
For many decades, content analysis was mainly known in journalism and newspaper studies. In the last decades, an increasing number of media and a corresponding multiplication of media documents have made content analysis one of the most important research methods for the social sciences at large.

Krippendorff’s Content Analysis (1980) was for long the primary sourcebook for the history and core principles of content analysis as a research method. Although welcome because of its profound discussion of assumptions, framework and logic of content analysis procedures, this first edition is mostly remembered by my students as an unattractive bundle of rather dense text. In contrast, the revised edition must be praised for its clear organization and readability. Much effort has been made to give the book an attractive layout. Also, although only a handful of substantive paragraphs have been added, the message is brought in twice as many pages (188 pages in the first edition versus 411 in the second edition).

The (same) chapters are now grouped in three main parts. Part I, Conceptualizing Content Analysis, starts with an overview of the history of content analysis. In Chapter 2 a definition of content analysis is discussed that gives the method a distinguished place between other methods of social scientific inquiry. Chapter 3 gives an overview of some of the ways in which content analysis has been applied.

The chapters in Part II, Components of Content Analysis, outline the procedures used in content analysis. In Chapter 4 designs for content analysis and their procedural logic are discussed. Chapter 5 addresses the units of analysis relevant for content analysis. Chapter 6 is devoted to an overview of the sampling techniques that can be applied. Chapter 7 describes the process of recording and coding, the core process of data-making in content analysis. Chapter 8 and 9 discuss the transformation of raw data with the use of data languages and analytic constructs.

The chapters in Part III, Analytical Paths and Evaluative Techniques, are devoted to several practical content analysis procedures. Chapter 10 discusses different statistical techniques that can be applied. Chapter 11 discusses the procedures to evaluate the reliability of the coding process, and Chapter 13 develops a typology of validation efforts that the content analyst may utilize. Strangely enough, Chapter 12 separates the two chapters devoted to methodological evaluation. This chapter is devoted to the use of computers and computational techniques in the research
process. The final chapter is dedicated to a practical guide that summarizes the foregoing discussion from a practitioner’s perspective.

Although the outline of this new edition remains essentially unchanged from that of the first edition (only the chapters on computer use respectively validity were moved), all chapters have been revised, many chapters have become an introduction paragraph, and in several chapters developments that have taken place in the last decades, such as qualitative procedures and computational content analysis techniques, are discussed extensively.

Chapter 12 on computer aided text analysis is completely rewritten and discusses the many ways computers can support content analysis nowadays. The chapter reviews computer-aided text analysis, searches on electronically available documents, forms of computational content analysis, computer programs assisting in qualitative analyses, and discusses future developments of computer use in content analysis research. A second relevant revision concerns the discussion of qualitative forms of content analysis. This improvement, however, has not lead to a new integrative chapter, but is limited to the introduction of paragraphs on procedures for qualitative content analysis in Chapters 1, 4, 6 and 12.

A third relevant revision concerns the chapters on reliability (Chapter 11) and validity (Chapter 13), which are completely rewritten and provide new procedures and corresponding statistical formulas.

Krippendorff introduces content analysis as a method designed to study symbolic phenomena. Its most important methodological advantage is its unobtrusiveness: The raw text materials (such as news reports, video clips, graffiti, meeting minutes, police records, television comedies, or billboard advertisements) are produced in everyday social situations, out of any kind of researcher control. In contrast to the participant observer, interviewer, or survey researcher, who has to deal with the reactivity of their method, the content analyst uses natural documents that already exist. Moreover, content analysis processes documents that are produced according to the aims and criteria relevant in these everyday situations. These documents in turn allow the researcher to make inferences to the contexts relevant for their production.

In short, in Part I Krippendorff presents content analysis as a method for systematic inferential research on symbolic materials. In his view, all reading of texts is qualitative (16), but the protocol the analyst has to follow should be systematic. In discussing his analytical perspective on content analysis as a research method, Krippendorff has reformulated and reordered the core concepts of his framework for content analysis. 

Data, context, knowledge, target, inference and validity are now reformulated in terms of texts (in regard to data, this was also used in quite another sense in the logic: Data-making), research questions (instead of
the ambiguous term target), context, analytical constructs (instead of knowledge), inferences and validating evidence. In discussing the forms of content analysis (Chapter 3) he has reformulated some of his inference models too. The system model for inferences is now termed extrapolations, and the communication model has been reformulated conversations. These revisions have clearly contributed to the readability of the text.

Although Krippendorff underlines in his conceptual perspective on content analysis the interpretive basis of the method, the procedures in the rest of the book follow the protocols for systematic-quantifying research designs. Qualitative approaches are mentioned (as alternative ways for exploring texts systematically) but in the elaborations of the components of the content analysis (logic components), qualitative procedures are not systematically discussed in terms of an integrative logic. But the same holds for quantifying procedures: The book gives an overview of alternative procedures for sampling, recording and analysis from an analytic methodological perspective, but does not choose integrative protocols. The book provides a palette of alternative procedures with their pros and cons for each component of the research design, but something neglects the coherence between chosen elements in one design.

Perhaps that is why the chapter on the observation instrument (the coding scheme as basis for each type of content analysis) has been left out. In order to find relevant data to obtain answers to research questions, the analyst should translate the conceptual model into observational terms that fit the document text. In content analysis, operationalization of concepts means the definition of topics, characteristics and related categories, but also related recording and context units and instructions to use units, topics, characteristics and categories. All these are discussed in the book, but scattered over several chapters (Unitizing, Recording, Data languages and Analytical constructs). The instrument itself, the coding scheme, is only discussed in analytical terms. Even in the practical guide (Chapter 14) the coding scheme as the instrument to be applied is only discussed in terms of developing categories and recording instructions (such as operational definitions). The practical aspects of developing and using the coding scheme, its relationship with the conceptual framework and analytical constructs, are not illustrated. It is a book for architects, not for builders.

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