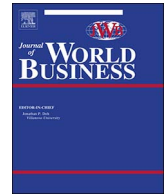




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Perspective article

A systematic approach to conducting review studies: An assessment of content analysis in 25 years of IB research

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ABSTRACT

Content analysis has become a popular method for qualitative and quantitative analyses in management and international business (IB) research. It is increasingly used in literature reviews to assess extant knowledge and understand intellectual structures. However, it is often poorly understood and incorrectly applied. In this article, we identify benchmark criteria and develop coding schemes that IB scholars can use in review studies. We also demonstrate the application of content analysis through a review of content analysis-based articles, published in the top eight IB journals from 1991 to 2015.

1. Introduction

Content analysis, as a measurement method, has gained popularity in management research (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007; Short & Palmer, 2008). Scholars use content analysis to identify and summarize literature trends and measure latent constructs in quantitative research when reliable, valid data are difficult to obtain from traditional sources (Duriau et al., 2007; Short & Palmer, 2008). Content analysis has many methodological advantages over other research methods: It is unobtrusive and relatively free of both researchers' demand biases and informants' recall biases; it is suitable for both inductive and deductive research; it can be used to extract manifest¹ as well as latent content²; and, given recent advances in computer-aided techniques, it can cope with large volumes of unstructured data (Duriau et al., 2007; Krippendorff, 2004; Short & Palmer, 2008).

Despite its merits, content analysis is often poorly understood and incorrectly applied, in literature reviews that take stock of extant knowledge. Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002), in their review of content analysis-based articles indexed in *Communication Abstracts* between 1994 and 1998, find that of 200 articles, only 69% report reliability statistics. Management research shows a similar trend: Duriau et al. (2007) find that only 62.2% of management articles explicitly report inter-coder reliability. Our preliminary investigation of content analysis-based articles in the field of international business (IB)

reveals a similar trend. Accordingly, we proceed to demonstrate the proper application of content analysis for conducting literature reviews, with a particular focus on the IB field.

We first discuss various methodological aspects of content analysis with regard to its application to literature reviews, including the selection of source databases, sampling of journal articles, development of coding schemes, coding, and testing for reliability and validity. Next, we conduct our own content analysis of content analysis-based articles in the eight leading IB journals over the 25-year period from 1991 to 2015. Our analysis has two objectives: to demonstrate the application of content analysis in conducting systematic and quality literature reviews and to critically identify trends and assess methodological rigor in the use of content analysis in IB literature. Although we include all IB articles that rely on content analysis, our focus is on the specific application of this method in literature reviews. We critically assess content analysis techniques applied in extant IB literature reviews and suggest steps that researchers should follow to ensure methodological rigor. We also present coding schemes that researchers can use to conduct reviews using content analysis and suggest potential avenues for future reviews.

2. What is content analysis?

Content analysis as a methodological tool first appeared in literature in the early 1940s (Franzosi, 2004; Krippendorff, 2004). Early content

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E-mail addresses: ajai@business.rutgers.edu (A. Gaur), f14mukeshk@iimidr.ac.in (M. Kumar).¹ Manifest content: The focus of analysis is on easily observable meanings in a body of textual data, such as number of appearances of a word or group of words, length of commercials in television programs, or number of times a handgun is fired.² Latent content: The focus of analysis is on the meaning of the underlying texts, such as political messages in a comedy show or quality of newspaper reporting. Latent content requires subjective interpretations by coders.<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2017.11.003>

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analyses focused on the identification of manifest content (Berelson, 1952). The technique was later expanded to include the domain of qualitative methods, focusing on both manifest and latent content (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Franzosi, 2004; Krippendorf, 2004). Whereas some scholars criticize content analysis for its over-reliance on a simplistic quantification of text into word counts, proponents of the method insist on the scientific utility of such quantification (Krippendorf, 2004).

To conduct content analyses, researchers first convert data into text (if it is in other forms, such as video or audio clips). Typically, textual data are coded into different categories at various levels, such as word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, or theme. The coding categories, which represent different characteristics of interest according to the research objective, are known collectively as the coding scheme or rules. The coding scheme applies to the entire body of the text to extract uniform and standard information. This information can be used on its own to draw inferences or combined with other data to conduct further statistical analyses. In quantitative content analysis, scholars often take the deductive route, using theory to develop coding schemes (Neuendorf, 2002); in qualitative content analysis, they develop coding schemes inductively through an analysis of the collected data (Drisko & Maschi, 2016).

Many scholars position content analysis at the intersection of qualitative and quantitative traditions, recognizing its value for bringing out replicable and valid inferences from a body of text (Duriau et al., 2007; Krippendorf, 2004; Li & Cavusgil, 1995; Weber, 1990). In most cases, content analysis involves coding target textual data that is central to the qualitative data analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016) and then subsequent summarization and analysis of the coded text. The IB articles that we review in this paper (Section 3) strongly reflect this trend of applying content analysis to both quantitative and qualitative research. Its use to review extant literature requires coding of manifest content and/or latent content that focuses on latent-content patterns³ (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Given this nature of content in review studies, it is possible to develop coding rules⁴ that minimize the subjectivity of coders' interpretations (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Moreover, quantification in terms of frequency counts and percentages can be used to summarize findings in tables and graphs. Generally, analyses of coded data may rely on qualitative tools, such as rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis or quantitative tools, such as multidimensional scaling and regression.

With regard to data coding, Short and Palmer (2008) classify content analysis into three approaches: human-scored systems, individual word-count systems, and computerized systems that use artificial intelligence. The human-scored systems involve manual coding by trained coders. In this approach, the researchers choose the coding units for classification (e.g., word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, full text), develops the coding scheme (deductive or inductive, based on the research objective), and prepares a coding manual with descriptions of each category. This manual is used to train coders, whose common understanding of the rules results in a high level of inter-coder reliability. The individual word-count approach requires researchers to develop categories by pooling semantically equivalent words to capture a particular theme of interest in the body of the target text. The researchers use the frequency count of pooled words to determine the relative importance of each category in the given text. The

³ Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999) further classify latent content into a pattern form and a projective form. In the former, the focus is on patterns in the content itself, considered to be objective in nature, such that coders can recognize the patterns without applying much personal judgement.

⁴ A coding category corresponds to a characteristic of interest that an analyst is seeking in a body of textual data. The set of all coding categories to be applied to a body of textual data is a coding scheme. Coding rules are more comprehensive, in that they contain definitions of coding categories with guidelines for coders to extract uniform and standardized information objectively from a body of textual data without or with only a minimum need for coders to apply subjective interpretations (Franzosi, 2004).

computerized systems use artificial intelligence to automate word counts according to built-in or researcher-developed dictionaries. Such systems include algorithms to resolve words with more than a single meaning and identify different words that have the same meaning.

More advanced computer-aided techniques, such as topic modeling, do not require researchers to specify coding categories, thereby preventing researcher bias. These techniques use complex but stable algorithms to help identify latent themes. They increase the speed and reliability of content analysis (because the coding process is automated) and eliminate the need for manual coding (which is a major threat to reliability) (Krippendorf, 2004; Weber, 1990). A wide range of software is available to conduct computer-aided text analysis (CATA), including NVivo, Altal.ti, QDA Miner, WordStat, Diction, and the “tm” and “quanteda” packages of R. Many of these popular CATA tools have the ability to input multiple types of data, such as documents (e.g., Microsoft Word, portable document format [PDF]), audio, video, websites, and social networking sites. However, despite the many benefits of CATA tools, scholars do not use them often, largely because of a lack of awareness and technical expertise.

Two other approaches to literature reviews also are notable: the Delphi method and meta-analysis. The Delphi method relies on the opinions of a panel of field-related experts. It is suitable for review studies that involve ill-defined problems (Liang & Parkhe, 1997). It can be subject to experts' personal biases, and the selection of expert reviewers can be influenced by both the availability of the experts and the subjectivity of the researcher. Meta-analysis statistically assesses empirical studies in very specific domains. It is suitable for well-established fields in which there is a high degree of agreement on the variable measures and statistical techniques (Liang & Parkhe, 1997). Although meta-analysis is useful for establishing a general consensus about the effect of a given set of explanatory variables on a given set of dependent variables, it is less suitable for conducting a general survey of a field. Accordingly, content analysis provides a broader scope of application and more flexibility than meta-analysis or the Delphi method for studies that aim to survey existing work in a given field.

3. Conducting literature reviews using content analysis

There are four stages of content analysis: data collection, coding, analysis, and interpretation of coded content (Duriau et al., 2007; Holsti, 1969; Weber, 1990). We begin by describing the first two steps, which are both critical for achieving validity and reliability in content analysis. We then use an example to demonstrate all four steps.

3.1. Data collection

In the data collection phase, researchers select their data sources and identify their sampling criteria. In human-intensive content analysis, it may be more efficient to sample a limited number of representative documents (Franzosi, 2004). To select valid samples, it is essential for researchers to know the relationships among source databases, sample characteristics, and research questions; proper selection of data sources and samples helps ensure the reliability and validity of findings.

However, in the context of literature reviews, sample size may not be relevant. In literature reviews, researchers know the population of the texts, making it possible for them to conduct more targeted sampling. In such cases, sample choices are guided by the relevance of the samples for the purposes of the review studies (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Krippendorf, 2004). That is, selected samples may represent the review's study objectives rather than the entire population of the sample (Krippendorf, 2004). The researchers' main aim is to identify data sources and samples based on the objective criteria for given research questions. These criteria may include, for example, minimum journal impact factor scores or articles with certain minimum citation counts. By exhausting all selection/exclusion criteria derived from the study

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