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Ellen Hijmans

Review Essay

The Logic of Qualitative Media Content Analysis: A Typology

Abstract

Methods and techniques for qualitative content analysis approaching media content are scarcely elaborated. In this article the first results of an investigation of different operating procedures in the field of qualitative analysis of media content are presented. To describe the methods used in the field, the concepts of 'Framework' and 'Logic' from Krippendorff (1980) were used as sensitizing concepts. Inspired by Glaser and Strauss, a comparative analysis of research articles presents results in the reconstruction of five distinctive procedures and the schematic representation of five types of qualitative content analysis as the first step towards codification of current methods in qualitative content analysis.

Background

The past few decades have shown a growth of research, inspired by interpretative and hermeneutic research styles in the social sciences. In these studies methods of data collection consist of (participant) observation, interviewing and various forms of qualitative content analysis. A striking feature, from a methodological point of view, is that little attention is paid to methods and techniques in this kind of qualitative-interpretative content analysis. Although examples of qualitative content analysis in the past are not totally absent, e.g. in the writings of classical sociologists in the social sciences (Weber, 1904 (1969); Elias, 1938 (1982); Thomas & Znaniecki, 1916 (1958); Blumer, 1933; Lévi-Strauss, 1968), an elaboration of qualitative procedures has so far not been developed.

In view of this gap this study¹ aims to contribute to the reconstruction and codification of current methods in qualitative content analysis. However, I do not seek to describe methods commonly used in, for instance, literary or theological research. The data in my study mainly consist of articles that report research on media messages from a mass communication point of view.

The term content analysis is so closely linked to systematic-quantifying methods, that the label 'qualitative content analysis' is rarely used. Not

surprisingly, an electronic survey of the research literature using the keyword 'qualitative analysis' produced only a handful of matches over the last 15 years (Rust, 1980; Lorenzer, 1981; Mayring, 1983/1989; Wiedemann, 1984; Fields, 1988). An extensive electronic scan of research journals for the period 1980 to the middle of 1995, using a number of additional field-related keywords, produced 280 titles. Some of these titles turned out to be irrelevant, because they did not involve some kind of qualitative content analysis, or were only purely theoretical surveys. And, some of the titles reported were essays or extensive film reviews rather than studies based on empirical research. I also found that some studies combined qualitative and quantitative methods, where the qualitative part was merely mentioned and not elaborated, being the pilot for the 'real study'. The original selection also contained studies which did not focus on media messages.²

From the remaining file I selected 57 empirical research reports in which some attention is paid to the methods used, or which in some other way can be regarded as examples of some specific kind of qualitative content analysis. I also made sure to select textual as well as visual cases. For the analysis of these research reports I followed the well-known grounded theory approach (Strauss, 1987). One of the procedures in this kind of explorative and formulating research is the systematic comparison of cases, resulting in this study in the distinction of different types of qualitative content analysis. In these comparisons I use an analytical framework inspired by Krippendorff (1980). He defines content analysis as a principally interpretative method of an inferring nature, that is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their (social) context.

In his approach to content analysis - that is, the analysis of data as symbolic communications - Krippendorff distinguishes *framework* and *logic*. The framework of a content analysis involves clear statement of the main research question, the kind of data, the context relative to the data, and the making of inferences from data to certain aspects of their context or the target of the inferences. That is to say, that to accomplish these inferences the researcher needs to have an operational theory of the data-context relationships. Logic deals with the procedures involved in the selection and production of data, the processing of data, methods of inference and analysis, including the assessment of validity and reliability. I considered the concepts of Framework and Logic as sensitizing concepts, which are to be specified in the process of analysing the research cases in my sample. This means that the first step is comparing and analysing differences and similarities with regard to the above-mentioned aspects of Framework and Logic. This process of constant comparison has resulted in the provisional scheme presented below.

A tentative distinction of types

I found that the wording and labelling of this kind of research is conspicuously confusing. Some researchers speak of rhetorical analysis, whereas others claim to be structural or semiotic analysts. Discourse analysis seems a term which can contain almost any operating procedure. This is partly accounted for by the circumstance that the wording sometimes refers to the research objective (Framework) and sometimes to an aspect of the procedure (Logic). Besides, it sometimes happens that several approaches are combined in the same study, just as several statistical techniques are combined in quantifying research. In order to evade this prevailing confusion I will expressly use *my own labelling* in the following scheme, which contains a global characterization of the operating procedures (Logic). In the further course of the research I will seek to specify the distinctive types by asking researchers for reports of their inquiries and by interviewing them extensively on their operating procedures.

Rhetorical analysis

Rough description. Central to rhetorical analysis is the question how the message is presented visually or textually. This question is rather straightforwardly translated into structural characteristics of the text. It is therefore a broadly stylistic analysis: the organization as well as the presentation of a message and the choices the communicator has made are at the core of this type of analysis. It is a formal analysis which focuses on distinctive features such as composition, form, use of metaphors and structure of argumentation or reasoning.

Example. The supply of information in news and current affairs programs is a popular subject. Pitelä (1992) analyses news fragments from Finnish newspapers, Sorenson (1991) engages in rhetorical techniques employed in the news coverage of the famine in the Horn of Africa. Potter and Wetherell (1994) and Potter, Wetherell and Chitty (1991) question the rhetorical use of quantification in an English documentary on cancer research. Bennett and Edelman (1985) deal with the (supposed) effect of presentational practices of news accounts as 'stock political plots' on responses of the audience. Schwartz (1992) analyses handbooks on photojournalism. Kaplan (1992), as well as Durand (1987), detects visual metaphors in advertisements.

In *Quantification Rhetoric of Cancer on Television*, Potter, Wetherell and Chitty (1991) demonstrate an example of rhetorical content analysis. It is shown how numbers and non-numerical quantity formulations are used in a British documentary on the (putative) lack of success in charity-provided cancer research. The case being argued in the programme is that the scientific efficacy of charity-based cancer research in providing effective treatments, must be doubted. Using crucial extracts from the programme, the researchers illustrate the organization of arguments and counter-arguments. They

reconstruct the close relationship between numerical and non-numerical quantification. They show how these accounts are constructed to form parts of arguments and the version of reality produced. They demonstrate how a selective drawing from presentational practices is designed to obtain argumentative effects, for instance how words like 'small' or 'large' and 'common' or 'rare' are used to heighten contrasts between versions of reality and to provide as extreme a case as possible. Several forms of contrasting versions are described. The researchers also have other materials at their disposal to corroborate their case, such as interviews with the program-makers and experts filmed for the program.

Indicative features. Rhetorical analysis implies a reconstruction of the composition or organization of a directly observable and perceptible message by way of a detailed reading of fragments or larger units of text or visual matter. It involves unravelling formal external characteristics of the language and/or imagery used. Sometimes emphasis is laid on the construction and therefore syntactical properties of a text, sometimes the stress is put on pragmatic aspects of language use, and therefore on communicator choices, practices and strategies. Examples of pure rhetorical analysis were hardly found. However, I did come across research consisting partly of a rhetorical analysis and partly of narrative or interpretative analysis. Procedures in rhetorical analysis are primarily focused on qualities of the plain text. These refer to broader (social) contexts, sometimes mediated by a sender, for instance social institutions or the cultural climate.

Narrative analysis

Rough description. Narrative analysis also focuses on formal structure, but in this case from the perspective of narrative. The narrative distinguishes itself from other texts by a clearly marked beginning and ending. Narration itself involves the handling of characters and plot and of resulting patterns. In this type of analysis it is not so much the characteristics of the plain text as the characters themselves that are crucial as well as their acts, their difficulties, their choices and the general developments. On the basis of his analysis of Russian folktales, one of the major early theorists, Propp (1928), formulated an invariant basic structure to describe any folktale. The title of his work, *The Morphology of Folktales*, already states that it is a formal analysis. The idea of connecting elements of the narrative and their meaning structure with functions that allow the structure of the narrative to be described in a more general sense, for instance as a genre, is still being followed (Eco, 1966; Wright, 1975).³ I take narrative analysis as a method concerned with the description of the logical and chronological structure of the course of events and the development of a story.

Example. All kinds of media products and media contents, such as films, television series, documentaries and news accounts can be described from a narrative point of view. Newcomb (1981) analyses an entire evening (three hours) of prime time television, switching between three commercial networks. Deming (1985) examines the innovative character of the well-known police series *Hill Street Blues*, Mander (1987) engages in 60 historic news accounts of battles in World War I and II. Liebes and Livingstone (1994) examine the correspondence between the narrative structure and the structure of family ties, or kinship structure, in English and American soap operas. On reflection, some examples originally labelled as narrative analyses, turned out to be rather rhetorical according to the procedures used (e.g. Pietilä, 1992; Bennett & Edelman, 1985).

The research article *The Rhetoric of Objectivity in the Newspaper Coverage of a Murder Trial* (Condit & Selzer, 1985) may serve as an example. In their narrative analysis Condit and Selzer employ a distinctive procedure, based on the dramatic analysis by Burke (1969). This device enables them to identify structural elements of narratives in the courtroom proceedings. It turns out that the point of issue in the courtroom is not so much the disclosure of truth, as the social construction of competing versions of the events surrounding the crime. The credibility of these accounts, both from the prosecutor and the defense, is of extraordinary importance for the outcome of the trial. The researchers address the process of the construction of stories and structural elements affecting the credibility of competing stories. In addition to the reconstruction of the competing narratives of the crime committed, the researchers compare the transcript of the trial with the newspaper coverage of that trial. This coverage shows a prosecution bias as it proves to mirror exclusively the prosecutor's version. Consequently, the readers are surprised by the outcome of the trial (acquittal). The researchers put down the one-sided news coverage to the rhetoric of objectivity, which by its focus on facts plays an important part in the story of the prosecutor.

Indicative features. In narrative analysis texts are considered as stories. The message is taken to be a presented or edited version of a sequence of events, of which elements are described and characterised as to their structure. The procedure focuses on the reconstruction and description of the narrative structure on the basis of acts, choices, difficulties and of events happening to characters. Narrative structure devices as Burke's (1969) or Chatman's (1978) enable systematic description and favour the substantiation of the particular reading. Besides these strict forms of narrative analysis more or less impressionistic styles of analysing exist, focused on the nature of certain types of narrative messages. Narrative analysis is often used as an earlier stage for subsequent analyses (which will be made clear below).

Discourse analysis

Rough description. The word discourse analysis is used in many ways. According to the meaning of the term discourse/discours the written text, wording and patterns of reasoning are the main objects of discourse analysis. In comparison with the formerly mentioned types of analysis the semantics of language or sign use are of central importance here.⁴ The studies show a common interest in communicator intentions and conventions, which are reconstructed by means of a sometimes very detailed attention to textual properties of the message.

Example. Knight and Dean (1982) analyze and compare newspaper coverage of the same event in two newspapers, Jensen (1987) analyses news programs on U.S. network television and shows a particular ideological vision of the U.S. economic system, referred to as 'news ideology'. Wonsek (1992) focuses on racism in the media, notably in the portrayal of black basketball players on television, Harwood and Giles (1992) highlight the role of age markers in the humorous context of the television series *The Golden Girls*. Nwoye (1993) studies graffiti on the walls of university buildings in Benin (Nigeria) and Shaheen discusses the image of the Arab in American comic books. Hoedemaker-Pol (1994) studies the reception of the art of an Indonesian artist by art critics, Hackett and Zhao (1994) examine the portrayal of the peace movement in news editorials during the Gulf War and Wang (1995) reconstructs and compares the image of Post-Cold War Russia in the New York Times during two different historic events.

Racism and the Press (Van Dijk, 1991) serves as an example of this type of analysis. It consists of several parts in which news articles on ethnic themes, notably ethnic conflicts in the autumn of 1985, are analyzed. Van Dijk starts with an analysis of the semantic macrostructures, or the overall characteristics of meanings concerning ethnic minorities. This macrostructure consists of a conventional 'news scheme' or superstructure, as a hierarchical organization of news item categories. Ethnic minorities are depicted as problematic groups as Van Dijk illustrates by means of descriptive categories. Subsequently, editorials are analyzed to reconstruct their underlying ideological vision. Once more the focus is on composition and structure: definition of the situation, the nature of the explanation and the moral of the story. The ideological frame of reference concerning 'law and order' confirms the results from the semantic macrostructure analysis. Yet another analysis focuses on specific textual forms of presentation such as the quotations and the wording of the message. This part of the analysis could rightly be labelled a 'rhetorical analysis'. The use of understatement and overstatement, metaphor, etc. are labelled by Van Dijk as 'semantic strategies' that contribute to the negative representation of ethnic minorities. As a conclusion of the textual analysis he states that journalists are deliberately concerned with the ideological legitimation of the existing status

quo. In my view this kind of phrasing shows an explicit opinion regarding media effects as intentional manipulation of the audience.

Indicative features. The procedure in most discourse analyses consists of a layered combination of several techniques. Specific linguistic analyses (for instance, choice of words such as 'riots' instead of 'disorders', or the search for textual patterns) and rhetorical strategies are followed by thematic analyses. This is a general form of content analysis to determine the main topics in a text. In most cases, but not all, it is followed by a macrostructure analysis, in which the interrelationships between topics in a text are represented in diagram form. Because of the sometimes rather extensive data samples, discourse analysis is both generalizing and detailed at the same time. The detailed analysis is more or less rhetorical in character and is mostly applied to a smaller part of the sample. Discourse analysis is used to identify contradictions and ambiguities in the message. These are taken to be indications of the ideological character of media messages. Unfortunately, the critical stance of some researchers is less applicable to their own procedures, which are sometimes difficult to reconstruct.

Structuralist-semiotic analysis

Rough description. Roughly speaking, structuralist-semiotic analysis is especially concerned with the deeper meaning of the message. In this way the referential nature and the symbolic meaning of the message is explicitly taken to be the subject matter of the analysis. The production of meaning is grounded in conventions, codes and cultural agreement. Semiotic analysis assumes man to be a 'homo semioticus', a signifying species. According to this concept the communication process consists of signs organized in systems called codes. Codes are conventions or agreements that connect a sign with its meaning (Vos, 1991:50). There are all kinds of codes: cultural codes, ideological codes, representational codes, language codes and so on. Semiotic analysis is mainly descriptive. Sign systems, signification, representation and signifying practices are identified and subsequently interpreted, for instance as ideological complexes. In this way semiotic research seems to concentrate on the reconstruction of cultural meaning conventions.

Structuralism is aimed at the myth underlying the narrative or story of the message. Myths are considered to be deep structures that represent the essence of human nature and society. Thus attention is focused on the social functions of myth (Lévi-Strauss, 1968). Narrative analysis is often the initial phase of structural analysis, because of the related concerns with chronological and logical structure and morphology of the narrative. The main difference consists of the subsequent decoding of symbolic systems in terms of characters, positions and oppositions relative to each other.

Example. Research is preferably aimed at contemporary cultural phenomena such as advertising, television drama or documentaries, and at revealing their hidden meaning. As a consequence of the semiotic basis of this approach I found many instances of visual analysis, always in combination with textual characteristics. I also happened to find some examples of mere textual analysis. Kurzweil (1982), for instance, analyses Martin Luther King's famous 1963 speech, Fiol (1989) studies CEO's letters to shareholders and Bal (1994) and Van Wolde (1993) unravel fragments from the Bible. Just like Goldman (1992) and Goldman and Papson (1994), Williamson (1987) aims at decoding ideological complexes in advertisements, while Schrif (1994) concentrates on the portrayal of women in studio cards, i.e. greeting cards. Moving pictures are examined for instance by Giaccardi (1995). She compares TV commercials and advertising campaigns in England and Italy. McLaughlin (1991) studies the image of prostitutes in television serials and Parry-Giles (1994) analyses a documentary on the problem of Northern Ireland.

In the example *A Structure for Modern Myth: Television and the Transsexual*, Silverstone (1984) analyses a series of three documentaries on the process of transformation of a transsexual man into a woman. He tries to demonstrate that the realistic material in documentaries incorporates the quality to transform everyday material into the material of myths that articulate and resolve basic problems of our culture. As the first step in the reconstruction of myth, Silverstone undertakes a chronological and morphological description of the sequence of events in the three episodes. This description in Propp's terminology is added to the article as an appendix. The author highlights central problems such as the object of search of the hero, the villain, the potential helpers, the dispatchers, the magical devices and so on.

Silverstone states morphological analysis to be insufficient in clarifying the myth, the theme of which is not so much the treatment and the course of the treatment as the transformation from man into woman. For this reason a second step to unravel the logical structure of the programme is carried out. By pointing out the specific and the generality of this logical structure of the documentary, Silverstone seeks to demonstrate that myths manipulate basic social and cultural categories. On the basis of earlier work (Silverstone, 1981) four underlying dominant codes are distinguished and applied. There are still other organizational principles (for instance the sea), that bear a specific meaning associated with their place in the overall structure of the programme. Thus, the North sea means the past, while the South sea represents the future. Finally, two binary oppositions are identified. In addition to the central opposition, male/female, there is still another important contrast concerning the change of sex, i.e. the opposition: nature/culture. These two oppositions represent the boundaries of two basic problems in our culture, cast in a narrative and televised form. Silverstone illustrates how documentaries provide the audience with a frame to resolve the unusualness and the threat emanating from the problem of

transsexual experience and the career of a transsexual by making it concrete and giving it a name.

Indicative features. This type of content analysis is theoretically inspired and aims at the latent meanings of the media message. This analysis can have a layered character if the message is first analyzed into narrative elements and subsequently searched for deeper meanings. Although concepts like myth and code are frequently used, it remains unclear what they imply in terms of the procedure, that is, the research accounts are poorly detailed in a methodological respect. Just as with any other form of qualitative research the results of the analysis depend heavily on the qualities of the researcher as a competent member of culture. Inasmuch as this fact is not made explicit or controlled, there is a risk that too little methodological grounds are provided for underpinning the conclusions, which in a positive case does not yield more than benefit of the doubt. Although structuralist studies consciously employ ideas on the referential character of media messages, many of them do not go beyond illustration of theoretical concepts. Part of my problem, then, is that the theoretical departing point of structuralist-semiotic analysis is the same as the ending, which implies that no progress is made.

Interpretative analysis

Rough description. This form of qualitative content analysis is mainly of social scientific origin, which is demonstrated in its design and procedure. In comparison with the formerly discussed types, the description of the research process in practical terms is much more elaborated. Moreover, the fact that researchers draw upon their own experiences as a resource and thus are part of the research instrument, is applied more consciously. Thus, checks are undertaken and coding rules are made explicit. We mainly see exploratory research like *Gender Advertisements* by Goffman (1976), theory-development research, typifying or thematic descriptive research, or cumulative and comparative analysis. The idea of 'discovery' can be meant as exploration, but it can also be, more as a matter of principle, the formulation of new conceptual categories: specific for the empirical data and to be interpreted theoretically. The analysis is a concrete link between empirical material and theory rather than an illustration of already-known theoretical notions.

Example. Research subjects are in no way different from those of the other methods discussed here. Like Downing (1988), who investigates Russian coverage of the war in Afghanistan, or Liebes (1992), who compares accounts of the Intifadah (on Israeli TV) with accounts of the Gulf War (on U.S. TV). Television news is also the subject examined by Dahlgren (1980). Written texts are investigated by Weiss and Gramatins (1985) in the news coverage of the introduction of satellite TV, and Illouz (1991) explores the concept of romantic

love in women's magazines. White and White (1982) analyze the representation of Vietnamese boat refugees in the Australian press, Weber and Laux (1985) are concerned with the use of the term 'stress' in the media, and Alexander (1994) detects trends in the utilization of children in advertisements. Gephart (1986) analyzes legitimations of quantitative parametric strategies in methodological articles in social scientific magazines. Altheide (1992) examines the relation between news and media in general and extraordinary judicial sanctioning, such as public confession of guilt in the media. There are also specific versions of qualitative analyses such as the hermeneutic approach (Charlton & Neumann, 1982). Charlton and Neumann unravel the latent meaning in a children's movie. Another approach is the ethnographic method as applied, for instance, by Altheide (1977) and Gilmore (1986). The latter analyses Andalusian folksongs within the broader frame of research into the Mediterranean masculinity cult of machismo. The label ethnography does not always point to anthropological fieldwork; it also refers to qualitative analysis of (sub)cultural aspects of Western phenomena. Altheide (1985, 1987) for instance examines several aspects of the production of news; Griffin, Viswanath and Schwartz (1994) compare cultural stereotypes in advertisements in India and the U.S.; and finally Mellinger (1992) decodes racial stereotypes on historical postcards.

As an example, I discuss an investigation by Elisabeth Hirschman (1987). In *Movies as Myths: An Interpretation of Motion Picture Mythology*, she analyses the mythical character of seven of the twelve best-selling movies of all time: *Grease*, *Tootsie*, *Jaws*, *E.T.*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Starwars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Although the investigator is theoretically oriented towards structuralism and uses the combined understandings of Lévi-Strauss and Campbell on myths, and notions of Jung on the archetypical content of myth, the reported procedures make clear that these understandings are used as 'sensitizing concepts'. The sample is theoretical and the analysis is open and cumulative. That is, gradually more complex themes are developed which as tentative interpretations are finally linked to four functions of myth, as distinguished by Campbell. Finally, she arrives at the comprehensive interpretation of what is perhaps the central dilemma in American culture, reflected in these movies, namely the choice between spiritual and moral development or amassing material gain and wealth. The main difference with formerly discussed work on myth is that in this case the central issue is not the illustration or demonstration of the mythical character itself, but the systematic application of the ideas of Lévi-Strauss to make assessments of American culture.

Indicative features. Researchers employing interpretative content analysis ask descriptive research questions aiming at the discovery and formation of theory. Analysis procedures are cumulative and comparative. This does not mean that

researchers enter the field without any theoretical notions nor that the illustration of theoretical concepts could not be the research objective. Both may be the case, but it is not the only aspect of importance: data serve to discover new findings and therefore the procedure is such that in the end one knows more than at the beginning. The relation between data and concepts is fundamentally open; concepts serve to arrange data and to understand them in a substantially new way. Sampling is theoretically informed: researchers choose cases for strategic reasons because they represent the phenomena under study in a particular way. Cumulative analysis with open beginnings, sensitizing concepts that guide observation and analysis, testing of theoretical insights on empirical data, adjustment of concepts and working with temporary hypotheses are signals of interpretative content analysis. It also seems to be that interpretative procedure can be recognized by the account of the methodological procedure, at least partly made explicit, although that does not apply to all the examples found. The rare examples of ethnographic analysis I came across make clear that this methodological procedure is so very close to 'normal' interpretative research that I did not find any ground to speak of a distinct approach in media content analysis.

Conclusion

The main differences in logic of the methods of approaching media content dealt with in this article can be represented as follows:

Schematic representation of five types of qualitative content analysis

Label	Procedure
1. rhetorical analysis	Properties of the text are crucial. Reconstruction of manifest characteristics of text/image: construction, form, metaphor, argumentation structure, choices. Not the 'what', but the 'how' of the message is presented. Detailed reading of fragments. The researcher as a competent rhetorician.
2. narrative analysis	Description of (formal) narrative structure: attention focuses on characters, their difficulties, choices, conflicts, complications and developments. Not the text as such, but characters as carriers of the story. Reconstruction of the composition of the narrative. The researcher as a competent reader of narratives.
3. discourse analysis	Engages in characteristics of manifest language and word use, description of topics in media texts. Through consistency and connection of words to theme analysis of content and the establishment of central terms. Aims at typifying media represen-

tations (communicator motives, ideology). The researcher as a competent language user.

4. **structuralist-semiotic analysis** Focus is on meanings. Aims at deep structures, latent meanings and the signifying process through signs, codes and binary oppositions. Interpretations are theoretically informed. Assertions on central themes in culture and society. Rhetorical or narrative analysis can be preliminary. The researcher as a competent member of culture.
5. **interpretative analysis** Typification of content is central. Aims at discovery and testing in developing theory. Theoretical sampling, analytical categories, cumulative, comparative analysis. Formulation of types or conceptual categories. Sometimes (ethnographically) aimed at the reconstruction of group perspectives, characteristics of (sub)culture. The researcher as a competent observer.

My main finding is that the terms employed in research accounts hardly distinguish the concrete methods of research. If differences in theoretical perspective and conceptual framework as well as differences in labelling of the related categories of analysis are left aside, the logic-in-use may, if reconstructible at all, be classified as one of the five main types defined above.

Although these main forms can be formulated as distinctive procedures, this does not mean that they are incompatible. On the contrary, in more than one study two or more of these types of analysis are applied, for instance a narrative or rhetoric analysis as an initial step for structural analysis. Most forms appear to be based on specific skills of the researcher, which made me decide to make these competences part of the described Logic. In future research I will elaborate the role of these skills in every distinguished procedure. For the moment, however, I consider this scheme to be the first step in the direction of codification of forms of qualitative content analysis.

Notes

1. The research for this study was supported by the Foundation for Economic, Socio-Cultural and Environmental Sciences (ESR) founded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).
2. Initially I used the restriction that the study in question should focus on media messages, in a broad sense. I not only accepted studies of the content of electronic and print media, but also some studies on historical texts like the Bible were analyzed as to their methodological merits. I did not consider particular approaches from the text or literary sciences such as narratology or social scientific approaches such as conversation analysis or ethnomethodology.
3. A clearly distinctive form of narrative analysis is literary narratology. This approach goes beyond my scope because of the accent on the narrativity of the text itself as the main problem. That means that the researcher describes the text as adequately as possible, thereby proposing a possible interpretation of the text (Bal, 1990:17). The presentation of a possible reading does not yet mean content analysis, in the sense of inferring from data to a context. Moreover literary narratology generally lacks a mass communication problematic.
4. Notably formal text analysis cannot be considered as content analysis because they lack a reconstruction of latent meaning structures or inferences about the social context of the data based on the inferential nature of the media message. Much research labelled as discourse analysis does not explicitly focus on media messages. Conversational analyses, negotiating techniques, dialogue, intonation, morphology, protocol analyses, and cognitive-psychological analyses of the processing of text and information concern themselves with detailed analyses of specific structural characteristics of texts rather than with media messages.

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Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.) (1994)
Book Reviews
Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage,
 ISBN 0-8039-4679-1, 643 pp.

In 1993 Sage announced plans for publication of a handbook of qualitative research to be produced with contributions from outstanding scholars in the field. Such a project certainly makes one curious, given that a handbook generally has the pretension to provide an overview and summarize an entire field. The resulting book has been edited by Norman Denzin, once a symbolic interactionist with a methodological approach in the tradition of Herbert Blumer; and Yvonna Lincoln from Guba's school of naturalistic research in education.

What once was a clear and orderly field, qualitative research, situated in the context of the dominant experimental and survey research in the social sciences, has developed during the past decade into a wide range of distinct approaches located in the peripheral region of both the social sciences and humanities. On the one hand, distinctive research designs seem to have materialized such as the ethnography of (sub)cultures, the qualitative survey though participant observation and unstructured interviewing, and the case study in organizational contexts with accompanying procedures and tools. In addition, traditional procedures have

survived and new forms have presented themselves in the areas of text analysis, historical research and methodological- philosophical essays on the interpretation or interaction between researcher and object, usually under the banner of cultural studies and/or postmodernism. The field has become disordered, especially for those who do not subscribe to a single well-defined position, but who, like Denzin, have moved to other forms of research and fields of investigation where the keenness of doing has not yet produced replicable or traceable procedures. A handbook might be of assistance for those persons who feel they already have the required overall view to adequately examine the work of a heterogeneous group of scholars, as well as for persons who lack such an overview but wish assistance in defining domains of distinctive methods and in identifying paths for further exploration. To be able to produce such a handbook one should be a 'jack of all trades' or have a network that counts for such. But in case of a handbook or an area as much in flux as qualitative research, this objective may be difficult – if not impossible – to realize. Not surprisingly, then, the editors describe in their foreword to the book some limitations of their effort to produce a genuine handbook: a biased network (with emphasis on sociology and education, and limited inclusion of anthropologists), few examples of applied research, and no discussions between the contributors to the volume.