RESEARCH ARTICLE

FOUR STAGES OF THE MASS-MEDIA INFORMATION ANALYSIS PROCESS

Ștefan VLĂDUȚESCU

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6929-1614, CCCSEM, University of Craiova, Romania

Abstract

The present study is limited to knowledge in the field of journalism and mass media. It focuses on detecting, outlining, defining the stages of the media information analysis process. Four stages of the analytical process are delineated: understanding the topic (problem definition), establishing facts and generating hypotheses, processing information/raw data, and developing the analytical product. The first three are explained in detail, the fourth, being complex and laborious, is to be detailed in a subsequent research.

Keywords: mass media information, analysis, analysis techniques, communication

1. Introduction

Any analytical enterprise objectively involves the development of a cogitative process in several stages. The media analyst first resorts to the evaluation of the data base. It then proceeds to transform the raw aspects into an analytical product ready to be transmitted to the client/beneficiary. Its contribution consists precisely in giving "added value" to the primary/initial information. In the activity of obtaining information, either a risk, a vulnerability or a danger was identified for the media organ of affiliation, or an opportunity to promote the interests of the media organ of affiliation was identified. In this context, the relevant elements must benefit from a special exploitation, such as: informing the management of the press operation, informing the employer, notifying the research and criminal investigation bodies or initiating a collaboration with those to whom the actant of the preaa can be promoted).

The priority objective of mass media activity is to inform the public. From this perspective, the mass media analyst must know in detail the evolutions of the internal and international informational context. This knowledge represents a starting point for anticipating potential events and, subsequently, for substantiating information capture measures, as well as for the effective exploitation of opportunities to promote the interests of the media operator.

If there have been significant changes compared to the last information product submitted to the management, in relation to the evolution of events or the opportunity in the information, in cases where it is necessary to return to the information, then this will be mentioned and the continuity will be marked.

A particular situation is that in which the decision-maker (or the stakeholders), although informed, does not have any measures, the consequences of this fact being the aggravation of the danger or the partial loss of the favorable conjuncture for the achievement of an interest, this requires "raising" the level of information, in order to solve the manifested problem. If in the first phase, the analysis and, consequently, the information have a prevention and anticipatory role, at the given time, later the function of countering the analysis and its role of investigating the created problematic situation is exercised.

With the installation of the new administrative structures of the media operator (change of management, modification of the editorial policy), the media analyst submits to them brief assessments regarding the main risks and/or opportunities for the media operator.

Knowledge and information are offered to "bring" him to the area where the pertinent decision, correctly substantiated, can serve the common interest - preventing or counteracting some vulnerabilities or threats to the information capacity of the media operator or to the promotion his interests. In this case, the purpose of the information analysis is to make x-rays of the various levels of the informational ensemble, in which the current risks/opportunities can be detected, highlighting their punctual or chronic nature and their isolated or extensive character, but also highlighting the induced negative implications of the perpetuation of the state of affairs/

When the management formulates an explicit request for information on a certain topic of interest, a context in which the media analyst must identify and send - as far as possible - the related answers, in a concise and clear format.

2. The stages of the analytical process

Four stages of the analytical process are delineated: understanding the topic (problem definition), establishing facts and generating hypotheses, processing information/raw data, and developing the analytical product.

2.1. Accurate understanding of the concrete purpose aimed at by the realization of the analytical product/definition of the problem

Regardless of the situation that requires the elaboration of an analytical material, the analyst must be clear about what he has to do and what message he must convey. The stakes of this stage are as high as whether or not the analytical product responds to an explicit request. If there is such a request, it is possible that its wording - although it would contain enough elements to perceive the need - be cryptic, doubtful or laconic. In this situation, the analyst will either elaborate an approximate answer (in which he will include what he considers to satisfy the need for information), or will in turn request additional clarifications (where and when possible).

On the other hand, implicit requests are those unexpressed needs or even lack of awareness by the client, but intuited by the analyst. The approach of the mass media producer, to find out what is the decision-making situation at a given moment - depending on which he must send a (namely) information -, involves several problematic aspects.

Decision-making situations are the result of the appearance of stimuli or changes. They can be created by events or actions of factors that produce conditions strong enough to generate the need to do something. In relation to the determinants that induce the decision-making process, two main categories of decision-making situations are delineated: forced and non-forced.

In the case of non-forced (unprovoked or subjective) decision-making situations, the aim is to take the necessary decisions in time to avoid possible inconveniences in the future or to increase the advance against competitors or opponents. Such an action becomes visible following the change of the decision-maker's objectives.

In the media field, non-forced decision-making situations can be correlated with the presence of vulnerabilities that can maintain/favor possible actions with a negative impact on the line of protecting the interests of the operator or, on the contrary, of supporting and promoting these interests. Forced decision-making situations (provoked or objective) are determined by information or actions that indicate changes in the system:

a) significant deviations from the state of equilibrium of a system over which the decision-maker has authority and whose proper functioning is responsible;

b) new system states, generated internally, which are not necessarily unfavorable, but which require a decision;

c) perceived changes in the external environment of the respective system, which may affect its elements or its operation;

d) the emergence of opportunities that deserve to be exploited (for the achievement of objectives or the consolidation of favorable conditions).

In the field of mass media, forced decision-making situations can be associated with the emergence/presence of risk factors, danger, threats or aggression against the values and interests of the media operator.

In this first stage of the analysis process, the challenge for the media analyst to understand exactly what he has to do - is associated with the fact that the beneficiary's trust in him is assumed and acquired in equal measure (Vlăduţescu, Bizadea & Puzdeie, 2014, p 14). The existence of the request itself is presumed and is acquired by the nature and manner of the response. If the nature of the response has a technical dimension and concerns the content and impact of the analytical product, the manner of the response has an ethical dimension and concerns deontological norms.

2.2. The preliminary evaluation of the factual situation and the generation of hypotheses

In order to be able to decide on the optimal way to create the analytical product, the analyst must follow several steps aimed at (Vlăduţescu, Bizadea & Puzdeie, 2014, pp. 14-16):

a) the modeling of the analytical problem, in which it is evaluated simultaneously with the beneficiary's need for information, for each of the two elements compared, answers to the classic set of questions must be found (in format 6 - Who? What? When? Where? From what? How? – or format 8 – Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? With what effects? For what purpose?);

b) determining the necessary information, in relation to the existing ones, and their nature, at which point it is important for the analyst to detect which are the pressing data that he does not have and the informational resources that he can exploit, and, depending on the conclusions results, to turn to those sources that allow him to reduce the knowledge gap; in addition to the mentioned set of questions, the media analyst can also use the method of approach angles (which involves the definition of various criteria for identifying information, which constitute as many aspects of the subject subject to analytical expertise) or the model " of the spider's web" (in which the questions and the search for ideas generate each other, benefiting from the advantage of highlighting the relationships between them). The quintessence of the two methods mentioned is the "search grid" (which allows the structuring of the search and, in parallel, the organization of the database);

c) defining the primary data search fields, the level on which the analyst resorts to the identification of physical data and the knowledge capital of experts from various fields, calling, at the same time (in the case of mass media activity), to formulate a request for information to the level of search and data collection through specific means and methods.

After going through these operations, the analyst must generate the hypotheses (Gettys & Fisher, 1979; Kuang, Eysink, & de Jong, 2022), in this case, identify all plausible hypotheses, draw up the list with as many ideas as possible (through consultations at the by experts from inside or outside the entity in which B operates, which will subsequently be narrowed down to a reasonable number of hypotheses to be analyzed. At this moment, it is essential for the analyst not to eliminate plausible hypotheses only on the grounds that there are insufficient arguments to support them.

2.3. Comprehensive selection of the available data base and raw data processing

In order to be sure that no relevant aspect existing at a given moment is missed, the analyst resorts, at this stage, to the collection of the entire information base by accessing all available sources of information and to its organization according to certain criteria that. allows the rapid identification of significant ideas and their supporting elements, as well as the rapid structuring of the message to be constructed.

In that phase, the raw data is subjected to several procedures and techniques, as follows:

a) data processing (treatment), which consists in the application of operations, procedures and techniques, such as annotations, references, summaries, indexes, codifications, thematic classifications, assignment of a format, preparation for electronic processing;

b) corroboration, which involves confirming / denying the content of information obtained through the sources used, completing or completing it and subjecting it to analysis and synthesis in order to extract relevance. In other words, corroboration consists of analytical operations of integration and comparison of information, in relation to the existing knowledge, at the time, about the field or the problem to which it refers, with the aim of highlighting the connections and trends, in order to be able to separate or draw conclusions;

c) integration, which consists in bringing together several disparate data, harmonizing their component elements according to established criteria and norms, estimating the probability of the veracity and usefulness of the data, summing up the component parts (in order to incorporate the constituent elements into an independent information), but and establishing management methods;

d) analysis, which means the treatment of information by using logical, analogical, systemic and communication analysis methods, in order to establish the truth, the uncertain or the false or to identify and characterize the dysfunctions, vulnerabilities and risk factors that can constitute threats;

e) the synthesis, complementary to the analysis, consists in the oriented reunification of the component elements of the whole, depending on the connections discovered and researched through the analysis.

Given these clarifications, note that the analysis of media information requires competence and experience (known generically as "specialized analysis" or "expertise") for:

a) elimination of inherent uncertainty (natural insecurity, specific to the complex issues of achieving national security) and induced uncertainty (through manipulation and disinformation operations);

b) the use of appropriate tools and techniques for structuring information depending on the areas of national security achievement and their relevance, building premises and alternatives, in situations where the information is incomplete, ambiguous or deliberately distorted;

c) analyzing national security information through the use of specific methods that express the ability of specialized personnel to apply information theory to the field of national security, respectively, to be based on situational logic, which forces the focus of the analysis on the cause-effect relationship, means- purposes.

2.4. Analytical product development stage

Once the hypotheses have been established and confirmed and the arguments for their support identified, the analyst can move on to writing the final material, a process in which recourse is made to (Vlăduţescu, Bizadea & Puzderie, 2014, 23-24): presenting the facts, outlining the consequences and consequences, arguing the perspective and presentation of conclusions

3. Conclusions

Media analysis follows a four-step process: understanding the topic (problem definition), establishing facts and generating hypotheses, processing information/raw data, and developing the analytical product. These stages are designed unitarily and run coherently.

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