

Critical analysis and comment (News Performance)

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KEYWORDS

news coverage, investigative journalism, watchdog reporting, criticism

FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Analyses of critical analysis and comment are theoretically linked to the news performance and the watchdog function of the media (Donsbach, 1995; McQuail, 1992). This construct is related to the normative expectation that the news media should critically analyze and comment on cases of abuse of power, incompetence, failures and grievances in government institutions, non-profit organizations, or the private sector (Downie & Schudson, 2009).

REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The analysis of critical reporting and comment is complex and requires an understanding of the context and the references made by the journalist. Furthermore, it is empirically demanding to distinguish between critical reporting in the sense of the watchdog function and criticism in the sense of negativity or sensationalism (Humprecht, 2016). Due to this complexity, automated approaches have hardly been employed so far.

EXAMPLE STUDIES:

Benson (2010); Humprecht (2016)

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Table 1. Study summaries.

Author(s)	Sample	Unity of Analysis	Values	Reliability
Benson (2010)	<p><i>Content type:</i> immigration news coverage (all articles focused on broad immigration trends, policy making and politics, or individual immigrants)</p> <p><i>Outlet/ country:</i> 14 newspapers from two countries (FR, US)</p> <p><i>Sampling period:</i> 1991/1994; 2002/2004; 2006)</p> <p><i>Sample size:</i> N= 1088</p>	<p><i>Unit of analysis:</i> critical statements in news articles (from sources/ journalists)</p> <p>Critical statements are classified according to their target, substantive focus, and sources</p> <p>Target (government; dominant left parties; dominant right parties; minor political parties; civil society organizations; business; foreign or international organizations)</p> <p>Focus (administrative, character, truth, ideology, policy, and strategy)</p>	<p>Administrative criticism (failure (e.g., corruption, incompetence, mismanagement)</p> <p>Truth criticism (e.g., evidence to demonstrate the falsity of claims)</p> <p>Character criticisms (e.g., attacks on personal characteristics of powerful individuals in public life)</p> <p>Policy criticism (e.g., logical coherence, feasibility, empirical justification, evidence supporting any proposed policy)</p> <p>Ideology criticism (e.g., criticisms of fascism, racism, sexism, other worldviews)</p> <p>Strategy criticisms (negative assessments of effectiveness of a particular idea/action; normative criticisms of political strategies)</p>	Holsti M=0.85
Humprecht (2016)	<p><i>Content type:</i> Political routine-period online news</p> <p><i>Outlet/ country:</i> 48 online news outlets from six countries (CH, DE, FR, IT, UK, US)</p> <p><i>Sampling period:</i> June – July 2012</p> <p><i>Sample size:</i> N= 1660</p>	<p><i>Unit of analysis:</i> Political news items (make reference to a political actor, e.g. politician, party, institution in headline, sub-headline, in first paragraph or in an accompanying visual)</p>	<p>Story shows critical perspective towards authorities/power holders</p> <p>Story raises probing questions at actors responsible for a problem</p> <p>Story discovers new, previously unknown information about a problem of social/political relevance; story may unveil a ‘scandal’</p>	Cohen’s kappa: critical perspective = 0.74 probing questions = 0.67 unveiling scandals = 0.81