COM 633: Content Analysis Research Methods

Fall 2009
4-6 pm, Tues. & Thur., MU 208 & occasionally 228
Prof. Kim Neuendorf   Office hrs.:
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This seminar-style course explores various approaches to analyzing the content and potential effects of documented communications--written materials (such as news articles, print ads, or transcripts of conversations), audio/visual forms (such as movies, TV programs, commercials, photographs, or videos of nonverbal behaviors), and interactive media (such as gaming and online applications). Content analysis is a <u>systematic</u> way of analyzing message content, with a variety of techniques available--from "human coding" of TV violence, to "computer text analysis" of the news coverage of a political issue, for example. The course's emphasis is on the design and execution of actual content analysis studies--methods of producing meaningful data to answer critical questions about all types of messages.

Some key points:
➢   The course introduces you to a number of software options for computer text analysis, an evolving set of techniques for analyzing the written word in an era of unprecedented digital retrieval capability.
➢   Content analysis, the fastest growing methodology in the mass communication literature, is also being used more and more frequently for commercial research purposes (e.g., for marketing, publishing, legal cases). The instructor has served as a consultant on several large-scale commercial and governmental content analyses.
➢   A prominent course requirement is an individually-designed content analysis project (with a small sample analysis, or "pilot" study) and corresponding class presentation.
➢   This course has been a useful way for graduate students to plan masters theses using content analysis (a popular option, given that one can execute the study on one's own schedule). Past examples of class projects that have evolved into theses include studies of:
> *women's images in films across the decades
> *the production and thematic motifs that characterize a particular filmmaker (i.e., Jane Campion)
> *form and appeal characteristics related to print advertising success
> *images in drug advertisements
> *themes apparent in self-reports of spouse abusers
> *self-disclosure in contemporary women's films
> *interpersonal appeals used in personal ads
> *a comparison of TV commercials from the U.S. and Thailand
> *self-presentation styles as reflected in nonverbals in MySpace personal photos
> *a cross-cultural comparison of U.S. and Hungarian MySpace profiles
> *quality of life and community web sites
> *product placement in video games
➢   The course meets the Communication Masters requirement of a methodology elective.

Readings: One book is required:

Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

The book is available on Amazon. Other required readings will generally be distributed in class, and/or available on the class website:

> *http://academic.csuohio.edu/kneuendorf*, click on COM 533

or on the textbook's website:

> *http://academic.csuohio.edu/kneuendorf/content*

Each student may on occasion be required to find research articles on assigned topics and be responsible for their duplication.

Additional recommended resources:

Gottschalk, L. A., & Bechtel, R. J. (Eds.). (2008). *Computerized content analysis of speech and verbal texts and its many applications*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Jordan, A. B., Kunkel, D., Manganello, J., & Fishbein, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Media messages and public health: A decisions approach to content analysis*. New York: Routledge.

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Krippendorff, K., & Bock, M. A. (Eds.). (2009). *The content analysis reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. G. (2005). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research* (2nd ed.). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Roberts, C. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Text analysis for the social sciences: Methods for drawing statistical inferences from texts and transcripts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Smith, C. P. (Ed.). (1992). *Motivation and personality: Handbook of thematic content analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Weber, R.P. (1990). *Basic content analysis* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

West, M. D. (Ed.). (2001). *Applications of computer content analysis*. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.

Grading: A major component of each student's grade will be a report that summarizes the background and/or literature in a given area, and develops an original content analysis coding scheme (including all appropriate materials, such as completed codebook and coding form). The paper may be "context-based" (e.g., an exploration of critical variables for rock music or horror films; the practical application of CA in network television), or "variable-based" (e.g., the role of message complexity across several media). Students will be expected to attempt an exhaustive lit. review, and should apply the content analytic scheme to at least some pertinent content (i.e., a set of pilot data should actually be collected, and reliability assessed). In relation to this individual project/paper, each student will give an in-class presentation at some point in the second half of the

term. The goal of this presentation will be to get feedback from class and instructor, so the final version of the paper should <u>not</u> be written at this point.

Since there is no exam, your paper and presentation should show clearly that you have completed the required readings and understand the course material. Additionally, smaller research tasks will be comparable to short take-home essays. These research tasks will include such things as: (a) Each student will be required to run a body of text through at least two text analysis computer programs, and write up a brief report.   (b) Each student will be asked to *code* for at least one content analysis being conducted (for a "client," most probably a graduate student completing a thesis or dissertation), and analyze the experience according to class concepts. (c) Each student may be asked to identify at least one on-line archive of interest to them, and share their evaluation of the usefulness of the archive with the class. (d) Each student will be asked to compute intercoder reliabilities using appropriate software (PRAM; as introduced in class), and share the results with the class.

As the class works its way through the textbook, students may be assigned particular topics from each chapter that they will be called upon to discuss. Students may also be asked to be prepared to speak about additional readings assigned. Therefore, participation serves as another important component to the course.

 The course grading breakdown is as follows:

Report (final version due at the final exam period, Tues. Dec. 8)	30%
In-class Presentation	15%
Completion of various research tasks	40%
Participation	<u>15%</u>
	100%

Tentative course outline:
- I. Review of research methodology options
- II. Content Analysis
  - A. Defining Content Analysis (Ch. 1)
  - B. Milestones in the History of Content Analysis (Ch. 2)
  - C. Beyond Description: An Integrative Model of Content Analysis (Ch. 3)
  - D. Message Units and Sampling (Ch. 4)
  - E. Variables and Predictions (Ch. 5)
  - F.   Measurement Techniques (Ch. 6)
  - G. Reliability (Ch. 7)
  - H. Results and Reporting (Ch. 8)
  - I. Contexts (Ch. 9)
- III. Applications
  - A. Message Archives (Resource 1)
  - B. NEXIS and Text Acquisition (Resource 2)
  - C. Computer Content Analysis Software (CATA) (Resource 3)
  - D. Software for Assessing Intercoder Reliability (Resource 4)
- IV. Special Considerations
  - A. Unitizing continuous content
  - B. Sampling fluid content
  - C. Sampling and analysis of interactive media
  - D. Problems with reliability assessment
- V. Class Presentations