability of such content towards the endorsement of euthanasia, whether expressed explicitly or inferred by a reader, is possible.

However, specialized literature on this topic is relatively limited, with few studies analyzing the language and content of the media. Specifically, euthanasia was widely explored between 1998 and 2015, the period prior to the decriminalization of practice in Colombia⁸. In addition, in the realm of social networks, Jaye et al⁹., scrutinized the discourse on selected platforms to determine how citizens engaged in the debate on voluntary euthanasia. They concluded that assigning binary con-

clusions to public opinion oversimplified the complexity of this discourse.

Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the portrayal of euthanasia by some Spanish media outlets in the period preceding its regulation in Spain from January 2019 to March 2021. Specifically, the approach towards euthanasia in news published on X (formerly Twitter) between 2019 and 2021 by two ideologically opposed newspapers (*ABC* and *El País*) and the profiles of major political parties (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, Podemos, Ciudadanos, Vox, and Partido Popular) was analyzed¹⁰.

2. Methods

To select media for analysis, a mixed criterion encompassing both print and digital presses was employed. Specifically, the print press comprised general information newspapers with an average daily circulation exceeding 100,000 copies as per data sourced from the Office for the Justification of Dissemination (pre-pandemic data). Meanwhile, the digital press included the 10 most widely read national digital newspapers, as decided by the Comscore report. Finally, the newspapers selected for this study were: *El País*, *El Mundo*, *ABC*, *La Vanguardia*, *El Español*, *OK Diario*, *La Razón*, *El Diario*, *20 minutos*, *The Huffington Post*, *El Confidencial*, and *El Periódico*.

In the subsequent step, the term “euthanasia” was entered into Google News for each of the chosen media outlets, encompassing the period from January 1, 2019, to March 24, 2021, immediately preceding the enactment of the euthanasia regulation law. This query yielded 383 articles, which were subsequently screened based on the following exclusion criteria:

- (1) Articles that were repeated across different newspapers in nearly identical forms lacked considerable variation in content or presentation. In such cases, preference was given to articles published earlier, within the specified timeframe.
- (2) Articles whose content did not primarily focus on euthanasia or approached the subject only

5 Cfr. Olivares-García y al., *op. cit.*

6 Cfr. Bernal-Carcelén, I. «Euthanasia: Trends and opinions in Spain». *Revista Española de Sanidad Penitenciaria*, 2020; 22: 112–115.

7 Cfr. García-Magna, D. «La opinión pública sobre la eutanasia en España ante una inminente reforma penal». *Revista Electrónica de Estudios Penales y Seguridad, REEPS*, 2021; n. extra 7; Serrano del Rosal, R. & Molina Martínez, M. A. «Regulación de la eutanasia y el suicidio asistido en España. ¿Hacia qué modelo se dirige la opinión pública?». *Arbor: Ciencia. Pensamiento y Cultura*, 2014; 190(769): a174.

8 Cfr. Sarmiento-Medina, P. J., García-Medina, D. P., Garzón-González, C. J., Castillo-Merchán, L. J., Correal-Neira, K. & Celis-Pedraza, D. A. «Media and euthanasia in Colombia. Content analysis and argumentative categorization». *Journal of the Faculty of Medicine*, 2019; 67(2): 209–215.

9 Cfr. Jaye y al., *op cit.*

10 Cfr. Olivares-García y al., *op. cit.*

tangentially. Two scenarios were considered: (i) when euthanasia was discussed within a broader context of political discourse, along with other elements, such as abortion, immigration, or ecology, and (ii) when the term “euthanasia” was employed as a rhetorical or literary device, where its removal would not alter the article’s intended meaning.

Finally, 281 articles were selected for analysis. These articles were transcribed into a Word format to ensure compatibility with the NVivo tool, thus avoiding any distortions that could impede the study. Then, the selection was distributed among expert researchers in the field of bioethics, who meticulously examined the articles and evaluated them using a given rubric. Subsequently, they agreed on the main arguments used in the bioethical discourse and indicated their agreement or disagreement (“yes” or “no”) with the following statements:

- (1) The article’s stance on euthanasia—whether it was favorable, neutral, or unfavorable.
- (2) The types of arguments presented in the article, categorizing them as sentimental, rational, or a combination.
- (3) The central argument made in the article is whether it focused on the extension of rights, euthanasia as liberation from suffering, or both.
- (4) The article equated dignified death with euthanasia.
- (5) This article proposes an alternative to euthanasia.
- (6) The article highlights the significance of suffering and illness.
- (7) The article used the expression “aid in dying.”
- (8) The article used expressions related to ending life or causing death; and
- (9) The article contained references to palliative care.

To quantitatively analyze the articles, we calculated descriptive statistics and compared quantitative variables using the χ^2 test. All analyses were conducted bilaterally, with a statistical significance level of 0.05, using the JAMOVI 2.2.5 program.

To qualitatively analyze the articles, all texts were entered into the NVivo software tool. The researchers coded 281 news articles based on their position on euthanasia, categorized as “favorable,” “neutral,” or “unfavorable.” Subsequently, word clouds were generated for each group based on word frequency (represented by word position in the word cloud), relative frequency of words compared with others (indicated by font size), and word clusters (depicted by the proximity of terms within the word cloud). These factors are crucial for understanding the connotations and cultural meanings constructed through the language used in the articles.

3. Results

Quantitative Analysis

Our quantitative analysis yielded data that undoubtedly warranted further investigation. First, based on the perspective of the expert researchers, of the 281 news items examined, the number of news items clearly favoring the practice of euthanasia ($n = 145$) significantly exceeded the number of unfavorable news items ($n = 53$) (Figure 1).

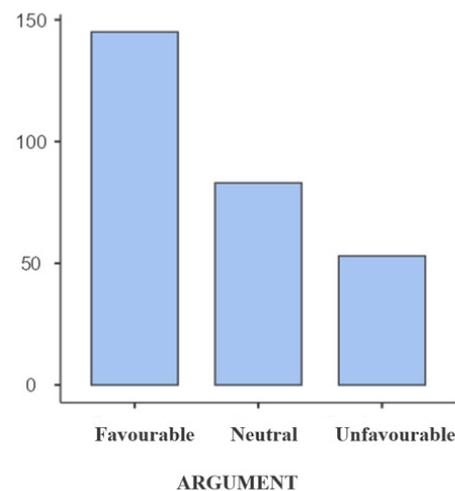


Figure 1. Trend of articles: favourable, unfavourable, neutral.

A comparison of pro- and anti-euthanasia articles revealed significant relationships among the following indicators (Table 1). Pro-euthanasia articles employed

the sentimental argument more frequently than did anti-euthanasia articles (χ^2 16.4, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, pro-euthanasia articles emphasized the right to euthanasia argument, compared with the avoidance of suffering argument, in contrast to anti-euthanasia articles (χ^2 6.89, $p < 0.003$). Both pro- and anti-euthanasia articles made few mentions of alternatives, such as palliative care (χ^2 125, $p < 0.001$).

Favorable articles proposed alternatives, such as palliative care, to a lesser extent than unfavorable articles (χ^2 125, $p < 0.001$). The term “aid in dying” appeared more frequently in favorable articles than in unfavorable articles (χ^2 10.2, $p < 0.001$), whereas “end of life” (χ^2 19.4, $p < 0.001$) and “palliative care” (χ^2 51.9, $p < 0.001$) were less prevalent in favorable articles than in unfavorable articles. Notably, no significant difference was observed in the occurrence of the terms “illness” and “suffering” (χ^2 3.2, $p = 0.007$, not significant).

Table 1. Argumentation regarding whether the article is favorable or unfavorable.

	Favorable	Unfavorable	χ^2 , p
Use of sentimental argument	54	5	χ^2 16.4, $p < 0.001$
Main argument as right versus suffering	36	7	χ^2 6.89, $p < 0.003$
Alternatives to euthanasia being considered	6	44	χ^2 125, $p < 0.001$
Euthanasia equated with dignified death	119	5	χ^2 97.4, $p < 0.001$
Appearance of “aid in dying” expression	65	11	χ^2 10.2, $p < 0.001$
Illness or suffering clearly appears	35	107	χ^2 3.2, not significant
The expression “to put an end to life” appears	114	9	χ^2 19.4, $p < 0.001$
No mention of palliative care	123	20	χ^2 51.9, $p < 0.001$

Qualitative Analysis

Using the NVivo tool, word clouds were generated based on the frequency of word occurrences, their relationships with other words, and word clusters. The generated word clouds corresponded to news items coded as favorable (Figure 2) and unfavorable to euthanasia (Figure 3), based on the perception of expert bioethics researchers. These word clouds were configured around the semantic fields created within each group of news items. Specifically, the primary argument represented by the words was located in the upper part of the central word, and the secondary argument in the lower part.

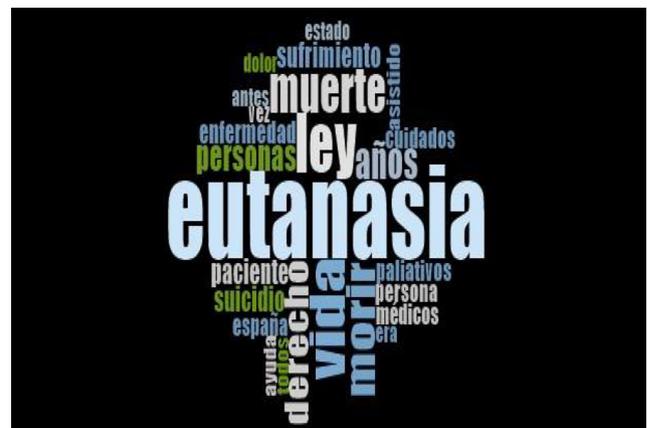


Figure 2. Word cloud of pro-euthanasia articles.

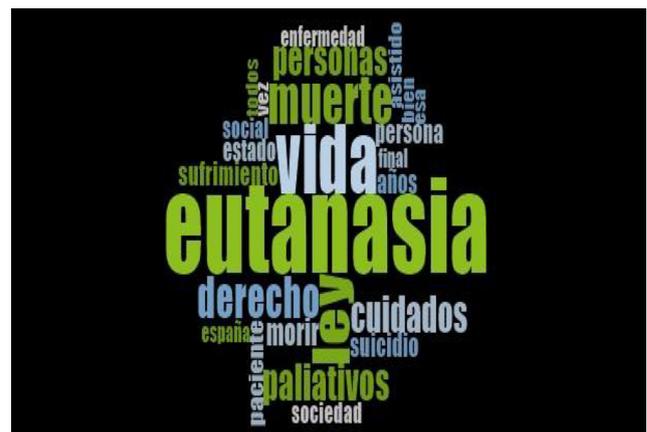


Figure 3. Word cloud of articles unfavourable to euthanasia.

As the main theme, a crucial distinction emerged between the two groups. The semantic field of news items favoring euthanasia comprised “law” (ranking 2),

“death” (ranking 4), “suffering” (ranking 9), and “pain.” The collection of words connected “pain” (ranking 25) with “euthanasia” and “law.” In contrast, the semantic field of news opposing euthanasia comprised “life” (ranking 2), “death” (ranking 4), and “people” (ranking 8), which, if combined with the frequency of the word “person,” surpassed “death” and “illness” (ranking 20).

Notably, the term “law” did not have a central position in the semantic field of either group. In unfavorable news items, “life” took precedence over “law,” in contrast to favorable and neutral news items. Given that most selected news items concerned the “euthanasia law,” studying word frequencies reflected this association. Its absence in unfavorable news items suggested a particular interest in shifting the debate on euthanasia toward the contemplation of life and illness rather than suffering. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses confirmed this interpretation.

Articles in favor of euthanasia center around the concepts of “law,” “death,” and “suffering,” indicating that their arguments emphasize the need for legal regulation concerning the right to die and alleviation of suffering. In contrast, anti-euthanasia articles were structured around “life,” “person,” and “illness.” Therefore, their arguments revolved around the idea of euthanasia being opposed to the realms of life and illness, especially for individuals.

The distinct connotations of each semantic field were evident. In favorable articles, euthanasia represented an escape from the darkness of suffering and death, whereas in unfavorable articles, euthanasia was regarded as contrasting with the world of sick individuals who, despite their challenges, valued life.

The word cloud provided clear insights regarding secondary themes. In the group of favorable news items, secondary themes appeared through “life” (third place), “dying” (fifth place), and “law” (seventh place). In contrast, unfavorable articles employed the terms “law” (third place), “right” (fifth place), “care” (seventh place), and “palliative care” (sixth place). Interestingly, if “palliative care” were treated as a single word, it would rank third in the frequency order in unfavorable articles,

surpassing “law” and “death” and, of course, “right.” In favorable articles, it only ranked eight, reaffirming the quantitative findings.

The second argument underlined the different connotations. Expert reading of the articles revealed that euthanasia proponents focused on the need to regulate both the right to die and the right to live for all. In contrast, articles on euthanasia emphasized the conflict between law (the right to euthanasia) and palliative care. Palliative care was presented as an alternative to euthanasia to alleviate suffering. This idea pervaded numerous articles, when advocating for proper regulation of palliative care prior to euthanasia.

Finally, the absence of certain terms was noteworthy. The term “dignity” (or its derivatives) did not feature among the top 25 most frequently used terms in any of the three groups (favorable, neutral, and unfavorable). As “dignity” represented a key ethical argument, its absence carried distinct connotations in each group. In the pro-euthanasia news group, this likely implied a preference for legal rather than ethical focus. However, in the group of unfavorable articles, it indicated a preference for framing the issue around the value of life rather than the argument of intrinsic dignity. This raised questions about the choice of an ethical model or desired to prevent the semiotic confusion surrounding the idea of a dignified death.

4. Discussion

The study revealed that the number of news articles on the subject increased considerably in the period preceding the approval of euthanasia laws in Spain. Furthermore, most studies strongly supported this practice. Undoubtedly, this had affected the public’s perception of euthanasia¹¹. Notably, if identical articles were not excluded from the selection, the total number of media articles on the subject during this period would have been considerably higher, thereby intensifying the social conditioning of euthanasia perception.

11 Cfr. Magelssen, M., Supphellen, M., Nortvedt, P. & Materstvedt, L. J. «Attitudes towards assisted dying are influenced by question wording and order: A survey experiment». *BMC Medical Ethics*, 2016; 17(1): 24; Olivares-García y al., *op. cit.*

In addition to the quantity and orientation of news articles, other factors such as the predominant use of emotional arguments could profoundly affect public opinion. Specifically, public discourse revolved around affective parameters¹² that aim to evoke sensitivity and emotion, which were often linked to specific cases of suffering. This tendency to focus on individual cases could lead readers to assume that these stories represented the majority of the population¹³. However, subsequent data showed that euthanasia-related deaths in Spain accounted for only 0.06% of all deaths¹⁴. This phenomenon was not unique to Spain and had also been observed in other countries¹⁵. Specifically, “pious cases” were emphasized, eliciting empathy from readers by instilling fear of facing a similar situation in the future¹⁶. Such media portrayals rarely presented alternative solutions for euthanasia.

Numerous studies have emphasized the significance of language. Grove et al¹⁷. identified how the use of emotional language and phrases influenced positive attitudes towards euthanasia. They demonstrated that allusions of hopelessness had a particularly strong effect on garnering support for euthanasia. However, the authors cautioned against interpreting the public support for euthanasia based solely on individual surveys. Furthermore, other researchers had identified the impact of framing and order of issues on attitudes towards euthanasia, leading to mostly favorable viewpoints¹⁸.

12 Cfr. Baczkó, B. & Betesh, P. *Los imaginarios sociales. Memorias y esperanzas colectivas*. Nueva Visión, Buenos Aires, 1991. Grove, G., Hughes, I., Lovell, M. & Best, M. «Content analysis of euthanasia polls in Australia and New Zealand: Words do matter». *Internal Medicine Journal*, 2021; 51(10): 1629–1635; Luxardo, N. (2012). Muerte Digna: Connotaciones y alcances del concepto en contextos locales. *MEDPAL Interdisciplina y Domicilio* 4

13 Cfr. Bhatia, N., White, B. & Deliens, L. «How should Australia respond to media-publicised developments on euthanasia in Belgium?». *Journal of Law and Medicine*, 2016; 23: 835–848. Díaz del Campo, *op. cit.*

14 Cfr. Ministerio de Sanidad. *Informe anual 2021 de la prestación de ayuda para morir*. Acceso: julio de 2024. <https://www.sanidad.gob.es/eutanasia/docs/InformeAnualEutanasia.pdf>.

15 Cfr. Johnstone, M. J. «Media manipulation and the euthanasia debate». *Australian Nursing and Midwifery Journal*, 2014; 21(7): 32.

16 Cfr. Bhatia y al., *op. cit.* Guzzo, G. «Euthanasia, mass media y consenso social». *Medicina y Ética*, 2012; 23: 171–190.

17 Cfr. Grove y al., *op. cit.*

18 Cfr. Bahnik, Š., Vranka, M. A. & Trefná, K. «What makes euthanasia justifiable? The role of symptoms’ characteristics and inter-individual differences». *Death Studies*, 2019; 45(3): 226–237; Hay-

A similar concern arose regarding the perspective of the medical profession, as doctors in the media did not necessarily represent the entire medical community¹⁹. The same applied to celebrities who supported euthanasia as they might not accurately reflect general sentiments²⁰. Furthermore, healthcare professionals directly involved in patient care were often unable to express their opinions and narratives publicly, owing to confidentiality concerns. Consequently, the narratives were often skewed.

Another ethical consideration was the confusion surrounding ideas. Euthanasia had frequently been equated with dignified death, which, in the minds of many, resembled practices such as palliative sedation or appropriate therapeutic efforts rather than traditional euthanasia²¹. This divergence aimed to distance the idea from therapeutic obstinacy²². Furthermore, the absence of “dignity” in the arguments against euthanasia might be aimed at preventing conceptual confusion stemming from the association of death with dignity in this context. Consequently, the multifaceted meaning of dignity in the context of dying had shifted toward an unambiguous interpretation promoted by certain groups in recent decades, linking it to euthanasia²³.

wood, D., Thompson, J., Breen, L. J. & O’Connor, M. «Beliefs And Emotions Underpin Community Attitudes Towards Voluntary Assisted Dying In Australia». *Omega*, 2022; 302228221133414. Advance online publication; Magelssen y al. *op. cit.* Parkinson, L., Rainbird, K., Kerridge, I., Carter, G., Cavenagh, J., McPhee, J. & Ravenscroft, P. «Cancer patients’ attitudes toward euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide: The influence of question wording and patients’ own definitions on responses». *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 2005; 2: 82–89.

19 Cfr. Cuervo Pinna, M. A., Rubio, M., Altisent Trota, R., Rocafort-Gil, J. & Gómez-Sancho, M. «Investigación cualitativa sobre el concepto de eutanasia, entre médicos españoles». *Revista de Calidad Asistencial: órgano de la Sociedad Española de Calidad Asistencial*, 2016; 31(1): 18–26. Wright, D. K., Fishman, J. R., Karsoho, H., Sandham, S. & Macdonald, M. E. «Physicians and euthanasia: A Canadian print-media discourse analysis of physician perspectives». *CMAJ Open*, 2015; 3(2): E134–E139.

20 Cfr. Guzzo, *op. cit.*

21 Cfr. Marcoux y al. *op. cit.* Rietjens, J. A. C., Raijmakers, N. J. H., Kouwenhoven, P. S. C., Seale, C., van Thiel, G. J. M. W., Trapenburg, M., van Delden, J. J. M. & van der Heide, A. «News media coverage of euthanasia: A content analysis of Dutch national newspapers». *BMC Medical Ethics*, 2013; 14: 11.

22 Cfr. Gamliel, E. «To end life or not to prolong life: The effect of message framing on attitudes toward euthanasia». *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2013; 18(5): 693–703. Guzzo, *op. cit.* Xu, H., Stjernswärd, S., Glasdam, S. & Fu, C. «Circumstances affecting patients’ euthanasia or medically assisted suicide decisions from the perspectives of patients, relatives, and healthcare professionals: A qualitative systematic review». *Death Studies*, 2023; 48(4): 326–351.

23 Cfr. Hemati, Z., Ashouri, E., AllahBakhshian, M., Pourfarzad, Z., Shirani, F., Safazadeh, S., Ziyaei, M., Varzeshnejad, M., Hashemi,

This was pertinent to the question of whether a substantial portion of Spain's major media outlets actively sought to shape public opinion in favor of euthanasia until the law was passed. Although it was challenging to ascertain the intent of the media definitively, clear indications suggested a probable agenda. First, extensive coverage of the topic indicated a deliberate effort to shape public opinion, whether in favor or against it. Second, the conspicuous alignment in the semantic themes of most articles favoring euthanasia was not coincidental but rather reflective of a cultural phenomenon.

5. Conclusions

In the months prior to the enactment of Spain's euthanasia regulation law, the media—particularly the Spanish print press and digital newspapers, the subject of this study—played a critical role in shaping the public discourse and opinions on the subject. Notably, this media presence did not remain ethically neutral but instead exhibited a clear bias in favor of euthanasia. The predominant arguments put forth in these instances emphasized the necessity of establishing the right to die or euthanasia as the only solution to unbearable suffering. In contrast, less than one-fifth of the examined articles expressed disapproval of this practice, advocating a guarantee of palliative care for all citizens. On the other hand, it was common to use narratives about cases of particular suffering that evoke sensitivity and emotion, a fact that positively influences favourable attitudes towards euthanasia. Our findings indicated the need to cultivate an ethical culture that empowered citizens to make end-of-life decisions based on clear-cut principles, rational reasoning, and diverse perspectives.

6. Annex 1 Rubric for media selection

The media outlets—always Spanish—were selected using the following multiple criteria: for print media, general information newspapers with an average daily

circulation of more than 100,000 copies, according to data from the Office of Distributive Justification, and the ten most widely read national digital newspapers according to the Comscore report. These newspapers were searched for opinion pieces, editorials, reports, and news about the passage of the law on dignified death and euthanasia.

This study was conducted within the framework of the research project "Analysis of Public Discourse on Dignified Death in Spanish Social Media in the Period 2019-2021," submitted to the 2022 Call for Funding of Internal Research Projects by Universidad Pontificia Comillas, which approved the funding following a positive evaluation of the project's scientific quality. This project was led by Rafael Amo Usanos as the principal investigator, with the collaboration of María del Carmen Massé, and with the participation of David Lorenzo and Montserrat Esquerda, the latter two being affiliated with other institutions. The funding source for this project was Universidad Pontificia Comillas, and there are no conflicts of interest that affect the results of this research.

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