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An Analytical Study of Content Analysis in Social Research

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Abstract

The term Content Analysis as a research methodology is nearly a century old but it may rightly be admitted that its history dates back to human history itself, to the beginning of human use of symbols and language. Today content analysis is no longer defined by its traditional application of understanding meaning of messages. It has, over the years, developed into a methodology in its own right that it enables the researcher to plan, to communicate, and to critically evaluate a research design independently of its results.

As a research method content analysis uses a set of categorisation procedures for making valid and replicable inferences from data (text, voice or images) to their context. Inferences may be about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. Texts can be defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, photographs, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, theatre, informal conversation, or any occurrence of communicative language.

Since it can be applied to examine any piece of writing or occurrence of recorded communication, content analysis today is used in a variety of fields, ranging from marketing and media studies, to literature and rhetoric, ethnographic and cultural studies, gender and age issues, sociology and political science, psychology and cognitive science. Additionally, content analysis reflects a close relationship with sociology and psycholinguistics, and is playing a key role in the development of artificial intelligence.

The paper designed on the basis of the secondary data available deals with the importance of the content analysis of both the primary and the secondary data.

Keywords: Content Analysis, Data, Generalization, Cause And Effect Relationship, Tabular Form, Scientific Method, Social Research, Empirical Research, Problem In Question, Research Gap

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Introduction

Content analysis may be defined as "the use of replicable and valid method for making specific inferences from text to other states or properties of its source." Qualitative content analysis defines itself within this framework as an approach of empirical, methodologically controlled analysis of texts within the context of communication, following content analytical rules and step-by-step models, without rash quantification. The aim of content analysis is the analysis of formal aspects of the material. Identifying the intentions of the communicators, determining psychological states of persons and groups, detecting propaganda and subversive tendencies in the publications of organisations and groups, securing political and military intelligence, legal purposes, study of cultural patterns, social and individual values, mores, interests, attitudes etc. are some of the functions of content analysis. Content analysis is used to study a variety of content- newspapers, books, vision statements of institutions and organisations, policy documents of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), police cases, criminal records, suicide notes and so on. In content analysis the study centres more on what is said than what is understood by the receiver.

The term 'content analysis' is generally used for the analysis of the secondary data, but in a broad sense, it applies to the analysis of the contents of both the primary and the secondary data. Content analysis is an integral feature of the social science research which is in most of the cases qualitative research. Though the history of content analysis research is only one century old as it came to be known only in the mid 20s.

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However, being useful in several respects for the researcher, it is very popular these days. It is believed that in generations to come, it will be strictly followed because the analysis of the secondary data helps the researchers find out the gap which further helps them set their objectives of research, hypothesis etc. The content analysis of the primary data (the term which is rarely acceptable) helps them make a micro study focusing minutely on all the variables both independent and dependent ones.

Both the primary and the secondary methods of the content analysis are popular with the scientists of the world at large. The history of content analysis witnesses the fact that since the term came into existence, it has been used using both the methods in varied contexts of social science research.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the nature of social research
2. To study the various steps of social research
3. To study the important aspects of social research
4. To study the nature of data
5. To study the sources of primary data
6. To study the sources of secondary data
7. To study the significance of varied types of data in social research
8. To study the significance of content analysis in the process of social research
9. To be familiar with the various methods of content analysis
10. To study the causes and effects of content analysis in social research

Review of Literature

Asta B Schram (2014) in the study entitled 'A Mixed Methods Content Analysis of the Research Literature in Science Education' observes that more and more researchers in science education have been turning to the practice of combining qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study. This approach of using mixed methods creates possibilities to study the various issues that science educators encounter in more depth.

Jessica M. Sautter (Summer, 2014) in the study 'Secondary Analysis of Existing Data in Social Science Capstone Research' observes that secondary analysis of existing data is an important model for capstone research in social science because it allows students to integrate and apply the knowledge gained through coursework in their majors or minors.   Students identify connections among concepts learned through coursework, identify appropriate data and statistical methods to answer relevant research questions, and use statistical modeling to demonstrate and interpret relationships among concepts. Through activities that include a research proposal, a proposal to the campus institutional review board (IRB), an annotated bibliography, data analyses, and a final public presentation, students gain applied analytical skills and make progress toward mastering the undergraduate learning goals of self-directed learning, critical thinking, scientific reasoning, ability to conduct statistical analysis, and effective oral and written communication. The advantages of using the secondary-analysis model in capstone classes include efficiency, publishable outcomes, transferrable skills, and student-faculty collaboration. Secondary analysis of existing data involves obtaining datasets from studies that have already been completed and using the data to answer new questions.

Melissa P. Johnston, PhD (2014) in Secondary Data Analysis: A Method of which the Time Has Come finds out that technological advances have led to vast amounts of data that has been collected, compiled, and archived, and that is now easily accessible for research. As a result, utilizing existing data for research is becoming more prevalent, and therefore secondary data analysis. While secondary analysis is flexible and can be utilized in several ways, it is also an empirical exercise and a systematic method with procedural and evaluative steps, just as in collecting and evaluating primary data. The secondary data analysis is a viable method to utilize in the process of inquiry when a systematic procedure is followed.

*Roller & Lavrakas (2015) in Secondary and Primary Qualitative Content Analysis: Distinguishing between the Two Methods observe that t*he definition and use of the content analysis method in qualitative research varies depending on the particular type of qualitative content analysis (QCA) being conducted. The most common QCA method is utilized when it plays a supportive analytical role in combination with other qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions, i.e., when content analysis is being used as a *secondary* method. The other less common QCA method is used when the source of content is an existing, naturally occurring repository of information (such as historical documents, media content, and diaries), i.e., when content analysis is being used as a *primary* method.

Greet Peersman (2016) in 'Overview: Data Collection and Analysis Methods in Impact Evaluation' observes that well chosen and well implemented methods for data collection and analysis are essential for all types of evaluations. The author suggests that collection and analysis methods should be chosen to match the particular evaluation in terms of its key evaluation questions (KEQs) and the resources available. Impact evaluations should make maximum use of existing data and then fill gaps with new data. Data collection and analysis methods should be chosen to complement each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Mohajan, Haradhan (2018) in Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects observes discusses the proper use of qualitative research methodology to discuss several aspects of the research for the improvement of the skill of the readers. During the last few decades, the use of qualitative research has been increased in many institutions. It can be used to explore several areas of human behavior for the development of organizations. The paper analyzes the design of qualitative research giving some methodological suggestions to make it explicable to the reader.

Victoria Sherif (May, 2018) in the study entitled 'Evaluating Preexisting Qualitative Research Data for Secondary Analysis' explores the nature of

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secondary analysis and provides a brief history of the method. Qualitative secondary analysis is a relatively under-used method in education and the social sciences, often due to the lack of easily accessible, relevant, trustworthy, and complete data. The author addresses some of the potentials and limitations that influence its use and explores criteria for assessing the quality and sufficiency of preexisting qualitative research data. Qualitative secondary analysis has important implications for qualitative researchers, students and practitioners interested in generating new knowledge via unobtrusive, reliable, valid, and time/cost effective research through the wider use of existing qualitative data

Hypothesis

1. Social research is the key to all the social problems
2. Social research follows the steps of scientific method
3. Study of related literature is an important step of social research which provides a sufficient feedback about the problem in question
4. For the understanding the previous trends of the study of the selected subject, content analysis is essential
5. Most of the researchers do not take the content analysis of the secondary data seriously
6. Content analysis related both to the secondary data and the primary data
7. Finding the research gap is the outcome of the content analysis of the secondary data
8. Final findings are the outcome of the content analysis of the primary data

Research Questions

1. What are the various types of research?
2. What is the importance of social research?
3. What are the steps of social research?
4. What is the importance of data?
5. How many types of data are used in social research?
6. What are the various primary and secondary sources of data?
7. What is content analysis?
8. How is content analysis made in social research?
9. What problems are faced while making content analysis?
10. What are the suggestions for making the content analysis easier in social research?

Methodology

The study is literally theoretical based on the secondary data on the content analysis available through the various sources, such as, reference books, audios and videos on the subject made available through You Tube and other internet sites, reference books and journals etc. The steps of study that helped the researcher arrive at fruitful results include- Selection of the topic on the theme of content analysis, study of the related literature, categorization of the literature on the basis of its nature, hypothetical interpretation, application of personal views on content analysis, arrival at findings and drawing conclusion about the theme.

Type of Study

The study is mainly qualitative one based on the study of the related literature made available through the various available sources. Since the arithmetical mode was not adopted to produce the data, it cannot fall into the category of the quantitative study. Hence, purely a theoretical study which reflects the scholar's theoretical approach

Type of Data Used

The secondary data in the form of related literature on the subject forms the basis of the study. Nowhere in the study has been used the primary data.

Sources of Data

Text books prescribed for the undergraduate and post-graduate students of Sociology, Research journals having stuff on content analysis, research works and varied internet sites

Findings

1. Descriptive research, empirical research, exploratory research, theoretical research, applied research, comparative research are some of the popular types of research, and each of them has its own specific features
2. In order to understand the social events and social problems that occur around the world, social research is very important, as it is the social scientist who feels struck by the social problems and events
3. Social research develops the understanding of the social phenomenon
4. Social research helps the policy makers make policies in the interest of the society
5. Social research extends solutions to the varied social problems
6. Selection of the subject, study of the related literature, content analysis of the secondary data, setting the objectives for the research, setting the null hypothesis, selection of the study area where the research is to be carried out, determination of the type of sampling for the selection of the units of information, determination of the type of observation to be adopted for the study, determination of tools and techniques, collection of primary data, classification, analysis of data, presentation of the data in tabular form, interpretation of the collected data, generalization etc. are the various steps of social research
7. Without data no research is possible
8. On the basis of nature, data are qualitative and quantitative
9. On the basis of priority, data are primary and secondary
10. The primary sources of data are schedule, questionnaire, interview, observation
11. The secondary sources of data include books, magazines, articles, journals, gazettes, research works, internet sites
12. Content analysis is a wide term. In the context of research it stands for the analysis of the primary and the secondary data collected through the various sources
11. The content of the secondary data is analysed by categorizing the contents collected through the various sources

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12. The content of the primary data is analysed by using appropriate statistical tools
13. Unfamiliarity with the statistical tools, unskilledness of the researcher and lack of sharp mindedness are some of the problems in the path of content analysis
14. While making the content analysis of the secondary data, focus should be made on the studied topic, adopted tools and particularly on the findings
15. While making the content analysis of the primary data, coding should be made, and micro analysis should be made
16. Content analysis of the secondary data helps the researcher spot the research gap and formulate hypothesis
17. Content analysis of the primary data helps the researcher make micro study of the social problems

Conclusion

With the change in times and with the change in the approach of the researchers in the world, the term 'content analysis' has got a different meaning. It is no more confined to the analysis of the secondary data which the researchers find in several documents, books, journals, research papers, theses or internet sites. Its scope is widening day by day, as now it is applied to the analysis of the primary data which forms the backbone of research. In social sciences, the nature of most of the researches is qualitative-cum-quantitative. Both the primary and the secondary data form the basis of the social science researches. Hence, the contents of both the types of data require a serious and careful analysis.

Going beyond its previously set limits, the term content analysis is becoming more and more popular ensuring reliability to the data to be used in the study through the primary and the secondary method. Its significance in social research cannot be ignored as without this step it is difficult for the researcher to get the feedback of the selected problem, and then to develop a complete understanding of the subject to be studied, which will later make it difficult to explore the research gap, to formulate objectives and hypothesis. As far as without the content analysis of the primary data, it will not be possible for the researcher to make the micro study of the various aspects of the problem minutely.

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