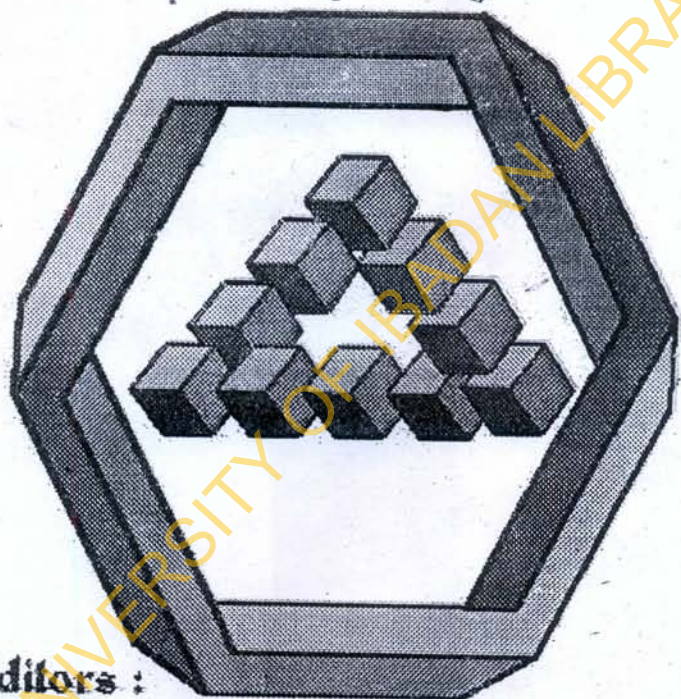1

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Approaches, Techniques and Reporting.

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CHAPTER THREE
CONTENT ANALYSIS
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Content analysis is a systematic way of reporting social and economic life that is dominated or influenced by casual observations about the content of communication. Most often, people report violence on television, government budgets, policies, -programmes, magazines, radio, newspapers, news, newspaper coverage and advertisements etc. based on casual observation and to the extent that unresolved controversies are generated. Issues such as these are too important to be resolved on mere observation. There should be a formal system of recording the impressions of all those who have comments about a given kind of content. Thus, formal content analysis finds its use in communication research. Stempel (1981) stated that the place of content analysis in communication research is indicated in the communication concept of "Who says What, to Whom, and with What Effect". He stated further that communication research can realize its full-potential only if it can relate content to communication audience and effects.

A. Definitions of content analysis

Many researchers in the field of communication have attempted to define content analysis. Krippendroff (1980) stated that content analysis involves specialized procedure for processing scientific data....... its purpose is to provide knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide for action. It is a tool.

This definition implies that content analysis is a device that can be used to assess communication content, communication patterns and possibly communication style. Therefore, it is an instrument for collecting data for the assessment of content in communication research. According to Kerlinger (1973), content analysis techniques can ask questions on communication already produced, instead of using scales or

interview schedules. This indicates that content analysis techniques can be used to obtain data in communication research just like scales and interview schedules can be used in collecting data in field survey

Berelson (1952) defined content analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. The implication of this definition lies in understanding the meaning of objective, systematic, quantitative and manifest content for a clear understanding and efficient performance of content analysis. The meaning of these variables of content analysis as opined by Stemp (1981) are as follows:

Objective: This means having the categories of analysis defined so precisely that different persons can apply them to the same content and get the same results. Objectivity implies that results obtained depend on procedure and not on the researcher.

Systematic: This means, first, that a set of procedure is applied in the same way to all the content being analysed. Second, it means that categories are set up so that all relevant content is analysed. Finally, it means that the analysis are designed to secure data relevant to a research question or hypothesis.

Quantitative: This means the recording of numerical values or the frequencies with which the various defined types of content occur.

Manifest content: This means the apparent content or the actual message of communication to be investigated. It indicates that content must be coded as it appears and not as the content analyst feels it should be.

B. Materials for content analysis

Kerlinger (1973) noted that:

> we put part of ourselves, our work, our attitude and our culture in the materials we create and store. Letters, newspapers and magazines, books, films, radio and television programmes, billboards and artwork project the life, society and

culture of a people. The contents of the various media we consume are projections of motives, values, needs, attitudes and impulses of the procedure onto the external objects.

This implies that a large number and variety of psychological variables such as needs values, attitudes, stereotypes, authoritarianism and creativity can be measured through content analysis.

Education has suffered from lack of analysis of the educational information that people absorb from the press and other media of public communication. Educational news articles, editorials and special features can therefore be content-analysed.

Content analysis can be applied to available materials and to materials specially produced for the research purpose. One can content analyse letters, diaries, ethnographic materials, newspaper articles, minutes of meetings and so on. Autobiographies, stories or short essays written by children can also be content analysed. Similarly, Akpan (1990) stated, that a great deal of information is trapped in expressive art facts such as newspapers, periodicals, books, electronic media, music, poetry, film, diaries, reports. etc.

The wide range of materials on which content analysis can be performed shows that content analysis reduces the stereotype answers produced by interview schedules and the tendency to hold back information when individuals are observed or interviewed.

C. Content analysis procedure.

Content analysis involves four methodological procedure, which include selection of unit of analysis, category construction, sampling of content and reliability of coding.

1.   **Selection of the unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis depends primarily on what information is required for the purposes of the study. Data are categorized on the basis of content units. These could be words, statements, sentences, symbols, paragraphs or entire article and

theme (Stapel, 1981; Akpan, 1990). Unit of analysis is related to the purpose of the study.

2. Category construction

This requires the classification of required information needed to answer research questions. There are existing category systems already developed by previous researchers that may prove to be appropriate for your study. However, category can be constructed if the existing categories are found not adequate or appropriate for your study. The advantages of using already constructed category systems are that it reduces concern about validity and reliability, and ensures that the category system is a workable one.

In constructing category system, three interrelated concepts should be considered according to Stempel (1981);

1. Categories must be pertinent to the objectives of the study. This implies that the categories constructed must actually help in gathering information that will answer the research questions of the study or permit the testing of the hypotheses of the study.

2. Categories should be functional: categories should be functional assumes that the purpose of the study is to provide insight about communication content.

3. The system of categories must be manageable- The number of categories must be limited to appreciable number that the coders can cope with. The categories should be such that the coder will operate without frequent reference back to the list and the definition of categories.

D. Sampling content

Sampling in content analysis is like sampling in other studies that requires the sample to be representative of the population, and each unit in the population should be given equal chance of being represented in the sample. However, in sampling for content analysis, there is additional consideration of sampling time as well as media. Basically, in content analysis, there are some considerations in sampling. These considerations are that stratified samples are necessary in some cases and that purposive samples are useful in some others.

For example, taking newspapers as a study universe in which the number of pages are more during the working days of the week than at the beginning or end of the week. The first consideration has to do with the days of the week. In this case, newspapers published during the working days are grouped together while those published on weekend days are grouped separately, before random sampling can be done in each of the groupings to obtain the sample newspapers.

The second consideration is how news media and newsgathering are organised. The news media and media source should be put into careful consideration when carrying out the sampling. Care must be taken to ensure that a proportionate figure is sampled, and in doing this, circulation figure of the print media must be obtained to assist in carrying out the sample.

The third consideration is availability. The researcher or analyst must make sure that the newsprint to be content analysed can be easily obtained through the circulation departments of the newsprint organisation.

E. Reliability of coding

Content analysis definition that emphasises systematic objectivity in the analysis of the manifest content of communication means that the researcher must be concerned with reliability. This will ensure that there is consistency in data collected and a high level of agreement among coders. Stempel (1981) identified three factors which can cause disagreement among coders as: inadequate definition of categories, failure of coders to achieve a common frame of reference, and oversight. It is not uncommon in the early stages of a study for there to be more disagreement among coders. In order to reduce disagreement among coders at the early stage of the study, researchers and the coders should carry out trial runs of the coding exercise so that the coders will be acquainted with definitions of categories, and have common frame of reference.

This, apart from reducing disagreement among coders, will also increase the reliability of the data collected.

Coding requires systematic transformation and grouping of raw data so as to enable researcher or analyst make precise description of relevant content traits. However, the need for reliability of categories in content analysis cannot be over emphasized. Strict rules are adhered to, in coding of raw data in content analysis.

These rules as stated by Bud, *et al* (1967) are as follows:
1. Categories must reflect investigators research question;
2. Categories must be exhaustive and;
3. Categories must be mutually exclusive

Categories must reflect investigators research question: This implies precise definition of categories, that is, items must be placed in appropriate categories. The idea is to enable research questions of investigator to be answered at the end of research period.

Categories must be exhaustive: This requirement is concerned with ascertaining that relevant items are placed into a category. More importantly, Categories should absorb all the relevant items in the study's sample.

Categories must be mutually exclusive: This requirement directs that no content item can be allowed into more than one category. Clear definition of categories and coding rules promote mutual exclusiveness of categories, while removal of all ambiguities further strengthens this requirement.

F. Training coders.

Coding involving coders requires that careful selection and training of coders should be carried out. Experienced coders should be selected, but in a situation where such coders could not be obtained, people of similar academic background should be selected, or people of high academic standard, probably from the field of journalism, political science, sociology or education. The major reason for training coders is to develop the common frame of reference that is important to the success of any content analysis study.

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