Communication and Language Analysis in the Public Sphere

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Chapter 25
DICTION as a Tool for Studying the Mass Media

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers a systematic assessment of DICTION's ability to address a wide range of media content. Each of the media-related works in this volume reflects a unique mix of communication inputs, and DICTION proves itself able to generate valid and reliable insights on a diverse range of material. In addition, the chapter focuses on a series of challenges (e.g., Message Tailoring, Hypertext, Interactivity) and opportunities (e.g., big data) for DICTION in relation to the study of media content. The program and the researchers who utilize it need to continue to evolve with the changing media landscape in order to generate practical knowledge that is relevant to improving communication.

DICTION AS A TOOL FOR STUDYING MASS MEDIA AND THE PRESS

Any one communicative act consists of five input variables: Message, source, recipient, channel, and context (McGuire, 1984). The treatment of mass media and the press as institutions can be addressed from all five of the communication inputs, and there is much scholarship in this volume devoted to each of these elements. In terms of message, a multitude of scholars focus on how journalists or news organizations frame a topic of social interest (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 2007; Scheufele, 1999). Journalism scholars have studied a variety of source characteristics of mass media and the press, including trust (e.g., Kohring & Matthes, 2007), credibility (e.g., Newhagen & Nass, 1999), and ideological orientation (e.g., Bovitz,

Druckman, & Lupia, 2002). Entire frameworks of study derived from competing explanatory principles like understanding (e.g., Uses & Gratifications; see Holbert, in press) and consistency (e.g., partisan selective exposure; see Stroud, 2011) have developed to study audience activity. While some of the major theories in journalism studies (e.g., agenda setting; McCombs, 2005) treat news as a single institutional entity, there is much work focused on the unique roles played by distinct mass media channels (e.g., Martinelli & Chaffee, 1995). Finally, there is much research devoted to the role of mass media and news in different contexts, with one of the classic distinctions being election (e.g., Hallin, 1992) versus non-election (e.g., Habermas, 2006) time periods. It is rare for any one study to devote sufficient attention to all five communication input variables (often too complex a task).

In fact, it is most often the case that one of the communication inputs tends to dominate within a given study. However, all five are deeply relevant to the study of mass media and news.

All of the works in this volume treat messages as the primary communication input. This point of interest is as it should be given our collective attention to DICTION and the varied ways in which it has been employed to better understand the language of institutions. It is clear, as will be outlined in this essay, that DICTION retains epistemological value in that it can help researchers generate new knowledge about a wide variety of texts. However, to focus only on the diversity of message types analyzed by DICTION would be a disservice if our goal is to gain proper insight about this software package's ability to aid the study of a truly diverse range of communicative acts, with any one communicative act consisting of more than just the message(s) being provided. Each of the chapters in this volume represents a unique mixture of message, source, potential recipient, channel, and context. The fact that DICTION can be used to address a wide range of communicative acts is testament to the tool's ability to bring utility to a multitude of research agendas.

This essay devotes space to each of the five communication inputs and summarizes this volume's chapters in relation to these inputs. What becomes clear from this summary is that there is true diversity found in association with each of the inputs. It is clear from these chapters that DICTION is a valuable tool in the hands of a strong researcher who wishes to address an interesting question. However, it must be the goal of scholars who are employing this software package to continue to push its boundaries and shore up its weaknesses. The essay closes with thoughts about the challenges and opportunities afforded DICTION with the coming of the digital media revolution.

Communication Inputs

Message

DICTION has proven itself to be a methodological tool that offers valid and reliable assessments of a diverse range of content (see http://www.diction-software.com/published-studies/#peerarticles). However, it will be important to provide a formal assessment of the nature of the messages analyzed within this volume in order to present a baseline for this chapter's core argument that DICTION is a flexible methodological tool for this particular type of work.

Several of the chapters focus on a variety of messages that speak to the values or identity of a broad range of organizations. Abelman (Chapter 18) focuses on the vision statements of institutions of higher education. These statements are deemed persuasive acts aimed at both internal and external publics that allow universities to take some ownership of and retain at least a modicum of efficacy over their image. Carroll and Einwiller (LCW, Chapter 15) attend to an analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Reports and DICTION proves itself able to offer quality assessments of this content type. A major focus of their analysis was on the transparency levels offered in the reports, with specific attention given to the dichotomous moderator of whether the various corporations signed on to the United Nations' Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). Lellis (Chapter 20) turned her attention to health care/disability non-profit organizations and how their promotional materials reflect what they value as organizations. Much like Abelman, it is argued by Lellis that public sector organizations face many challenges in establishing an identity with an external public that allows for trust to be established (trust being a primary outcome variable for public relations activities; see Botan & Taylor, 2004). This chapter's analysis reveals

DICTION's ability to extract meaningful dimensions of organizational identity emerging from a broad range of promotional materials. As is evident from this brief listing, DICTION can take on a wide range of content (i.e., vision statements, corporate reporting, non-profit promotional materials, internal social media policy statements) in an effort to understand better how organizations seek to define themselves to a host of internal and external publics.

Given that primary attention is given to the news media in this volume, special note needs to be made of the variety of news messages DICTION can analyze to aid a host of research agendas. A smattering of public policy issues squeeze through the news hole on any given day. These issues are often categorized as economic (e.g., taxes, deficit), social (e.g., welfare, education), or security (e.g., terrorism, war) in nature. A small sampling of the chapters reveals the ability of DICTION to aid researchers interested in news coverage of a variety of public policy issues. Ragas (Chapter 19), focuses on business/economic news coverage, and stresses the need for some of political communication's major theories (e.g., agenda setting), to expand their boundaries to more than the study of purely political issues. Stewart and Rhodes (Chapter 16) focuses on the all-important social issue of the environment, while the Merola (Chapter 17) chapter is devoted to the national security issue of accused enemy combatants. The DeMoya and Jain (Chapter 22) content analysis does not focus on specific public policies, but countries (e.g., Mexico) that can become the focus of journalistic attention. This group of chapters reinforces DICTION's ability to content analyze news content, regardless of focus on particular political objects.

Beyond the study of news content with a singular focus on a specific political object, a pair of chapters in this volume reveals that news content can be assessed more broadly for research questions that address a variety of normative concerns and institutional practices. Jarvis and Stephens (Chapter 13) focus on the content of headlines offered through online news versus traditional newspaper outlets. Headlines and material appearing in the most prominent areas of a news product (e.g., front page, most read) can be of particular interest to journalism scholars given audience behavior. Like Jarvis and Stephens, Lowry's work (Chapter 14) does not focus on news content devoted to a single object. Instead, attention is paid to the fundamental question of whether there is evidence of bias in news reporting (i.e., objectivity). Schudson (1998) has argued that various journalism models (i.e., Trustee, Market, Advocacy) have dominated the American news industry landscape over time, and at the center of distinguishing between these models is the degree to which journalists and news organizations seek to be detached, third-party observers of the major issues and events of the day or willing participants in cajoling citizens to pay attention to and act in certain ways toward political actors and positions. DICTION can be employed to focus on news coverage of specific objects (i.e., public policies, political actors), but also broader theoretical concerns related to journalism as practice.

Two additional chapters offered in this volume serve as exclamation points on the diversity of messages that can be addressed through the use of DICTION. The Hart and Scacco chapter (Chapter 4) focuses on presidential press conferences, while Waisanen (Chapter 23) content analyzed comedy stand-up material. These messages are distinct from the institutional image building materials and news content outlined in the previous paragraphs. Press conference content represents more reactive and interactive communication dynamics than traditional news content or institutional value statements. One driving force behind political comedy is the production of pleasure within an audience (i.e., The Hedonic Principle); whereas this explanatory principle is less pronounced in the other chapters in this volume. These two unique content analyses serve all the more to highlight DICTION's versatility.

Whether the driving force behind the creation of the messages assessed by DICTION is the providing of understanding, generating persuasion (i.e., response formation, response reinforcement, response change), or offering some pleasure, valid and reliable assessments of messages can be offered through the use of the program. Each of the authors in this volume depended on DICTION for insights that would be hard to obtain otherwise.

Source

When approaching the study of the mass media, an important source distinction is separating newsmakers from news providers. The chapters in this volume divides relatively equally in terms of content produced by potential newsmakers and news providers. Just as DICTION has proven itself able to address a variety of messages, those messages are emanating from a wide range of sources. The combination of message-source diversity represented in the chapters summarized in this essay speaks all the more to the flexibility of DICTION as a tool to aid communication research.

The newsmakers represented in this and its companion volume represent a wide range of institutions, including for-profit (Carroll & Entwiller, LCW, Chapter 15) v. non-profit (Lellis, LPS, Chapter 20), vs. educational (Abelman, LPS, Chapter 18). Other chapters (e.g., Waisanen, Chapter 23) focuses on an assessment of content from a source (i.e., comedians) that can both make news (e.g., provide a provocative political statement that generates news coverage) and compete with news for citizens' attention to political matters (see Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Young & Esralew, 2011). Lowry (Chapter 14) also addresses a major source of news, political campaigns, through his analysis of political advertisements. Only a small number of chapters were needed to see that messages produced by representatives from many segments of society can be analyzed through DICTION.

When looking at the news producers (i.e., news organizations) focused on in this volume, a majority of the news outlets focused on would best be defined as elite sources. Du (Chapter 15) and Stewart and Rhodes (Chapter 16) focus on the single most identifiable news outlet, *The New York Times.* Other chapters (DeMoya & Jain, Chapter 22; Lowry, Chapter 24; Merola, Chapter 17; Ragas, Chapter 19) collected content from national, elite news outlets as well, but operationalized this concept as encompassing a wider range of news organizations (e.g., national network TV news, *USA Today, Washington Post*). Only one chapter (Jarvis & Stephens, Chapter 13) devoted its attention to news media organizations that are more regional in nature (e.g. *The Idaho Statesmen, The Tulsa World*), and this chapter's core research question sought to compare the content offered through these types of news organizations against what is provided by elite/national news outlets. In short, the news sources focused on in this volume are overwhelmingly national and elite in nature. It has been shown through the study of intermedia agenda setting that elite/national news outlets impact the coverage offered by local/regional news organizations (McCombs, 2005), but the degree to which DICTION is equally adept at addressing content provided in these various news outlet types remains an unknown. The Jarvis and Stephens chapter would point to DICTION working equally well for national/elite outlets as for local/regional outlets, but the types of content analyses undertaken by a variety of the authors in this volume clearly favors assessments of the former over the latter. In assessing the flexibility of DICTION as an analytical tool, it will be important for more research to be undertaken on local and regional news content.

One of the most interesting chapters in this volume in terms of source is the work by Hart and Scacco (Chapter 4). This research effort represents a content analytic assessment of a media event (i.e., press conferences) where there

is a meeting of newsmakers and news providers. DICTION proves itself worthy in assessing the communicative acts undertaken in those spaces created specifically for where these two groups interact with one another. As stated by Hart and Scacco, their DICTION analysis reveals how "people's micro-linguistic decisions shed light on grand things, even institutional things, if we are patient enough to track them down" (p. 75). In short, the chapters in this volume show DICTION to be a flexible tool suited to studying a variety of message types.

Recipient

For the study of media, the recipient of a message is embodied in the concept of the audience (Webster, 1998), and the audience as a concept can be addressed from a variety of perspectives (e.g., audience as mass, audience as agent, audience as outcome). There is no one conceptualization of an audience, only what various researchers wish to make of it (Webster & Phalen, 1997). Therefore, it is best defined as a referentially real concept (Pavitt, 2010) that can alter over time within a community of scholarship. The mass media messages created by a source have the potential to be consumed by an audience, and it is important to note that the audience could be both intended and unintended, and this is true for any news, entertainment, or promotional mass media product. Each of the chapters in this volume speak in some way to the potential audience for the messages being analyzed in outlining why their particular research activity is important. The varied means through which the audience is envisioned by the distinct researchers highlights even more the diverse set of communicative acts, which can be analyzed by DICTION.

Given that a majority of the content analyzed in this area is news material, the dominant audience conceptualization is that of the citizenry. News organizations, and individual journalists nested within news organizations, view their audience as members of a citizenry who are engaged (or have the potential to be engaged) in a variety of democratic activities. As citizens, one of our primary drives is to seek understanding; the desire to seek out news to learn about the major issues, actors, and events of the day that can impact how we go about our day-to-day existence and the goals we wish to achieve. This approach to the audience has been dominant since the rise of what Katz (1987) defined as the "institutional critique" of the Lazarsfeld approach to political communication research.

The journalistic conceptualization of audience as citizenry becomes better defined when comparing the news-oriented content analyses against the other types of messages taken on in this volume. Lellis (Chapter 20), given the public relations focus of her chapter, adopts the metaphor of audience as partner, rather than audience as citizenry. The various documents crafted and disseminated by non-profit health care organizations have the ability to affect trust levels between the organization and the external public it is seeking to serve in a beneficial manner. There are elements of the Abelman chapter (18) that speak to this same metaphor being employed by institutions of higher learning, but there also appears to be an intended audience as consumer nested within his discussion of institutional vision statements. The intended audience for a university's vision statement could be a prospective student and his/her immediate family. Clear vision statements not only allow a university to define itself so as to allow for better working relationships with community partners, but can serve to make that institution more marketable to potential consumers of its product. It is clear that Carroll and Einwiller (LCW, Chapter 15) work from an audience as consumer perspective (i.e., what do CSR Reports tell us about the stability of a company?). Waisanen's work on political comedy (Chapter (23) retains hints of a desire to treat the audience as citizens, but also gravitates (and rightfully so) to envisioning the audience as pleasure seekers. There remains a

heated debate about the degree to which audience members turn to political entertainment media for understanding, pleasure, or some combination of the two drive mechanisms (see Holbert & Young, 2013). All of these conceptualizations stand out as distinct from that of audience as citizenry that dominates the study of news messages.

Another key audience (i.e., recipient) distinction evident in this volume is whether the primary intended audience is reflective of an internal or external public. Abelman's work (Chapter 18) would point to institutional vision statements being of equal potential value for internal and external audiences. Potential students as one type of external audience member may look to such a statements of this kind in making an initial determination of where they may want to go to school. In contrast, an existing faculty member (i.e., someone internal to the organization) may look to this same statement to reaffirm their notion that the organization he/she works for shares a similar set of values, worldviews, and goals. The Abelman chapter can be contrasted to other work focused on material crafted largely for an external audience (e.g., Lellis, Chapter 20). One can also imaging important work being done on messages designed for purely internal audiences but which are somehow consumed by an external public as well.

In short, the messages assessed by DICTION represent a variety of potential audiences, both intended and unintended. The researchers envision the potential audience members as being driven by a variety of internal drive mechanisms, seeking understanding or consistency or pleasure. The study of media can be broken down into three different types of studies: content, use, and effects. The content analytical studies that are offered in this and its companion volume reflect the first of these three study types. The recipients of a message are of secondary concern in studies of this kind (i.e., the focus is on the message), but the recipient/audience becomes or greater interest for use and effects research. Use-based mass media studies

(e.g., work on uses and gratifications or partisan selective exposure treat the audience as primary, while any study of media effects must take into account the role of the audience in order to place any act of media influence in its proper context. Once again, audience is a man-made construct, and, as such, can be reconceptualized by researchers to best attend to their unique research agendas. Building on earlier arguments made concerning message and source, the insights offered on the diverse range of audiences serves to reinforce the flexibility of DICTION as a content analytic tool.

Channel

The diversity of material content analyzed by DICTION can be found not only in message, source, and recipient, but also in the primary channel through which the messages were offered. All of the material assessed by the DICTION program was ultimately converted over to text for the purposes of analysis, but the original means through which these messages were communicated to an audience reflect a wide range of communication channels. Lowry (Chapter 14) has devoted special attention to making an argument that it is important for mass media researchers to recognize the importance of moving beyond the print medium when thinking of engaging an analytical tool like DICTION. The program has the ability to provide valid and reliable insights on a host of content crafted for varied media forms. As he states, "Focusing on the lexical content of television should not be considered a second-class activity" (p. 256). The chapters offered in this volume provide further support for Lowry's general assessment of the utility of the program.

In terms of the news coverage content analyzed in this volume, the primary media form is the newspaper (e.g., DeMoya & Jain, Chapter 22; Du, Chapter 15; Stewart & Rhodes, Chapter 16). However, a sizeable number of the journalism chapters utilized textual representations of audiovisual (i.e., television) content (e.g., Lowry, Chap-

ter 14; Merola, Chapter 17). Jarvis and Stephens focus a portion of their attention on Web-based news, which can contain a mixture of textual and audio-visual information, but their analyses focus solely on the textual elements of this medium. The latter set of works reveal the appropriateness of utilizing DICTION to assess text generated from audio-visual based media forms. It is important to reinforce a point raised by several scholars in this volume; researchers need to think creatively of what can be produced textually to be analyzed by DICTION. If a textual form can be generated from any type of communication, then there is at least an opportunity for DICTION to be employed in ways that can offer valuable, unique insights.

Of all the political content analyzed in this volume, the work of Waisanen (Chapter 23) pushes the envelope furthest for what type of audio-visual content can be translated into textual form and analyzed by DICTION in a valid and reliable manner. Waisanen assessed humor, and humor's meaning is often indirect and beyond literal interpretation. Message types like satire, derived from the Latin term satura (meaning mixed bag), are highly complex and multi-faceted. A strong case could be made that content assessments like those provided by DICTION are of little value for something like political humor. However, several of the insights reported by Waisanen point toward DICTION being a valuable tool even for our most subtle and nuanced message types. For example, virtually all of the comedic material ranks low to very low on the DICTION concept of certainty. A great deal of humor is formed around the concept of incongruity. When Element A and Element B are presented alongside one another and it is pointed out that Element A does not match well with Element B, then we can find humor in the fact that the two points (which should create a match) do not (Young, 2008). For example, one type of incongruity could be offered in a political context by articulating how a nation's values (e.g., all life is precious, forgiveness) often do not match its policies (e.g., the death penalty).

It would be easy to see how messages of this kind would result in low levels of certainty, as indicated by the DICTION program. However, one comedian who rarely uses incongruity is Chris Rock, and this is the one individual who ranks above the low/very low uncertainty ratings. Chris Rock's brand of humor is to be clear and to the point on where he stands on the major issues of the day. For example, Chris Rock in reference to former President Bill Clinton as being "nothing but a man" stated, "A man is as faithful as his options" (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALriYXLj9Gg). There is nothing incongruous about this comedic line-there is a clear and definitive statement that Bill Clinton is not faithful. The general set of findings offered up by Waisanen represents some of our most basic theoretical approaches to the study of humor. DICTION's ability to address message types of humor, even without the non-verbal elements often needed for more accurate understanding, speaks to the flexibility of the tool.

When looking at the non-news material content analyzed in this volume, the vast majority presents textual information that can be distributed in traditional print form or digitally via the Web. There is little attention paid in these chapters to non-text based materials where the source of the message is a newsmaker. There is little reason to believe DICTION would be unable to address this type of content, but work of this kind needs to be conducted in a more systematic fashion in order for any formal judgments to be offered on this matter.

Finally, Hart and Scacco's work (Chapter 4) represents a unique case in that it content analyzes a non-mediated exchange between newsmakers and news producers. Additional chapters also provide textual translations of what could be deemed non-mediated events (e.g., State of the Union addresses; Du, Chapter 15). Presidential press conferences, although they are often televised, remain fixated on the non-media exchange between the Executive Branch and the press. Any direct media coverage

of the event is secondary. By contrast, a State of the Union address is created first and foremost for the media audience (i.e., the citizenry) rather than for the political actors in the room. DICTION's ability to offer valid and reliable insights on the reactive and interactive exchanges that take place in a presidential press conference speak volumes of the ability of the program to assess messages generated through a variety of communication channels.

Context

The context within which a message is sent and received can have a profound influence on the meaning generated from that message and its effects. For example, I could offer the statement "I love you" to my wife in a moment of mutual serenity or during a heated argument. The same words are coming out of my mouth, but may reflect two completely different meanings. The former may be interpreted as a profound insight that comes along only in those moments of true reflection, while the latter may be seen as my begging forgiveness and letting my wife know she is better than me/I am not worthy of her. In order for DICTION to be deemed a truly versatile tool, it is essential for the program to be able to provide valuable insights on messages offered in a variety of contexts.

In the political arena, one important contextual distinction is campaigning for elected office versus holding elected office. Lowry (Chapter 14) offers a DICTION-based assessment of a classic political campaign message type (i.e., the 30-second advertisement), while Hart and Scacco (Chapter 4) and Du (Chapter 15) offer content analyses of non-election presidential events (i.e., press conferences and State of the Union addresses). It appears clear from these chapters that DICTION is able to address messages offered in either political context.

Politics is not just about political actors (i.e., politicians), but also public policy. A major contextual factor for the coverage of or communication about a matter of public policy is whether there is a crisis at the moment in relation to that issue. The Merola (Chapter 17) and Stewart and Rhodes (Chapter 16) works on terrorism and the environment, respectively, represent the assessment of news coverage of issues being addresses during moments of crisis. Conversely, the news media content analyzed by Ragas (Chapter 19), Lowry (Chapter 14), and Jarvis and Stephens (Chapter 13) do not constitute focus being given to coverage of political issues that are necessarily in crisis mode. One way to think about the crisis versus non-crisis distinction is to place the matter of public policy along the Downsian Issue Cycle (Downs, 1972). Downs stated that each public policy issue works through five stages: Pre-problem, discovery/enthusiasm, realization of cost, decline of interest, and post-problem. News coverage of any issue exists primarily in the second, third, and fourth stages, with the discovery/enthusiasm stage being the point in time when there is a crisis. DICTION should be able to offer quality insights on news coverage of a variety of topics that exist anywhere along the Downsian issue cycle, and the chapters in this volume offer assessments of media content on issues residing at each of these stages.

Another contextual factor of potential importance is whether the message being analyzed was created voluntarily or as a result of adhering to some ritual/maintaining a level of compliance. The former speaks more to an internal attribution, while the latter would signal an external attribution. Varied attributions can generate unique meaning. There are messages analyzed in this and its companion volume that reflect an adherence to ritual (e.g., Du, Chapter 15) or complying with a particular policy put forward by an external third party (e.g., Carroll & Einwiller, LCW, Chapter 15). There are also several chapters devoted to messages created pro-actively by organizations without any external force at work (e.g., Abelman, Chapter 18; Lellis, Chapter 20;). Once again, researchers have found DICTION to be able to assess messages along a variety of dimensions, regardless of these contexts.

DICTION: A Versatile Tool

The variation in topic offered in this volume speaks to the flexibility with which DICTION can be used as a tool to better understand a wide range of communicative acts. However, the true versatility of the tool becomes further evident when greater organizational power is extended to the message types that are the focus of the various chapters. Three primary message types are identified within the chapters: Organizational identity statements, coverage of public policy issues, and general news coverage. Researchers taking on these unique messages indicated with universal agreement, DICTION's ability to provide valid and reliable assessments of broader patterns of meaning nested within the content being assessed. In addition to these message types, the content analyzed by Waisanen (Chapter 23) and Hart and Scacco (Chapter 4), both unique to the three major classifications, reinforce the claim that DICTION can tackle a variety of messages with a precision that often exists beyond the abilities of human coders.

There is no question, the robustness of DICTION should be assessed first and foremost by the degree to which a variety of messages can be content analyzed. However, DICTION as a methodological tool would inevitably be undervalued if our assessment were to begin and end with a sole focus on message. In addition to message, this chapter addresses four additional communication inputs: source, recipient, channel, and context. DICTION has proven itself a versatile tool with regard to each of these inputs, not just message. The sources of the messages assessed by DICTION in this volume represent both newsmakers and news producers. A variety of conceptualizations of the audience (e.g., audience as citizenry, audience as consumers, audience as investors, and audience as pleasure seekers) are articulated throughout the chapters. Messages emanating from a wide variety of media channels are evident in the various works: There are messages from

newspapers, television, and the Web, along with what are primarily non-mediated communication exchanges (e.g., press conferences). The messages being analyzed also reflect a variety of contextual elements (e.g., campaign v. non-campaign season, crisis v non-crisis public policy stages). A seemingly infinite number of cells can be generated from the message X source X recipient X channel X context matrix put forward in this chapter, and each of the chapters in this volume represents some unique mixture of these five communication inputs. If presented more formally, I would wager that the full range of chapters may be able to fill all the available cells. This insight is an empirical indicator of a versatile methodological tool that aids researchers to better understand an act of communication. No matter the nature of the communicative act, it appears DICTION has the ability to provide utility to a communication research agenda.

Pushing the Boundaries of DICTION

Challenges and Opportunities for the Study of Mass Media and the Press

It is clear from the points raised in this chapter that DICTION has proven itself a versatile tool that can analyze a wide variety of communicative acts. However, the changing media landscape is creating communication scenarios that put forward new challenges for DICTION. In fact, alterations to the media landscape are forcing a revisiting of general practice of content analysis, more broadly. As communication scholars, we clearly value a thorough analysis of message, but our emerging and ever-evolving communication technologies are making it more difficult to pinpoint the specific messages that need to be analyzed. The concluding section of this chapter will raise three digital media-related subjects (message tailoring, hypertext, interactivity) that create new challenges for DICTION as a program. However, the future does not consist solely of challenges for DICTION.

With the coming of the digital age are opportunities for an expansion computer-aided content analysis. More specifically, the big data era we now find ourselves enveloped within points to programs like DICTION becoming an essential tool that needs to be a part of any media researcher's toolkit.

Challenges

Message Tailoring: There is growing interest in message tailoring for the study of media-oriented health communication campaigns (e.g., Jensen, King, Carcioppolo, & Davis, 2012; Noar, Harington, & Aldrich, 2009). The practice is not as well analyzed in a political context, but is appearing in the assessment of specific campaigns devoted to certain political issues (e.g., the environment; Pelletier & Sharp, 2008). Message tailoring consists of crafting individualized media messages for audience members based on their demographic, psychographic, contextual, and behavioral profiles. It only takes a few slight changes to specific content elements to create a seemingly infinite number of message permutations. One result of message tailoring is that each individual will receive his/her own unique message, whether that message is intended to persuade, produce understanding, or entertain. If message tailoring is the future given its ease of implementation with various digital technologies, what does this movement indicate for the utility of DICTION (and for the method of content analysis in general)?

One of the main findings coming out of the message tailoring literature is that even just a small set of word choice alterations can have sizeable effects on audience members. As a result, it is often the case that a finite number of points within any one message are made available for tailoring. If the number of permutations stemming from the tailoring is manageable, then DICTION could perhaps be used to assess all possible permutations. Once more, it would be interesting to assess whether a DICTION analysis would be able to reveal differences in the often finely grained message altera-

tions derived from the tailoring process. Overall, the number of words being altered within any one baseline message represents a small percentage of the overall number of words contained in the message. However, the argument offered in this line of research is that these small changes can produce meaningful effects. As such, DICTION should be able to indicate subtle changes when comparing one tailored message versus another. A DICTION analysis of tailored mass media messages represents a strict test of the program's ability to detect subtle, but important differences in content that can impact the effects generated on an audience.

Hypertext: The study of hypertext has been a component of new media research for several decades (see Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996; Walther, Gay, & Hancock, 2005). The technique of imbedding connections to multiple pieces of additional content is now commonplace on the Web, and has played an especially important role in the creation of Web-based news content (Green, 1997). News organizations wrestled for several decades when trying to understand how best to utilize digital media for the purposes of storytelling. For a long period of time, web-based news content represented a simple repackaging of material originally created for other forms (i.e., newspapers, television). With the goal of journalists to be information providers, hypertext was one of the key elements of digital media that allowed for this profession to embrace the concept of infinite space and to link together a variety of information with the journalistic story serving as a base from which an audience member can travel down a seemingly infinite number of information threads.

While message tailoring calls into question whether there is a single mediated message to analyze, hypertext puts forward the question of where a specific media message begins or ends. Is it a valid claim to argue that we continue to content analyze only the main text of any one media message, or, if we are looking at digital media content, should we also be taking into

account the most immediate content offered in a given hyperlink? Given that many of the chapters in this volume address news content, are we embracing outmoded notions of what is mass media content by isolating only the main text of an online newspaper article, and not looking at the messages connected to the main article through hypertexting? Focusing on the main text only will provide valuable insights, but choices made of when, how, and what to hypertext are important communicative acts that can alter the meaning of a given message. If we do embrace hypertexting in our content analyses, then how far are we going to travel down the rabbit hole? It is most likely the case that each piece of hypertext-linked content contains its own hyperlinks.

Interactivity: Chaffee and Metzger (2001) argue for the need to discard the term "mass communication" all together. With this term comes a set of connotations that no longer apply to the study of media; The term "mass communication" conjures images of sender-driven, top-down, one-way communication of old media. Conversely, "media communication" represents at-your-convenience, receiver-controlled, interactive (or at least reactive) communication. This shift reflects the classic movement from a push to a pull media environment. Push media comes and goes at specific points in time (e.g., the morning newspaper, the 6:00 PM television newscast), whereas digital media content exists in a cloud and can be pulled down whenever desired. These changes are profound for all media industries and their audiences.

The shift from a push to a pull media environment can have profound effects on the conducting of a content analysis. The fact that mass media content exists in perpetuity in a cloud means that it can evolve over time. The originators of any piece of content can go back and edit or reformulate a message at any time. An original message can be reworked based on audience feedback. In addition, rarely does any one message exist in a vacuum relative to reviewer or audience comments about

that message. Should these types of reactions be taken into account when content analyzing what other potential audience members may come into contact with as a communication experience? Is to discard an assessment of this type of audience feedback just another example of embracing a mass communication mindset, rather than a media communication mindset (to use Chaffee and Metzger's terms) to our content analyses of digital media content?

Summary: Today's "media communication" environment brings with it unique challenges for the practice of content analysis in general, and the use of DICTION in particular. Message tailoring calls into question whether a single message exists to be content analyzed. Hypertext forces researchers to revisit core questions of how to properly bound a message to be analyzed. Interactivity speaks to the fact that even if a single, well bounded message is offered for potential mass consumption, that message is open to constant alteration and expansion through receiver feedback/commentary. As Bennett and Iyengar (2008) have stated, it is essential for media research in general, and the study of political communication in particular, to evolve in such a way so as to remain "interpretable, cumulative, and socially significant" (p. 709). Content analysis scholars, and, and, and more importantly for this essay, those who use DICTION, must address the myriad of issues created by the digital media environment in order for their work to be defined in the terms offered by Bennett and Iyengar. Once more, they must reach a series of decision that allow for valid and reliable insights to be offered on the types of media messages people are encountering in their day-to-day experiences.

Opportunities

Big Data: Just as challenges are created by the new media environment, new opportunities also come to light. Within infinite space comes infinite content, a volume of content that is difficult

for any one set of human coders to take on in a meaningful way. There is the opportunity for human coders to sample any one corpus of messages for the purposes of analysis (as has always been the case), but the digital revolution allows for all this content to be collected and analyzed rather effectively on some level. The sheer volume of messages that can be collected and potentially analyzed would point to computerized content analysis becoming more of a mainstay for future research endeavors. This basic point is purely utilitarian and focuses on the functional aspects of this type of work.

The key question for researchers in this area is the degree to which DICTION is well suited for taking on this deluge of content. The single greatest advantage of DICTION over other computerized content analysis programs is that it is based on theory. Many different scholars, from varied fields, emphasize that point repeatedly throughout this and its companion volume. There is nothing more practical than good theory, so there is no question that DICTION remains of utility for media researchers who wish to study large volumes of data. However, do the inner workings of the program allow for large volumes of data to be digested and analyzed in ways that researchers will find useful? Perhaps a meeting of the minds similar to that which took place in Austin, Texas in February 2013 will pave the way for content analysts to create new and better tools to handle the oncoming changes to our media landscape.

CONCLUSION

The research summarized in this chapter represent a truly diverse set of communicative acts analyzed by DICTION. Each analysis nested within each chapter represents a unique mix of message, source, audience conceptualization, channel, and context. As a result, DICTION has proven itself a versatile tool for the study of media messages. This theoretically-grounded program has come to the

aid of many researchers who are seeking to better understand exactly what is being communicated in a variety of media areas. However, alterations within the media environment and the digital revolution we find ourselves enveloped within creates a unique set of challenges for DICTION. These challenges should not be treated lightly, many of which strike at the heart of content analysis as a method of inquiry. With this being stated, there is no question that digital media bring many opportunities for DICTION and the researchers who are utilizing this tool. The sheer volume of mass media messages available for consumption speaks all the more to the need to have a firm understanding of exactly what we are saying to one another. DICTION can aid us in this process, and do so in a valid and reliable manner that can ensure our work can serve to improve our basic democratic processes.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Big Data: A type of data defined by three characteristics: High volume, high velocity, high variety. Big data are large in quantity, continue to build up very rapidly, and are obtained from a wide range of sources.

Channel: The form of communication through which a message is provided (e.g., face-to-face, radio, World Wide Web, television, newspaper.)

Hypertext: The nesting of references to additional content within an existing message.

Interactivity: A level of communication to be distinguished from one-way and reactive communication. A necessary, but not sufficient condition of interactive communication is the ability to generate a meaningful utterance (u) based on information offered by another source in a distant utterance, u-2 or before (i.e., a meaningful utterance can be created from more than the most immediate utterance, u -1.)

Media: The plural form of medium. A means of communication most often used in association with reaching a mass audience (i.e., mass media, a means of communication that has the ability to reach a large audience.)

Message Tailoring: The production of a message based on unique information obtained a priori about the individual who will be consuming that message.

News: Unique information or insights presented on a topic deemed to be in the public's interest.

Politics: The art and science of government, affairs of state, the struggle for power, and the management of conflict.

Source: The provider of a message.