

## Content Analysis Method in the Study of Economic Federalism in Development Programs in Iran

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### ABSTRACT

Methodological literature provides numerous definitions of content analysis and different divisions in the separation of its different branches. The aspect of interest in this article is to apply this method in different conditions, and especially the requirements that challenge its application. The content analysis based on its theoretical support has methodological consequences that associate its application in different populations with methodological adjustments and combinations. This article reviews the literature and theories on the content analysis method and enumerates its types. We have compared these two methods of content analysis and the grounded theory because of their similarities and then we have discussed the results of applying these combinations and adjustments while studying development programs in Iran.

### KEYWORDS

Content analysis, Development programs, Iran.

### Introduction

Usually, the research method is supposedly a tested tool to achieve the research goals. Content analysis also as a tool can be used according to the specific conditions of each research. It is used to analyze existing data. For example, texts, including documents, interviews, newspapers, films, and photographs, can provide materials for applying the content analysis method. Content analysis encompasses various branches and inaccuracy in selecting these branches can lead to unrealistic results. Sometimes shifting the means as the research methods and objectives as the problems under study can also lead to a deviation in the research process. We make assumptions by proposing each problem; they are among the consequences of proposing and stating each problem. A social issue whether as a problem for a researcher or as a normal matter depends on several factors. These factors dominate the researcher's mental space because of the researcher's mental space or the dominance of the theoretical perspective. They can result from a lived experience and a collection of cultural and historical elements that dominate the researcher's mind. This issue can be more prominent In Iran. Many concepts have been raised in the last century in Iran. This is because of the changes and developments that have occurred in Iranian society during this century. Many concepts in sociological literature also do not have a historical and theoretical background in Iranian society. These requirements make the formulation of the problem and, consequently, the choice of method face adjustments and combinations. As an example, this article raises a problem whose theoretical support has been written in societies other than Iranian society. Therefore, we will discuss the best solution for choosing a method according to the research problem.

### Content Analysis

The term hermeneutics is derived from a Greek word that means expressing a written or spoken statement in a language understandable to the audience. As researchers have said on the historical background of this method: The messenger of Hermes, the god of commerce and eloquence, in ancient Greek myths interpreted God's messages to make them understandable to the general public. Since religious sacred texts such as the Torah were not easily understandable, an expert or scholar had to interpret these texts to make them understandable. This expert or scholar tried to extract the main religious ideas from the sacred texts and explain them to the public. (Bass and Tarnai 1999)

As the aforementioned historical background for this type of content analysis shows, this method has an older historical background than other research methods. Moreover, content analysis was first proposed in the humanities. Over time, the idea of the art of scientific description in content analysis was proposed by Schleiermacher. The hermeneutic process of content analysis in its original form attempted to explain texts systematically. (Rahim Soltani 2012)

The first empirical content analyses that were mostly based on quantitative processes were carried out among journalists in the late 1920s. This occurred especially during World War II when public attention was attracted to newspapers, announcements, and advertisements. It gained particular popularity among researchers. Empirical content analysis as a quantitative approach is a frequency analysis method. That is, it determines the frequency of the units of analysis and interprets the results based on the difference in the frequencies of the units of analysis. This method determines the value, importance, and intensity of the variables from the beginning. It assumes that any concept that has a higher frequency of repetition is more important in the text. (Rahim Soltani 2012)

Many researchers have criticized this approach a lot. Some believe that a purely quantitative approach to content cannot reveal the concepts hidden between the lines. For example, this approach cannot measure the relationships between sentences and concepts and the importance of the occurrence of two concepts simultaneously. Therefore, the results of this method are not reliable in validity and reliability. (Krakothar 1952)

As we mentioned earlier, traditional methods of content analysis were not without criticism. Hermeneutic content analysis is not reliable in validity and reliability because of the direct involvement of the researcher's attitudes in the results. (Bass and Tarnai 1999)

The quantitative content analysis method also tried to measure only the verbal aspect of the texts. This method was also not without criticism because it could not answer many questions by counting units alone. Therefore, its validity and reliability were also doubtful. So researchers proposed a third method to cover the shortcomings of the previous two ones. Advocates of the third method believe that the results of quantitative research should ultimately be qualitative, otherwise, the results will be an incomprehensible display of numbers, so a qualitative interpretation should be presented along with quantitative data to make the results concrete and understandable. (Rahim Soltani 2012)

### **Types of Content Analysis**

Content analysis methods, following these criticisms, take on various branches, which we will list.

#### **Descriptive Content Analysis**

This type of analysis is a post-event analysis method, that is, a quantitative description of the clear content of a text. It is especially used in the analysis of authors and their styles. (Etslander et al., 2012) Descriptive content analysis must first determine which of the dimensions of the text can be logical units of study. Some kinds of descriptive content analysis include analysis of repetition, correlation, change trend, and intensity.

#### **Repetition Analysis**

The researcher calculates in repetition analysis the number of words and terms, the time allocated to them in the text of speeches, or the number of stories allocated to them in individuals' writings in addition to determining their type. Here, the researcher may even need to determine the number of minutes that radio and television stations have allocated to the research topic. (Larijani 2008)

#### **Correlation Analysis**

The researcher examines in communication analysis the correlation and connection of specific words and terms with other words and sentences, both in quality and frequency. (Larijani 2008)

#### **Change Trend Analysis**

The researcher's goal in this type of analysis is to understand changes in policies by comparing recently used words and terms. (Manshadi 2001) This type of analysis is mostly used in ministries of foreign affairs and other political organizations that deal with foreign relations. Announcements, reports of official publications, etc. are analyzed daily in these organs to find out the changes in the policies of governments and their relations with each other and the international political situation. (Larijani 2008)

#### **Intensity analysis**

The researcher who carries out intensity analysis is interested in discovering the degree and amount of friendship or hostility between two or more countries, groups, or individuals. There are various methods for measuring the intensity, but the most common one is the Kyusert method. The researcher in the Kyusert method also takes help from one or more neutral judges besides defining the topic and specifying the time and sources of the speeches and writings. The researcher should write each sentence that indicates friendship or hostility between the two groups on separate cards and separately ask the judges to give each sentence a value from one to nine. Since these values are conventional, it is necessary to measure the level of agreement between the judges. (Larijani 2008)

### **Inferential content analysis**

Inferential content analysis assumes that certain features of a text are related to certain features of the theme or social situation. This type of analysis does not only describe the content of the text. Rather, its goal is to conclude the content of a text about aspects of social reality. For example, the impact and reflection of the slogans during the years 1979 to 1988 in the content of circulars issued by government executive agencies. (Khaki 2000)

### **Communicative content analysis**

Communicative content analysis examines the entire path of real communication. The subject of analysis here is not limited to a specific text unit. Rather, it also includes the process aspects of communication and the emergence and use of verbal and non-verbal signs. (Khaki 2000) Indeed, this type of content analysis intends to reconstruct a specific reality through the stored and recorded information of a completed social process. For example, examining the content of written messages between the deputies and general managers of the Ministry of Science. (Khaki 2000)

Etslander considers communication content analysis as the most complete and simultaneously the most controversial method of content analysis and sees its goal to be to achieve conclusions about the sender's intention, the impact on the receiver, and the state of communication based on the content of a communication. (Zeighami, Bagheri Nesami, Haqdoost Oskoui, Yadaver Nikraves, 2008)

Raymond Kivi and Ludwan Kampenhoud (2006) list the types of content analysis methods as follows.

### **Thematic analysis**

Thematic analyses are methods in which the researcher examines and analyzes some of the constitutive elements of the message. Some types of analysis include group analysis and evaluative analysis.

### **Group analysis**

The oldest and most common method of content analysis is to calculate and compare the frequencies of themes in the message. According to this analysis, the more frequently a theme is, the more important it is for the speaker. This type of analysis has quantitative insight.

### **Evaluative analysis**

It analyzes the judgments that the speaker expresses in the middle of his speech. Here, the researcher calculates judgments and the direction and intensity of words.

### **Formal analyses**

Formal analysis focuses on the form and connections of speech components. We can distinguish the following types among these methods:

### **Rhetorical analysis**

It pays attention to the form of verbal communication. These analyses are based on the principle that the characteristics of verbal communication, i.e. words, sentence length, and word impact provide information about the speaker's mental state and ideological tendencies.

### **Propositional analysis**

This method considers speech as a dynamic process. So the researcher's attention is focused on data such as the general structure of speech, order, sequences, repetitions, rhythmic breaks, etc.

### **Structural analyses**

Structural analysis pays more attention to the arrangement of the elements of the message. Here, an attempt is made to reveal the hidden existence of the message. Types of this analysis:

### **Correlational analysis**

This method examines the correlations of themes in sequences of verbal communication. The assumption is that correlations of themes provide researchers with information about the speaker's hidden mental structures.

### **Structural analysis**

The goal of structural analyses is to reveal the principles that organize speech elements as independent of the content of these elements. This method tries to either reveal the hidden order in the function of speech or to structure speech and make it understandable through an abstract model that has been constructed by researchers. (Rahim Soltani 2012)

### **Content analysis and grounded theory**

Glazer and Strauss introduced the philosophical background and foundations of Grounded theory (1967) as the discovery of theory from data that is systematically obtained and analyzed in social research. They introduced a research method to arrive at a theory that is appropriate to its assumed applications, which is in contrast to a theory that is produced by logical deduction from prior assumptions. As Strauss and Corbin (1994) argue, it is a general methodology of thinking about and conceptualizing data. The Grounded Theory Institute, run by Glazer, one of the founders of grounded theory, defines it as follows: Grounded theory is an inductive methodology. Although many call grounded theory a qualitative method, it is rather a general method. This theory is a systematic generation from systematic research. It is a set of rigorous research procedures that lead to the emergence of conceptual categories. Grounded theory can be used with qualitative or quantitative data. (Grounded Theory Institute 2013) As Crotty (2003) proposes, methodology is the strategy, plan of action, process, or design, and method is the techniques used to collect and analyze data.

The proposal of grounded theory was a reaction to positivism that sought scientific falsification and verification. As Glazer and Strauss (1967) suggested, a researcher can derive a theory that is meaningful in specific contexts of observations and the consensus of observers. (Suddaby 2006) Grounded theory comprehends the use of a rigorous, open-ended, and iterative process that simultaneously involves data collection, coding (data analysis), and note-taking (theory construction). (Groat and Wang 2002) The conceptual orientation of grounded theory is similar to symbolic interactionism (Priest et al. 2002), which believes that humans create meaning in action.

Qualitative content analysis is “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of textual data through a systematic classification, coding, and identification of themes or patterns. (Hsieh and Shannon 2005)

Grounded theory has two unique features: constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling. (Glazer and Strauss 1967) Continuous comparative analysis implicates an iterative process of simultaneous data collection and analysis that involves the systematic selection and study of multiple comparison groups. (Glazer and Strauss 1967) The researcher does not wait until the data collection is complete to begin data analysis. Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously so that the analyzed data guides subsequent data collection. One incident must be compared and contrasted with other events during the data analysis process. (Corbin and Strauss 1990) Researchers should make comparisons between empirical data and concept, between concept and categories, between data, between categories, and between different slices of data to reach higher levels of abstraction and progress with conceptualization. (Gregory 2010) The goals of comparative analysis are to gain the validity of evidence in a conceptual category and to prove the generality of a fact. Furthermore, two major requirements of theory are achievable: 1) economy of variables and formulation and 2) scope in the application of the theory to a wide range of situations. (Glazer and Strauss 1967) Theoretical sampling is the process of collecting data for comparative analysis. (Glazer and Strauss 1967) This means that insights from the collection and analysis of primary data lead to the collection and analysis of subsequent data. This involves participants with different experiences of the phenomenon to explore multiple dimensions of the social processes under study (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). Researchers, during the analysis, must be theoretically sensitive to the data analysis that will guide them in further actions. One of the unique features of qualitative content analysis is the flexibility to use either inductive or deductive approaches, or a combination of both, in analyzing the data. The second feature is its ability to extract meaning from both explicit and implicit content. First, qualitative content analysis is flexible in using inductive and deductive analysis of data depending on the purpose of the study (Hello and Kingas, 2008). The main difference between the two approaches is in developing the initial codes or categories. An inductive approach is appropriate when prior knowledge about the phenomenon under

study is limited or fragmentary (Hello and Kingas, 2008). The inductive approach extracts codes, categories, or themes directly from the data, whereas the deductive approach begins with predetermined codes or categories derived from previous theory, research, or relevant literature (Kavanagh, 1997; Kondraki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002). The deductive approach is appropriate when the purpose of the study is to test existing theories or retest existing data in a new context. Second, coding in qualitative content analysis can help to identify the overt and covert meanings of communications. While overt content means that the researcher encodes the visible, surface content of the text, covert content means that the researcher encodes the underlying meaning of the text. (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) Mostly the researcher wants to reach beyond the overt content of the text and analyze the covert content (Potter & Levin-Dannerstein, 1999). As Schreier (2012) argues, qualitative content analysis is appropriate for data that require some degree of interpretation. A researcher who uses grounded theory aims to develop a substantive theory that explains a phenomenon in a specific context and is appropriate to its intended application. The emphasis in grounded theory is on theory development. (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Thus, grounded theory is appropriate when there is no theory or there is a theory that is too abstract to be tested and is not suitable for testing a theory or generating knowledge about objective reality. (Martin & Turner, 1986; Sadabi, 2006). On the contrary, a researcher who uses qualitative content analysis aims to systematically describe the meaning of the specific aspects of the phenomenon (Schreier 2012). Although both grounded theory and qualitative content analysis follow coding processes, content analysis does not focus on finding relationships between categories or the structure of theory. It focuses on extracting categories from the data. (Steve Stemler 2001)

### **Applied study of economic federalism in development programs**

We have chosen a strategy that can guide the research as much as possible towards the realities of development programs in Iran by examining the existing literature on content analysis and comparing it with the grounded theory based on the research requirements. There are no signs of the existence of the two concepts of federalism and free economy in the relevant literature in Iran. Therefore, we benefited from literature and theories about the two concepts of federalism and free economy that have been written in societies other than Iran. We summarized the concepts in the literature and theories and began to analyze the content of the laws, clauses, and notes of development programs. We have come probably close to a directional content analysis in a way. However, not all articles, clauses, and notes can be placed in the concepts we summarized from the available theories and literature regarding the concepts of federalism and free economy. Therefore, we will analyze the content with an open mind in the economic part of development programs, extract the themes, and then explore the propositions. Therefore, this research has two methodological aspects. First, the content analysis supports the literature and theories of the concepts of free economy and federalism, and secondly, it is exploratory, which leads to propositions that ultimately express the type of general outlook and orientation towards economic development programs. Putting it another way, the first aspect results from the back and forth between the theory and development programs and their relationship with economic federalism, and the second aspect results from coding and classifying the themes and inferring from these themes a general perspective that governs the development programs. Another characteristic of this research is sampling. The sampling will be flexible because of introducing new hypotheses or exploring and formulating new concepts in development programs.

We have extracted 200 codes from the first to sixth programs that are related to the research topic. It has resulted from the application of adjustment and combination in the content analysis method and looking at the principle of exploration in the grounded theory. These concepts were either related to theories about the concepts of free economy and federalism, or they were extracted during the study of the articles, notes, and clauses raised in the first to sixth development programs, which concerned mostly cases in which the role of the government was more prominent (the concept of state-centered economy). The largest number of codes is for the first program (46 codes) and, as shown in the diagram, most of these codes are those that were about the state-centered economy. The smallest number is for the second and fifth programs. The number of codes for the state-centered economy in the second program is higher than the codes for the concepts of free economy and federalism. The codes of the concepts of state-centered economy, free economy, and federalism in the fifth program are closer to each other. The average of the extracted codes in each program is 33 codes, with three programs above the average and three programs below the average. So the codes are distributed equally in the development programs.

### **Conclusion**

As the results show, the concepts of federalism and a free economy have occupied a much smaller amount than the concept of the state-centered economy. Many data about economic development programs are neglected because of adopting only

one of the branches of content analysis and the analysis of the programs becomes distant from reality. Therefore, we have reached the realities hidden in the development programs as much as possible by choosing two approaches deductive and inductive content analysis. Although the type of research method has approached the grounded theory method in some aspects, this is because of a kind of inductive orientation that dominates an aspect of the research. In other words, both content analysis and grounded theory methods are looking for exploration. However, we cannot complete the grounded theory because of the limitation in theoretical sampling, the size of the statistical population, and the failure to achieve theoretical saturation. Therefore, we chose two approaches of deductive and inductive content analysis because of the challenges of the lack of federalism and free economy in development programs, the consequent distancing from the realities of development programs resulting from looking only at the theoretical framework of federalism and free economy, and the limitations in the statistical population. As we mentioned in the statistics about federalism, free economy, and state-centered economy, most of the existing statistics are for the state-centered economy, which results from inductive content analysis.

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