

# Research Methodology Assignment

A reflection of a Content Analysis of the Alternative Media's  
news articles

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## Introduction

In this research paper I'll reflect on the use of a qualitative content analysis. In the research presented here I studied the journalism of the alternative media, and more specific in how one form of these alternative media describes the political parties of Sweden through the framing of news. Since alternative media is a general concept about media that presents alternative facts (Holt, 2018; Haas, 2006), I selected for my study one defined form of alternative media in the form of right wing. This refers to a media that is politically to the far right with ideologies such as fascism or nazism.

My research focused on how the right-wing alternative media choose to portray the image of the political parties around the general election 2018 in Sweden, compared to one other right-wing alternative media. The method selected for the study was a qualitative content analysis due to the research focusing on analyzing the contents of the alternative media's news texts and how this is structured. In the following chapters I will discuss my results and how I approached the research of my selected phenomena.

## Research puzzle

### Research problem

The research questions and how they are designed are the core functions of each research design (Blaike and Priest, 2019). They also propose in their book, three types of questions in the form of what, why or how questions. In this chapter I discuss how I developed my research questions.

The alternative media's traditional role is to present facts that the producer of these texts' claim to be left out in the traditional media or to be a form of counterweight and competitor to the mainstream news outlets. A common way to describe these media platforms are that they sometimes could be identified as critical to immigration or politics and identified as right wing (Holt, 2018; Fuchs, 2010). The research puzzle I approached in this paper was how these alternative media outlets chose to portray certain issues. These issues and frames I looked for could be what these alternative media call the alternative facts that Holt (2018) and Haas (2006) mention in their respective articles.

A previous master's thesis that studied the general framing of Sweden, examined how Sweden is constructed in well renowned international media such as The New York Times or The Guardian. The results showed that international media stay close a stereotyped image of Sweden which is the images of both a Good Sweden, with developed welfare system. The other one being the Bad Sweden destroyed by immigration. She also explains that the image of Sweden is heavily relied on stereotypes (Linnander, 2018). My issue could however be similar but instead study how alternative media frame Sweden's political parties and if this is similar in the stereotyped view or completely different to the results from the well renowned international medias studied in Linnander's thesis.

Due to the short available time of this research assignment I identified two alternative media outlets to do my analysis on. These two news outlets were also selected due to their traditionally viewed right-wing position and hostility towards immigration. These two mediums were Fria Tider, which traditionally have been recognized as right-wing, and the web-based site Samtiden owned by members of the Swedish democratic political party.

To further narrow down my research I also choose a specific political event that receives a lot of attention in both mainstream and alternative media. This selected political event was the election of 2018 since I perceive it as a political event that receives a lot of attention in all form of media.

### **Theoretical perspective**

The role of alternative media is to present alternative fact that mainstream media does not present (Holt, 2018). The study fit into the area of journalism of the media and communication science subject. A relevant approach to the theory in this field is the theories of media representation and how the media choose to portray and frame news reporting, the framing theory. Since I study the framing of politics in the texts, it is relevant to use the framing theory. Entman (1993) emphasize that this theory describes how all forms of journalism are viewed through a "frame" and there is never such a thing as objective journalism. Everything presented is the perception of someone else. My study fits in this field of framing theory since I study the journalistic choices of the articles published in alternative media and these subjective perceptions. These alternative facts that compete with mainstream media that Holt (2018) and Fuchs (2010) discuss in their articles, could be a form of framing of journalism.

Entman (1993) also suggest that frames point the attention towards a certain issue. “Frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements” (Entman, 1993, p.55). This can be related to my study due to identifying elements that are both included and as well other content that are removed from the texts. My research questions will be based on identifying what alternative media obscure and include in their articles.

The issue is also highlighted in Linnander’s (2018) thesis who suggest further research in the field of analyzing the image of Sweden by performing a similar study in another context. My context is in the right-wing alternative media and a framed image of Sweden’s political party in the alternative media context. It could be of interest in my study if the image of politics is stereotyped as Linnander’s thesis suggested the society in Sweden is in an international context.

### **Research questions**

After studying the literature and limiting my chosen subject I developed two research questions. Those two research questions for the study presented in this paper are:

*RQ1: How does the right-wing alternative media Fria Tider compared to Samtiden frame Sweden’s political parties around the time of 2018s elections?*

*RQ2: What similarities and differences can be found in the portrayal of political parties around the election of Sweden in the alternative media?*

### **Paradigms**

After I identified my research questions, I also needed to identify relevant paradigms that connects to my research. To find a paradigm suitable for the qualitative content analysis is not always an easy task. The closest relation to a paradigm I identified was the interpretivism since I study cultural perceptions of news articles. An interpretivism approach is closely related to the classical hermeneutics approach (Blake and Priest, 2019). Collins (2010, p 39) explain that the interpretivism is about “understanding the world” rather than explaining it from a predefined reality. This is opposed to the positivism approach that believe there is one form of reality.

The positivism approach could also be used for a content analysis due to its use of logic and numbers. However, since the study explained in this paper was qualitative, a better approach was to use interpretivism.

Interpretivism also fit my study due to it focusing on the analysis of subjective framing, through the lens of the framing theory described by Entman (1993). Both the choices of the writers are subjective as well as my analysis and interpretation of the published media texts.

The approach in the research is an inductive approach. I selected an inductive approach due to the focus on answering my what-based question. Blaike and Priest (2019) assert how inductive or abductive approaches are better when answering a question based on what, or when researching explorational or descriptive problems. The abductive approach however is not suitable in this case since I am not studying material to understand why a certain issue exist. My research starts by focusing on how and what the issue is from the beginning. The purpose of the inductive approach is described by Blaike and Priest. “To establish *descriptions* of characteristics and regularities” (Blaike and Priest, 2019, p. 93).

## Method

### Content analysis

I choose to perform a content analysis of a selection of texts from the website friatider.se and samtiden.se. The content analysis was selected due to my focus in analyzing the contents and construction of the media texts published on those sites. Mayring (2000) explains that a qualitative content analysis expands on the basics of a quantitative approach to include textual analysis. Margit Schreier suggest that there are three features in a qualitative approach. “Three features characterize the method: qualitative content analysis reduces data, it is systematic, and it is flexible” (Schreier, 2014, p. 170).

The text analysis can be performed in many ways, such as discourse approach or an image approach (Ledin & Moberg, 2013). They also emphasize that a text analysis is not about creating a model of analysis, but rather approach it by opening different “doors”. The analysis is done through observing different aspects of the texts.

Boreus and Kohl (2018) propose however that a content analysis could be weak in identifying what is absent in the text. As Entman (1993) suggested this is as much interesting to identify what is absent, when studying framing. I however choose the content analysis as a method since it could be useful for studying the context and construction of many different media texts (Boreus and Kohl, 2018).

My first approach after I identified my research topic, was to design the coding variables, see appendix I. I began with constructing a quantitative coding book, to analyze the articles. This was my first step so that my selection of empirical material, the media texts, would be based on the variables that I aimed to identify in each article. As Layder (2013) writes in his book, variables can be everything from a certain emotion to words or names. My variables were developed from my research questions to help with answering the problems identified in those questions.

The second step of the process was to select a few articles from the websites all focusing on discussing the election of Sweden in 2018. These articles were as just mentioned, based on the variables so they included mentioning of a political party. The articles would need text about political parties so they could be related to my first research question. My selection of articles is further explained in the Sample-chapter. The selected articles are included in Appendix II.

When I had identified my selected articles, I performed an analysis of the variables from my coding schedule and wrote my code book, see Appendix III. My final step was to analyze the content in the text based on my variables to find qualitative answers to help with finding an answer to the research questions.

## **Sample**

I selected for this analysis eight articles in total, four from Fria Tider and four articles from Samtiden that is about politics of Sweden. To find articles I used the search function on the webpage friatider.se where I used the search word of *Riksdagsvalet*. Fria tider did not list on their site how many articles that resulted in.

To find empirical articles on Samtiden I approached the site in the same way as with Fria Tider. I used the search word *Riksdagsvalet*, which resulted in 110 articles.

The dates selected for this study ranged from the beginning of 2018 up until the day of the election on the ninth of September. The articles of 2017 were excluded to make the articles be closer and more directly related to the election. The articles from after the ninth of September were excluded since the election was done by then and I wanted to study articles that could possible influence the citizens voting process.

I selected political articles that did not include a certain individual by name which I will explain in the ethics-section. With including a name, I refer to people that not generally should be perceived as public persons. A highly positioned politician or government employee that could be viewed as a public person, should be generally acceptive of being part of public situations and in the media, and thus in some research processes.

The articles also needed to include the mentioning of one or more of the political parties according to my defined coding schedule. The number of articles selected were four from each website, resulting in a total of eight articles for the research. The limit was done due to the short amount of time of this research. A qualitative approach can also be very time consuming, especially in some forms of approaches such as interviews (Layder, 2013; Blaike and Priest, 2019). The eight selected articles that were used for the final analysis are included in Appendix II.

## **Ethics**

Layder (2013) mention in his book three ethical considerations. These are informed consent, protecting participants interest and anonymity of the participants.

Since I use a qualitative content analysis for my study, I will need to use a sample. A sample could always have the risk of including people's names or behaviors (Blaike and Priest, 2019), and therefore I did need to consider informed consent for studying articles published in alternative media. It should be noted that articles are published on a webserver with an internet domain. The journalists of the articles are aware that their articles are published on an internet platform. There should not be any doubts that they are unaware that their texts are online and public (Fuchs, 2010; Holt, 2018). Ekström (2013) explains that it is not always possible to ask for permission for a study, however it could be acceptable for some situations such as content access for the public.



Ekström (2013) also points out that informed consent and asking for permission is more important when studying an individual person and their behavior. Since the research questions does not ask how an individual person is portrayed, but how a political party is framed, this makes it a different study since it does not include someone's personal interest but instead political interests. As Derek Layder writes in his book: "the approach is not concerned with providing descriptions of specific (and therefore, identifiable) individuals or groups, but rather with revealing the underlying patterns of social behavior and the general principles that explain them" (Layder, 2013, p.19). It should be noted however that there are individuals that can be identified in the empirical texts. These people are however, as I believe for this study to be highly ranked politicians that should be considered a public person in their role as a politician, or in another similar position. My aim is not to study them as an individual in their behavior, but the political party's role in the text. I do however, not mention any individual person by their name in the presentation of results and every person is thus anonymized.

When I designed my coding variables, I also constructed variables that did not focus on the framing of a person, but on the political party as the research question asks. The first variable was based on which political party I study. The second was designed to identify the topic of the article and if this focused on the manifesto of the political party or a change of voters. The final variable describes if there is a good or bad reputation mentioned about the party. None of these variables are however connected to the framing of an individual person but instead the political party.

Blaike and Priest (2019) also mention the right to withdraw for participants. This consideration would have been more relevant for an interview, than the textual content analysis that I perform. Since I do not study individual and identifiable people's habits or behavior, there is not any interests on personal or intimate level conflicting with my findings. The result does not contain the names of an individual person so there should not be an issue with the anonymity of participants.

## Results

In this section I will present some of the findings from the selected articles. Since I performed a qualitative study there is no large amount of numbers to present. However, I will aim for this

presentation of making minor analyses of some of the data found because of the short timeframe of this study.

One of the findings of my study was the common way to mention politics is the decrease of voters of other parties. This was as well one of the primary variables I looked for. In the selected alternative media, there were more news containing information about success of a party that relates to the voters than the political agenda of each party.

In the case of the Swedish democrats there are in the analyzed articles a positive presentation of the articles about that party. As Fuchs (2010) and Holt (2018) agreed on there are alternative facts presented in these forms of media. These forms of presentation could be one of those alternative facts presented that the media want to highlight one part.

One of the articles presents data about the Swedish democratic overwhelming statistics regarding social media use. The articles continue with explaining why this could result in success without any further sources or researches presented. This is a similarity between both outlets I studied in this paper. Both Fria Tider and Samtiden show positive response towards the right-wing Swedish democrats party. The other parties are mentioned in a form of forced support of the Swedish democrats that seems superior to the other parties analyzed. Since my selected media are right-wing it is possible that they choose to frame the party that share a similar agenda in a positive way. This could be the stereotyped image of Sweden suggested by Linnander (2018).

At Samtiden the Swedish democrats are mentioned in more positive remarks and more often than any other party. In this case it could also be due to the website being owned by members of that party and it could be aimed towards a positively portraying themselves.

In general, one of the results shows how much negative remark the alternative media are directing towards the other of the parties included in Appendix 1. The article about Swedish democrats show more statistics of how that party increase in success, while other parties are presented in their more practical sense regarding why they lost voters. By this I mean for instance the overwhelming success in the use of social media that the alternative media suggest being a form of source to success. There is a more focus in general to the change of voters than that of the political agenda.

A difference between the two alternative media websites show that Samtiden also focuses on more of voter's habits than Fria Tider does in their texts where there is more focus on the agenda behind each party.

## Reflexive analysis on method

### Weakness and Strengths of a Content Analysis

The content analysis could be suited both in a situation when researching large quantities or when the focus is to perform a more qualitative study. For this paper the primary focus of the study was an analysis through a qualitative study of a few articles. Since my research questions is based on the words How and What, I selected the content analysis. The How-questions refers to how an image is constructed which would make it easier to understand through an analysis of the contents in a text. The content analysis is thus suitable for understanding how the text is constructed since it covers the analysis of the text's contents and construction (Boreus & Kohl, 2018)

As was also mentioned in the research paradigms, the approach in this paper was inductive since I study what Blaike and Priest (2019) refer to as an explorational subject. The qualitative approach could thus be a useful approach since it analyze the contents in depth. The quantitative approach however would be similar suited for this study if I instead wanted to identify a generalized image of the question. Since the study was qualitative there were only a small number of articles examined, in total eight articles which would make it impossible to draw any generalized conclusions from the findings in the empirical data. However, the qualitative approach helped with finding more detailed results to reflect about and with to compare with each other.

A strength with a qualitative approach is in the What-question. What themes can be identified in the text? I use the qualitative approach to further analyze the similarities and differences on a deeper level. This is different from what could be found in a quantitative approach, which would allow me to form a more generalized image of the issue in the research questions. This approach could be useful as well for the same research questions.

Boreus and Kohl (2000) points out that a content analysis as method does not include the analysis of what is absent from a text. Entman (1993) asserted that in framing it is also of interest to identify what is not included. This is also affecting the results. In the result chapter I only had the option to present what I found. It would have been more difficult with this method and the approach I selected, to find what is not included in the empirical data. Boreus and Kohl (2018) suggest the use of a discourse analysis for this instead. Since I designed coding variables for this study, these would

describe what I am looking in the text. This would further strengthen the argument that a content analysis makes it more difficult to find what is obscured from a text.

Another approach with a quantitative analysis is also the option to select more of the available alternative media platforms. Such outlets could be the online newspapers of Nyheter Idag or Samhällsnytt which is also situated in Sweden and could frame political parties different. With a longer timeframe more media texts could be combined to be analyzed. The qualitative approach is not always easy and could be very time consuming. This is something Blaike and Priest (2019) mentioned in their book regarding qualitative studies. Therefore, I did need to reduce the amount of media texts selected for the study to have the time to study them in depth which the qualitative approach requires.

The findings from this study could also be applied to a study based on an abductive approach. A study could be aimed at understanding why alternative media work in a certain way, which was somewhat suggested to be a competition with mainstream media (Holt, 2018; Fuchs 2010). For this approach it could have been better to use an interview as method than the content analysis. It could have been suitable to use an interview approach but with the use of another research question. I did not select the interview as a method since I aim to identify how something is framed. By interviewing writers of the articles that could have been more useful approach for a Why-based question and Why the alternative media construct news as they do.

### **Experience as a Researcher**

A weakness with using a qualitative approach is that the results are not always reliable. I analyzed the results from my own previous experience and cultural context. Boreus and Kohl (2018) emphasize that a qualitative approach contains measurements that must be done by a human. Since the approach and research design in this paper are qualitative and hermeneutic, it is influenced by my own previous experience and my own political views. I have a Swedish background and citizenship which can make me biased in the analyzing process of Swedish political parties. The same analysis could show a different result if it was done by an American media scholar.

When I selected empirical data, it is also in a qualitative approach very important to motivate my selections (Blaike and Priest, 2019) and why did I select this particular text. These are also considerations that must be argued for. The selection process is subjective, and my personal

experiences could influence what texts I choose. Collins (2010) also points out that it is even more important to be trustworthy when performing a qualitative analysis due to the analysis being based on the researcher's own perceptions and the studying of small amount of articles. As was mentioned in the paradigms the interpretivism is about understanding the world, which would be a subjective approach.

I selected texts based on my research questions. These articles were to include at least one or more of the political parties of Sweden in the text. The validity of the research would otherwise fail if these was not related to the research questions. In the questions I specifically asked how the political parties are framed and then selected my empirical data from that. I wanted to analyze the political parties and I did need to select empirical data that contained political parties in the text.

This is also a reliability issue with this qualitative study. If a similar research was to be done again, it not sure that the results would be the same if it is done by another researcher (Blaike and Priest, 2019, p.211). Another researcher could have selected completely different texts and interpreted them different which would produce a different result. This is the issues of reliability in a scientific research which becomes more important and difficult in a qualitative approach (Blaike and Priest, 2019; Layder, 2013).

The method I selected and how I approached the research kept me at a distance from the study. I remained anonymous during the entire research process. I accessed texts directly from the websites and analyzed them without making myself known by anyone. This could as well be an ethical issue, with the informed consent of me anonymously studying and observing a social situation in a media text.

## **Conclusion**

A reflection from this research is how the research puzzle need to be well formulated to produce good results. My research idea was inspired by a previous master's thesis as well as previous research articles to identify the issue of how alternative media could stereotype Sweden's political parties. As with every form of research, the method relates to the research problem and question. Without a well-defined background it would be much more difficult to research my identified phenomena and impossible to decide what method to use.

As with Linnander's (2018) thesis my approach could be used on alternative media on an international level. Another approach could be to apply this study to include mainstream media. A research design could be built around the concept of identifying what the alternative media calls "alternative facts".

In the process of writing this paper I selected my preferable method, the content analysis, as the first step. I then researched other articles that used the content analysis to understand what form of question it could be used for.

For the methodological approach I also used a consecutive approach. The content analysis was performed in four consecutive steps to build on each other and to make relevant selection of empirical material. As describe in the methods chapter I did this to find empirical material that is related to my code book and originally, the research questions.

However, it could also be important to not be to be locked in a fixed schedule. The writing and reading all go together. Sometimes it can be interesting to go back and for instance find more literature to add and to explain the findings or maybe another paradigm could be considered. As Collins (2010) shows in the figure on page 12 in her book, the research process is a circle. It is all about going back and forth between every part of the research. These are all experience that will be considered in my future research papers.

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## Appendix I: Coding Variables

1. ID. The ID that identifies each article. In my coding book each article gets numbered from 1-10 according to appendix II structure
2. Political party. How many times a political party from the parliament is mentioned.
  - a. Social Democrats
  - b. Left Party
  - c. Green Party
  - d. Centre Party
  - e. Moderate Party
  - f. Christian Democrats
  - g. Swedish Democrats
3. Topic. What is the topic of the article? I selected two topics to identify in each text.
  - a. Increase or a change of amount of votes
  - b. Manifesto, what is the idea/the political agenda behind the party
4. Reputation. Is the party framed in positive or negative remarks?
  - a. Positive, this is an increase of voters or good
  - b. Negative, this refers to when a decrease of voters is mentioned or when manifesto is criticized

## Appendix II: Selection of media texts

1. Fria Tider, 2018-02-15, *SD går till val på att "stoppa allt asylmottagande"*
2. Fria Tider, 2018-02-26, *Löfven: Rösta på mig – så ska jag rädda landet från brottslighet och bristande sjukvård.*
3. Fria Tider, 2018-03-02, *S öppnar för samarbete med Centerpartiet – för att stoppa SD.*
4. Fria Tider, 2018-03-03, *SD överlägset störst i sociala medier.*
5. Samtiden, 2018-01-02, *Valåret är här – så kommer det att gå.*
6. Samtiden, 2018-01-20, *Sifo: S tappar 3,3 och SD vinner 3,3 procentenheter.*
7. Samtiden, 2018-05-14, *Fler vill ha regering med SD än ren alliansregering.*
8. Samtiden, 2018-06-05, *SCB, Så har väljarna flyttat sig till SD.*



## Appendix III: Code book

ID	Political party	Topic	Reputation
1	Swedish democrats	Manifesto / Political agenda	Positive
2	Social democrats	Manifesto / Political agenda	Negative
3	Social democrats, Swedish democrats, Centre party	Change of voters	Positive for Swedish democrats Negative for other
4	Swedish democrats	Change of voters	Positive
5	Swedish democrats	Manifesto / Political agenda	Positive
6	Swedish democrats, Social Democrats, Centre party	Change of voters	Positive
7	Every political party	Change of voters	Positive for Swedish democrats. Negative for other parties
8	Every political party	Change of voters	Positive for Swedish democrats. Negative for other parties