

Media analyses

Steps of the analysis

Step 1: Aim of the analysis, main question, and hypothesis

After selecting the topic - subject - of the analysis it is necessary to define the aim. The general aim should be the analyst's (researchers) explicit intention to collect data in such a way that they can answer the main question and verify or disprove the hypothesis.

For example: *“Aim of this analysis is to find out how the media are portraying certain topics.”*

Main question is then the inquiry the analyst wants to know the answer to, e.g. “What is the relationship between? What is the best way to ...? What happens if ... ?”

In the context of the media, an example can be this: *“How has a certain topic been portrayed by the media during the past year?”*

After having a clear idea of what researcher wants to analyse and find an answer to, it's possible to formulate hypothesis or hypotheses.

It is a statement about the nature of a certain situation or matter in the world. It is a proposal of the assumed relationship between research variables and can also include assumptions related to cause and effect of actions.

During the research (and analysis), the hypothesis is confirmed or disproved on the basis of empirical evidence. It is not necessary, but hypotheses can be designed at the end of the pilot research.

Example of the hypothesis: *“Media are mostly portraying certain topics in a biased way.”*

Simple analyses don't require creation of the hypothesis - it's enough to define its aim.

Step 2: Choosing the right method

Relevant methods for analysis of media content have been described in the previous part of this course. Choosing the right one is important, otherwise it may not be possible to find the answers to questions and verify/falsify the hypothesis. For example, semantic analysis will not be helpful at all when an analyst is aiming at finding out whether the medium is practicing agenda setting in favour of certain topics or interest groups. However, it can be complementary to analysis of authorial intent, as it can provide answers to whether reporting on other topics is biased, or not.

Please note that *comparison* of various texts from one or more sources that have been analysed using methods mentioned above helps to find the answer to the main question as well.

Step 3: Specific questions

Since the hypothesis is still very broad, the list of questions helps the researcher to analyse the media content and find enough evidence to confirm or disprove the hypothesis.

Below you can find several examples of specific questions that you can use in your analysis of media content.

1) Basic analysis

- Where and how is the reportage presented?
- Is space given to various (opposing) sides? Is the reportage biased, or balanced?
- Who are the sources/people interviewed or quoted?
- Are any expressive words used in the reportage?
- Is the headline corresponding to the rest of the reportage?

2) Advanced analysis:

- What headlines, pictures, or graphics are used and how?
- Are there any mistakes (factual, grammatical) in the media piece?
- 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? (semantic analysis)
- What is the context of the media? What does it react to? Is it relevant? Does it use sources that are not relevant? (contextual analysis)

Step 4: Finding the answer

During process of finding an answer to the main question it's possible to use one, or even combination, of two approaches:

Verification – it is an aim to confirm the hypothesis, prove that something is correct. Verificationism is *“the philosophical doctrine which maintains that only statements that are empirically verifiable (i.e. verifiable through the senses) are cognitively meaningful, or else they are truths of logic (tautologies)”*¹.

Falsification – it is an aim to disprove the hypothesis, prove that something is wrong. Falsifiability means that a statement, theory or hypothesis can be contradicted by evidence. For example, the statement "All swans are white" is falsifiable because one can observe that black swans exist. *“Falsifiability was introduced by the philosopher of science Karl Popper in his book Logik der Forschung”*².

¹ Wikipedia (February 12, 2021), Verificationism, Retrieved from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verificationism>

² Wikipedia (April 19, 2021), Falsifiability, Retrieved from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falsifiability>

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Wikipedia (February 12, 2021), Verificationism, Retrieved from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verificationism>

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