Content Analysis – Research Designs

• I. Use analysis of text to shed light on attitudes and values of the source
  • McClelland’s analysis of children’s fiction as a measure of “achievement motive”
  • Dodds-Danforth study of “happy” lyrics, blog posts, and State of the Union messages
  • Race-ethnicity of criminal suspects in local news as an indicator of prejudice
II. Using content of news reports messages to assess causes of news programming, e.g. importance of market forces

- Comparing public broadcasters and commercial broadcasters for extent of hard-soft and international-domestic coverage
- Comparative analysis of niche versus generalist sources (e.g. Wall St Journal vs. NYT)
- Partisan vs non-partisan sources
III. Examining content to make inferences about effects of messages on behavior

- Suicide notes
- Diplomatic cables and onset of war
- Candidate rhetoric and vote share
- Infotainment and market share
Stages of Content Analysis

• (1) Identify relevant sources, identify the population of messages (op eds vs news; front-page news, etc., and draw a sample)

• (2) Develop content categories
  • Categories guided by theoretical-conceptual considerations (e.g. market forces make news organizations over-produce soft news; campaign news dwells on “horse race” and strategy at the expense of policy)
Coding Scheme

- Content categories to reflect underlying concept – soft news, objective news, news as negative (bad versus good news), reliance on official sources, etc.

- Categories should be **exhaustive** and **mutually exclusive**

- Categorization process to be independent, i.e. categorization of any given message should not depend on categorization of previous message
Table of Contents

• Intro – statement of the problem, why this is relevant/important; theory and hypothesis
• Outline your research design/strategy – sample of news sources, coding scheme, inter-coder reliability
• Presentation and interpretation of results
• Discussion-Implications
Unit of Analysis and Reliability

- What gets coded – words, sentences, paragraphs, entire news report
- Holistic coding; roles played by men and women in advertisements; treatment of minorities in entertainment programs
- Issue of inter-coder reliability; have multiple coders categorize the same messages
Presentation of Results

• Tabulate results of coding – word counts, percentages, column inches

• Interpret results in terms of theoretical expectations
Online Databases

Lexis-Nexis includes >500 daily newspapers, magazines, Blogs, and some transcripts of TV programs

http://lib.stanford.edu/lexis-nexis-academic