

Media analyses

Methods

Content analyses

Through content analysis of media content it's possible to effectively deconstruct any text, being it written or expressed through auditory or visual means. It focuses only on the text itself, disregarding external influences. There are four main methods:

a) *Quantitative*

Analysing the whole medium or pieces of media content, not its parts: how often is a certain topic presented, what is the frequency, what amount of time is dedicated to it?

b) *Qualitative*

Analysing whole medium or pieces media content, not details of individual pieces: what topics are presented, who is interviewed, where is it presented, are there any mistakes (factual, grammatical) in the reportage?

c) *Semiotic / semantic*

What is obvious or hidden in the text. What meanings are encoded? What is the language used? Are the words neutral, or expressive? What headlines, pictures, or graphics are used and how? Are mistakes (factual, grammatical) in them as well? Are they related to the rest of a medium?

d) *Parsing (syntactic analysis)*

Structure of the media piece: analysing sentences, paragraphs, and whole text. Are some words or sentences present very often? Is the media piece consistent? Are quotations used? What headlines, pictures, or graphics are used and how?

Contextual analysis

A contextual analysis is already going beyond boundaries of the media content and focuses on external influences. It is *“simply an analysis of a text (in whatever medium, including multi-media) that helps us to assess that text within the context of its historical and cultural setting, but also in terms of its textuality – or the qualities that characterize the text as a text. A contextual analysis combines features of formal analysis with features of “cultural archaeology”, or the systematic study of social, political, economic, philosophical, religious, and aesthetic conditions that were (or can be assumed to have been) in place at the time and place when the text was created. While this may sound complicated, it is in reality deceptively simple: it means “situating” the text within the milieu of its times and assessing the roles of author, readers*

(intended and actual), and “commentators” (critics, both professional and otherwise) in the reception of the text”¹.

A contextual analysis can be basic or complex, depending on the focus of the researcher. Generally includes several key questions: what is the socio-political, historical, and cultural context of the media piece; to what does it react; is it relevant; is the information presented in the right context; does it use sources that are not relevant?

Analysis of authorial intent

As you learnt in the lesson “Language of media”, each author creates a text with an intention to inform, entertain, provide aesthetic or emotional experience, promote a viewpoint, etc. (internal influences). This analysis is focusing on internal influences of media content and it is seeking answers to the questions such as why the author published the media piece, what may be their intentions, are we understanding the text right? During this analysis, it’s possible to focus not only on what the author said and how it’s been presented, but also on what is omitted and why.

Looking at the whole medium, the researcher can consider for example a TV station as an author. In this case the whole agenda can be analysed with questions such as why a certain topic always appears on the first page.

In this context it’s important to explain the term **agenda-setting**, which is media practice that aims to influence public perception of importance placed on the topics. Media gives importance to topics on the basis of their own interests instead of that of the public. **Gate-keeping** is a related concept, which refers to filtering of information. Media are deciding which information to publish, and which should stay “behind the gate”.

All the methods mentioned above can be naturally combined. Hence the semiotic analysis can be for example complemented by questions seeking quantifiable answers, such as how many times certain words appear or how often the author uses biased expressions.

Comparative analysis

It’s not necessary to focus on one medium or one text only. Comparison of various pieces or media is very useful as well. Researchers can choose the topic and then compare how it’s been covered by several media. The questions may be what they put emphasis on, do they point out the same facts, whom they interview, where they present the topic, how much space they devote to it, what can be causes of different presentations?

This analysis can be also interesting to compare various genres and their approach to the same topic. This is especially important when analysing shifts in the meaning, for example when original satire is presented as news, or when identifying by whom and when the topic was covered for the first time.

¹ Behrendt, Stephen C. (Spring 2008), Using Contextual Analysis to evaluate texts, Retrieved from: <http://english.unl.edu/sbehrendt/StudyQuestions/ContextualAnalysis.html>

Resources

Behrendt, Stephen C. (Spring 2008), Using Contextual Analysis to evaluate texts, Retrieved from: <http://english.unl.edu/sbehrendt/StudyQuestions/ContextualAnalysis.html>