Lab: Content Analysis

Comments

This in-class assignment will require you, working in groups of 3 or 4, to perform a rudimentary content analysis of personal ads from a newspaper, with an eye toward learning about the criteria that different people use in mate selection. Specifically, you will be looking for differences between men and women in terms of the specific qualities or characteristics that each group tends to seek in a mate. Consider such differences in advance.

Instructions

1. Each group, pick a secretary, to record all the names and decisions of your group, and to present your work to the rest of the class later.

2. (10 min) Start out by discussing as a group what sorts of things you want to look for in the personal ads, i.e. what **variables** you want to measure.

   - In addition to identifying the gender of the author of each ad, you may want to code for such things as the overall number of mate characteristics they specify; the number of specifed physical, emotional, or financial characteristics they mention; the kinds of relationships they say they are interested in; and so forth.

   - The possibilities are virtually limitless. The important thing is that your whole group **be perfectly clear about what you are looking for and why**, before you proceed. This includes specifying whether you will look at characteristics marketed (i.e. of the author), shopped for (i.e. of the "date" they want), both, or either.

3. (5 min) **Pick out two** personal ads and have each member of the group code them on their own. That is, each person in the group codes the same ads, but **code them separately** rather than as a group.

4. (5 min) Come together again and **compare** what each member came up with for those same two ads. If you find clear differences in how various members of your group are perceiving and coding things, then you will need to work out clearer **coding guidelines** before you move on.

5. (5 min) Once your group is satisfied with how everyone in the group is coding the ads, select a systematic random sample* to allow each individual to code three more. (Your sample size is thus three times the number of people in your group).

6. (5 min) Each group member should code three of the sampled ads, according to the variable(s) and guidelines established by the group.

7. (5 min) Put your data together and calculate some **rudimentary summary statistics** – such as mode and variation ratio – by hand. Discuss the findings amongst yourselves and try to reach some **empirically justifiable, theoretically informed conclusions**, and construct a *brief* write-up that summarizes the co-varaition you have observed and measured.

8. (5 min) The secretaries/recorders should all swap groups. Compare the data from your ads with the data from the next group. Draw some conclusions together about any differences, and about what all this (the process you're going through) means. What can you say about reliability? about validity? What part(s) of the process was hardest? easiest? most fun?

That's 40 minutes. 45 minutes from now, the "secretaries" you choose will begin presenting each group's results, and we'll discuss them. Following presentations, secretaries should submit a list of all of your work, with a list of names of everyone in your group.

Other notes:

   ISO = In Search Of

   SWM = Single White Male

   DBF = Divorced Black Female

   GAT = Gay Asian Transexual

   N/S = Non-smoker

* Systematic sampling uses "k", the "skip number".

   K = total population / sample size = total # of ads / (# group membrers * 3)

   Start with one of the first "k" cases, and skip every "k^{th}" member.

   For example, if k=4, you start with one of the first 4 (pick randomly) then skip every 4th .

   Your sample then might be cases 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, …