

MDST 7559

Content Analysis

Class meetings

Monday and Wednesday
3:30 PM – 4:45 PM
Monroe Hall 111

Instructor

Professor Kevin Driscoll
ked5d@virginia.edu
Wilson Hall 210
Office hours: <https://calendly.com/driscollofficehours>

Course description

Content analysis is a fundamental method in media studies, combining qualitative interpretation with quantitative data analysis. Content analysis enables individuals and teams to systematically transform a large collection of media artifacts into a set of standardized observations suitable for exploratory data mining, statistical analysis, and critical inquiry. Across academic and industry settings, content analysis is used to investigate a wide range of media modalities and research questions, including gender representation in film and television, agenda setting in news journalism, racial bias in algorithmic platforms, misinformation in health communication, and political polarization on social media. This course combines practical training in state-of-the-art tools with a theoretical investigation of the conceptual underpinnings of the method.

Motivating questions

- How do we identify themes or trends within large collections of media texts?
- What does it mean to annotate or “code” a media artifact?
- How does content analysis fit alongside other methods?
- What is gained or lost through the process of annotation and quantification?
- How do we ensure consistency among teams of researchers?

Course goals

- Identify topics and research questions for which content analysis is an appropriate method
- Compare various content analysis strategies and techniques
- Design and organize a study involving more than one researcher
- Apply statistical techniques for sampling, reliability testing, and reporting results
- Adopt software tools for annotation, data management, and statistical analysis
- Communicate the procedures, results, and limitations of a content analysis study

Materials

Books

Neuendorf, Kimberly A. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2017.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781071802878>

Wickham, Hadley, and Garrett Golemund. *R for Data Science*. O'Reilly Media, 2017. Online edition.
<https://r4ds.had.co.nz/>.

(Optional) Riffe, Daniel, Stephen Lacy, Brendan R. Watson, and Frederick Fico. *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*. 4th ed. New York: Routledge, 2019.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429464287>.

Software

R, latest version, <https://cran.rstudio.com/>

RStudio Desktop, Open Source Edition, latest version 1.4, <https://www.rstudio.com/>

Tidyverse, latest version, <https://www.tidyverse.org/>

Assignments

Write a research brief

On Wednesdays, you will take turns giving a brief presentation on a published paper that makes use of content analysis. On your assigned days, you will circulate a summary of the paper and lead a discussion of its organization and research design. You should seek out papers that fits your personal research interests (with prior approval.) You will complete two reports during the semester. **Due dates TBD.**

Exploratory study

The purpose of an exploratory study is to test the feasibility of a research design. You will write a research question, identify a potential corpus, define a unit of analysis and variables of interest, and prepare a coding procedure. Next, you will code a preliminary sample from your corpus and write a report reflecting on what worked and what changes are needed. We will workshop the design and implementation of your projects in class. **Reports due Monday, March 21 before the start of class.**

Research report

After tweaking your research design based on the exploratory study, you will carry out the complete content analysis and draft a paper reporting the results. This paper will focus principally on the content analysis procedures and findings. **First draft due Monday, April 18 before the start of class.**

Conference presentation

Near the end of course, you will give a formal presentation of your study. Following the format of a typical academic conference, you will make slides and field questions from the audience. **Our mini-conference will be held in class on April 25 and 27.**

Assessment

This course requires you to demonstrate mastery of the core concepts and techniques. To receive credit for an assignment, you must earn a **Satisfactory** grade (S, E, or M).

Briefs	Projects, papers, and presentations
Satisfactory (S) Complete and on-time	Exemplary (E) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear understanding - Only trivial errors
	Meets expectations (M) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding is evident - Satisfies all requirements
Unsatisfactory (U) Incomplete or late	Revisions needed (R) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partial understanding evident but gaps remain - Some requirements unsatisfied
	Not assessable (N) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fundamental misunderstanding - Unfinished or incomplete

Grading

To determine your final grade, refer to the table below for the requirements. Earning a higher rating than required on your paper or project will raise your course grade by a partial letter (e.g., B to B+).

	B	A-	A
Brief(s)	1 at a Satisfactory level	2 at a Satisfactory level	2 at a Satisfactory level
Exploratory report	First draft at R or higher	First draft at M or higher	Revision at M or higher
Research paper	First draft at R or higher	First draft at M or higher	Revision at M or higher
Presentation	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Revisions

You may choose to revise any of the written assignments for this course. Any assignment may be revised within two weeks of receiving feedback. Projects that Meet Expectations (M) may be revised toward an Exemplary (E) rating. Revisions will be marked using the same criteria as the original assignment. An improvement to the grade is not guaranteed. **All revisions are due before May 10 at 5:00 PM ET.**

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance and active participation are recommended. You are responsible for managing your time and attendance. Excessive absences may affect your final grade, at the instructor's discretion. If you anticipate missing more than two class meetings, contact your instructor as soon as possible to determine if an alternate arrangement is possible.

Calendar

Each week's readings and activities should be completed before the start of class on Monday.

Week 0

January 19

Introduction to the course

Week 1

January 24 & 26

What is content analysis? What types of questions can we answer with content analysis?

Neuendorf, "Chapter 1. Defining Content Analysis."

Neuendorf, "Chapter 2. Integrative Approach to Content Analysis."

Neuendorf, "Chapter 7. Content Analysis in the Interactive Media Age."

Neuendorf, "Chapter 9. Contexts."

Week 2

January 31 & February 2

What is a "unit of analysis"? Why do we sample? What if we don't know the population?

Neuendorf, "Chapter 3. Message Units and Sampling."

Week 3

February 7 & 9

What are common types of variables? What is the role of a coder?

Neuendorf, "Chapter 4. Variables and Predictions."

Wickham and Grolemund, "Explore," Chapters 1-8 of *R for Data Science*.

Week 4

February 14 & 16

Are you measuring what you think you're measuring?

Neuendorf, "Chapter 5. Measurement and Validity."

Week 5

February 21 & 23

How do we manage the data generated by coders? What does it mean to "clean" or "anonymize" data?

Wickham and Grolemund, "Wrangle," Chapters 9-16 of *R for Data Science*.

Week 6

February 28 & March 2

How do you know if two coders are interpreting texts in the same way?

Neuendorf, "Chapter 6. Reliability," *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, 2nd ed, 2017.

Wickham and Grolemund, "Program," Chapters 17-21 of *R for Data Science*.

Spring break	March 7 & 9
No class meetings.	
Week 7	March 14 & 16
<i>Workshop exploratory study</i>	
Week 8	March 21 & 23
<i>What arguments can you make with these data? How might you test a hypothesis?</i>	
Neuendorf, "Chapter 8. Results and Reporting."	
Wickham and Grolemund, "Model," Chapters 26-30 of <i>R for Data Science</i> .	
Exploratory study reports due before the start of class on Monday.	
Week 9	March 28 & March 30
<i>Which types of charts and tables are useful for reporting the results of content analysis?</i>	
Wickham and Grolemund, "Communicate," Chapters 26-30 of <i>R for Data Science</i> .	
Week 10	April 4 & 6
<i>Reserved for special topics and one-on-one consultations</i>	
Week 11	April 11 & 13
<i>Workshop research reports</i>	
Week 12	April 18 & 20
<i>Workshop research presentations</i>	
Research report drafts due before the start of class on Monday.	
Week 13	April 25 & 27
<i>Conference presentations during class</i>	
Week 14	May 2
<i>One-on-one consultations and revisions workshop</i>	
Deadline	May 10
Final drafts of research reports due before 5:00 PM ET on Tuesday, May 10.	