CHAPTER IV

METHOD OF RESEARCH

After defining the scope and terms, setting the objectives and stating the hypotheses, the next activity in the process is to choose a method for conducting the research.

"The greatest invention of the nineteenth century was the invention of the method of invention." Indeed, today many methods of research are available. Further, the method of choosing a suitable method for research has grown into a systematic subject in itself, and it is called Research Methodology. Choice of a method depends upon the nature, the scope, the objectives and the depth of the problem on hand. In other words, one must justify the means.

If the research is of descriptive nature, it deals with the core problem in a superficial fashion. It does not get to the roots of the theme/problem. It can only explain the 'what' type of questions. The real issues can be probed with the 'why' and the 'how' type of questions, which are handled more efficiently by scientific methods.

1. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p.120

The word Science means a systematic or organized body of knowledge. Further, it also means "the systematic, objective, deliberate and controlled search for insights and accurate knowledge about a realm of phenomena." In other words, Science is a method of modifying and extending what is known or science is a method of research. Such a scientific method is a product of "observation, measurement and quantification." Here the observations have to be unbiased, measurements have to be accurate, and the quantifications must be based on the right mathematical and statistical procedures.

4.1. Choice of a Method

Several methods suggested in the books about Research Methods in Social Sciences, in general and in Library and Information Sciences, in particular, were studied in relation to the objectives and the hypotheses set for this study. (p 36-37) Finally, two methods were left in the fray. The two possible and suitable methods were

(1) To conduct a survey of the views and opinions of the reviewers and editors of the selected periodicals. This involves getting their response to a structured questionnaire

(2) To conduct a content analysis of the published book reviews from the selected periodicals.


After weighing the pros and cons of the two methods in relation to the stated objectives and the hypothesis, it was found that Content Analysis is a more suitable method for this study. Following were the reasons:

1. This study deals with book reviews of Library & Information Science books, appearing in the selected set of professional periodicals. These published book-reviews are essentially a type of mass communication. Thus, content analysis being a technique exclusively useful in communication studies, it is logical that it must be the most appropriate method for studying the book reviews. Also, the literature search suggests that book reviews were successfully subjected to content analysis (See p.160 Bibliography).

2. Content Analysis is related to book reviews more intensely than any other type of communications. Writing about the advantages of content analysis, T.F. Carney states, "In more down-to-earth terms, if you can employ content analysis easily, you will produce better essays and projects, synopsize your reading more effectively and more speedily, and make a more competent job of reviewing books. In the latter case, for instance, you can take what the writer claims in his preface to have done and conduct a little content analysis of the work to see whether he has done
It. You will be alerted to the problems he should have dealt with in going about his study, and so will not fail to notice whether he has or has not actually dealt with them." Further he writes, "Consequently, instead of producing a review which says 'I found misprints on pages such and such', you can state: 'The book is methodologically sound/unsound because of. The author claims to have established so and so. What is actually there is in fact thus and such'. You can review with speed and with confidence that you have the relevant facts at your finger tips."

This vindicates that book reviews are products of content analysis, to say the least. Thus, it is all the more natural that content analysis is the ideal method for studying book reviews.

3 The practical difficulty of tracing the addresses of reviewers scattered all over the world and waiting for their responses to a structured questionnaire makes the survey method more time-consuming, laborious and expensive with no marked advantage. On the other hand, content analysis is a comparatively easier, simpler and economical method. Above all, content analysis questions the published reviews direct instead of

5 T.F. Carney, Content Analysis p.18
6 Ibid. p.19.
seeking opinions which could be subjective of the reviewers and editors. Thus, more objectivity is pumped into the process of research when content analysis is selected as a method of study.

4 Content Analysis gives the method of observing the reviewer without any favour or fear. It does not even make the respondent conscious of observation. This advantage is absent in the survey method. Structured questionnaires prompt ideal answers, sometimes even contrary to the practice. Even if the respondent is honest, he may fail to relate some of the questions to any specific book review written years ago. Thus, the responses are less likely to be related to the practice.

5 There is yet another hidden danger in the survey method, particularly in relation to the present problem. If the opinions of editors and reviewers are mutually contradicting then it becomes difficult to draw conclusions. By applying content analysis, the study may predict about a source which is a combination of reviewer and editor. So, observations reflect on the nature of reviewing done by that periodical. Thus, one can get clearer patterns of attitudes of the source—a collective noun representing both reviewers and the editors of the periodicals.
After selecting content analysis to be the research method to be adopted, it is proper that the rudiments of the method are presented in brief for clearer comprehension of the present study.

4.2 Content Analysis

Content Analysis is not really a new technique. "... Content Analysis is as old as reading, viewing or listening. Whenever someone reads a body of communication content and then summarizes and interprets what is there, content analysis occurs." Obviously, as the name suggests, content analysis deals with the analysis of content of communication.

The word "content", according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means, that which is contained in anything. It is worth noting that this word has other meanings such as satisfied, pleased, intention, etc. Again, the word "content" in the context of a book or a periodical refers to the table of contents or just contents appearing at the beginning. It gives the list of chapter headings in a book or captions or list of articles appearing in a periodical. The page number on which the chapter or the article begins is also indicated against each item of the list. Thus, it shows the order in which the items occur in that document.

7. Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science, S.V. "Content Analysis"
In the context of content analysis, it is required to go beyond the above-mentioned restricted meanings of the word 'content'.

There are three aspects of content analysis. They are,

1. Descriptive Aspect
2. Counselling Aspect
3. Inferential Aspect

4.2.1 Descriptive Aspect

Here, the word content stands for the sum of the substance of what is contained in a document. In other words, content could be the theme or central idea or part or summary of the document under consideration. It is not out of place to say that in this sense content is like an abstract of a document. It can be said that, "Content Analysis is a central concern of both library and information processing professions. Without content and its analysis, there would be no selection, no subject analysis, little information retrieval and transfer, few reader services." This is the descriptive aspect of the content analysis.

4.2.2 Counselling Aspect

The counselling aspect deals mainly with interpersonal communications ranging from routine conversations to highly...
specialized interviews with applications in psychiatry and behavioural sciences

4.2.3 Inferential Aspect

In this sense, content analysis is a research method, used in social science and communication studies for analysing the message or content of any type of communication. The study of content analysis as a research method is the concern of this thesis.

4.3. Content Analysis, as a Method of Research

A study of content analysis, naturally, has to begin from the concept of communication. The term communication, like the words, 'life', 'energy' and 'electric charge' is one of the most used, yet least defined words. It defies definition as it encompasses shades of many established subjects like psychology, technology, law, ethics, sociology, etc.

The process of communication is complex in nature. One can make it comprehensible by asking questions, which form the oft quoted words of Harold Lasswell in his article, "Structure and Function of Communication in Society." Those questions are, 'who, says what, in which channel, to whom and with what effect?'

9. Laymon Dryson Ed. Communication of Ideas (Harold Lasswell's article is part of this book)
This, in other words, amounts to say that there must be a source of communication (who), a message or content (says what), a medium like print, radio, television, movie or conversation in person (in which medium) and a destination or receiver or consumer (to whom) in the process of communication. Further, the process is incomplete without a statement of the purpose of communication. The purposes could be information (e.g., teaching, writing, making of documentary movies and the news received from various media), persuasion (e.g., business advertisements, political campaigns and religious discourses) and entertainment (e.g., movies, television serials, stories, etc.) These are some of the broad goals of communication, which, in a nutshell, are described as, 'with what effect.' Thus, the source is linked with receiver through medium and message or content.

It is not always possible for a researcher to contact the source or receiver for their response on certain communication-related issues. Sources like authors, editors and directors of movies are too busy and difficult to access and receivers are too many in number, heterogeneous in nature.

One special feature of communication process is that the source and the receiver are highly inaccessible while the content or message that links the two is easily available.
Social scientists have found a method of understanding and predicting many characteristics about the source and the receiver by subjecting the content to a systematic analysis. This is the objective of content analysis.

Content Analysis, as a method of research is defined by many authors.

"Content Analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication."
- Bernard Berelson

"...is a systematic technique for analyzing message content and message handling - it is a tool for analyzing the overall communication of selected communicators"
- Richard Budd

"Content Analysis is a technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of message."
- Holsti


11. Richard Budd and others, *Content Analysis of Communications*, p 2.

Evolution in the scope and purpose of content analysis becomes very clear if the three definitions are compared. Berelson’s definition was concerned about the ‘manifest content’. Hudd calls it as ‘overt’ communication but extends the scope to include ‘message handling’ along with content. Holsti has widened the scope further by deleting the qualifiers such as ‘manifest’ and ‘overt’. Deletion of the two words brings even the implied or implicit or latent contents under the umbrella of content analysis. It covers all types of communications, written, spoken or sung. Even pictures, gestures, punctuations, pauses and puns can be objects of content analysis.

All these ideas can be summed up in Fred Kerlinger’s words:

"Content analysis, while certainly a method of analysis is more than that. It is .. a method of observation. Instead of observing people's behaviour directly or asking them to respond to scale, or interviewing them, the investigator takes the communications that people have produced and asks questions of the communications. There is a logic and economy about so viewing content analysis."

This method of research - like any other method - has both advantages and disadvantages. A select list of these is given below so that pitfalls are kept to a minimum and advantages are maximized

### 3.1 Advantages

1. "Time, labor and expense can often be saved when a researcher can go directly to the heart of his analysis, bypassing preliminary fieldwork, experimentation, or commissioning of documents."

2. There is less chance of the investigator becoming biased as Mr. I. Carney puts it, "using if you adopt an investigative and, instead of seeking facts to prove or disprove an hypothesis, you are simply recording details each in itself too insignificant for you to be able to see - and therefore be biased by its meaning. Only when you have all the facts can you see which are emphasized most, which least, only when all the facts are in can you see what is not there."

3. An investigator who employs content analysis, "can check on how the facts were obtained, because the method is explicit. He can check on the care with which the analysis was conducted."

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Thus, it is possible to rely on and build upon a study which has used content analysis in a way which is not possible with an impressionistic study. In simpler words, the method is more reliable and more valid.

4 Those familiar with content analysis can be much more clear-headed about drawing inferences. Thus, the method polishes the thinking faculty of the researcher.

5 The type of data collected in content analysis affords the only means of studying certain kinds of communication problems. Communication behaviour is best shown in the content. Source of the communication projects itself through the content.

4.3.2 Disadvantages

It is highly useful to know the disadvantages of any method before its applications. It helps us to keep its bad effects to an unavoidable minimum.

The text books on content analysis give certain shortcomings of the method. These fall into three major categories.

16. Carney, *Content Analysis*, p. 17
17. Ibid., p. 18
a. Those criticisms levelled by people who have some misconceptions about the method.

b. Researchers in history and literature, who are trying to point out how and where the content analysis was not applicable. But, there are people who have successfully used content analysis in history and literature.

c. There are some limitations given by the people who have understood content analysis, who have applied it in social sciences and communication studies where it is most applicable.

Following are a few of such very genuine limitations or criticisms that fall under the last category. However, there are many logical and substantial defences for each of these.

1. "... all content analysis does is to collect facts, the making of inference from the facts is not governed by the technique, or any technique, for that matter."

In other words, content analysis is not a method of drawing inferences. It only collects facts. This is true. But, the method ensures inclusion of maximum

number of relevant facts, thus, has a built-in control on the validity of the findings. And for inference-like most of other research methods - content analysis also depends on statistics.

2. "Content Analysis claims to be 'scientific' and so is more pretentious."

T.F. Carney says that content analysis is scientific in a "limited sense".

This is only a matter of definition. If one confines to the natural laws and deductive logic, even medical science can be proved to be non-scientific. Like any other scientific method in social sciences content analysis is hallmarked by observation, measurement and quantification. And thus, it is incorrect to reject content analysis as non-scientific. Carney says that content analysis is based on practical experience and that it works."

3. "Content analysis by focusing attention, restricts it."

20. Carney, Content Analysis, p. 13
21. Ibid, p. 281
22. Ibid, p. 13
23. Ibid.
This really has a desirable influence, and hence it is no criticism of the method. Restriction is exactly the purpose of focussing attention. Further, so long as the investigator is conscious of restricting, it is not restriction.

"... the written document, by its very nature, is only a part of the total message."

This is a serious limitation of the method. However, this is a general comment on any written document. No author or editor can write everything he wants to say. He/She leaves a lot to the imagination of the reader. The message is hidden between the lines, and sometimes even beyond the lines. Further, the same document can be interpreted or understood by different people in different ways. This may be due to social, political and psychological conditioning. This can not be helped. But, content analysis examines the message in the context and tries to focus attention on different aspects of the message and thus objectivity can be increased, and even the implied messages can be analysed, by being more cautious.

24. *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, S.V. "Content Analysis".
5. It can be remarked that content analysis just does what a historian or a literary scholar does intuitively. In other words, an impressionistic reading can do all that content analysis does.

True. But, content analysis has its place unshaken by all these comments. Consider the example of novelists and playwrights who were born and established before Sigmund Freud. They all had seen deeply into the working of the subconscious. But Freud made it into a 'public fact.' That is the difference between a literary scholar and social scientist. And that is the power of analysis. Thus, content analysis can achieve more than intuition and impressionistic reading.

Their definition, advantages, disadvantages and the defences in relation to some of the criticisms levelled against content analysis are aimed at proper understanding and application of the method to the present research problem.

The next chapter evolves a research design by adapting various components of content analysis such as categories and directions of communication content in relation to the hypotheses and objectives stated in Chapter III.

25. Carney, Content Analysis, p. 18