**Content Analysis and the News - Useful Concepts**

Content Analysis is a highly successful technique to investigate the content of the media. It is relatively easy to do, as the media is ready made, as well as easy and cheap to access (and thus build up a sample). It allows researchers to measure or add up the frequency of a given message. Provided the method is agreed by a team of researchers beforehand, replication is possible, and reliability improved.

Content Analysis is a particularly useful technique when trying to assess news values by evaluating, in broadcast news (amongst other measurables):

* The running order of news stories
* The repetition/persistence of news stories in the news agenda
* The time allocated to news stories

And in print media:

* The volume of space taken up (measured in column centimetres or cm2 or similar)

This creates statistical data which is difficult to challenge when addressing issues of media bias.

**News Values** as listed by Steve Chibnall (Law and Order News)

According to Chibnall’s research the following factors shape the news agenda and create the news programmes we see:

* **Immediacy -** *news is about what just happened*
* **Dramatization –** *news must be dramatic (millions of people slowly starving is not dramatic)*
* **Personalization -** *for example, important political issues get trivialized, e.g., reducing the current General Election to “Theresa” vs “Jeremy”.*
* **Simplification-** *an editor of the Daily Express defined a bad news story as one that cannot be absorbed at first reading*
* **Titillation-** *for example, “Shock, Horror, Probe”. It fascinates and titillates and then reassures us by finally condemning the act*
* **Conventionalism-** *the journalist does not just report the news, but ‘translates’ it so that it can be understood by ‘normal people’*
* **Structured access-** *those in authority get more access to the media, hence news tends to be about what those in authority define as news*
* **Novelty-** *there must be an angle which another paper or programme has not got –*the idea of a “scoop”

**Try applying these to the news agenda yourself.**

**Contemporary Issues – Social Media**

Content Analysis of news on social media is both more difficult and but also easier.

The principal problem for contemporary research is the issue of access.

News sources have become much more varied and likely to be less easy to track by individual researchers (and it is even a problem deciding what may be regarded as “news” – hence recent panics around the concept of “Fake News”). Large corporations may also make direct access to their own data less accessible.

But, importantly, the use of online media creates its own data trail and easily creates important and useful statistical data as well as qualitative material. Frequency of searches for key terms on Google or hashtags tending on Twitter gives some indication of the measurable data created by internet sources and have proved the basis of research. Google will regularly share stories on the most frequent search terms accessed (although they do not share online browsing histories … imagine if they shared yours!).

**Key elements in analysing news media**

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| Coding Scheme | List if categories to look for. (Therefore when a researcher is coding a piece of media they simply use the pre-arranged categories to measure the frequency of the message) |
| Language Bias | This is a popular starting point. Does the media contain words or phrases that may contain a biased, one sided viewpoint – e.g. headlines (bias is clear, and somewhat necessary, in newspaper headlines to capture the public’s attention and persuade them to buy ) |
| Selectivity | news items, transmitted or published are created by a process of selection (editing)  Construction of the news involves decisions made by media personnel as to the relative importance and merits of each story  (At some points of the year – the silly season – when parliament recess for summer, some stories are given attention they wouldn’t merit at other times, except as light-hearted, short items at the end of a broadcast) |
| Scheduling | decision about what is the most important story is reflected in the order of the items – reflected through the headlines in broadcasts, newspaper headlines |
| Frequency | over a period of time should be possible for a researcher to see any patterns that exist, in the type of items given precedence over others |