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Digital Place Narratives and Content Analysis in Tourism Research

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to introduce content analysis in the field of social research on tourism. Among other techniques, content analysis has undergone a revitalisation and acceleration in recent years, especially following a process of digitalisation and the spread of blogs, websites, social media, online reviews and digital spaces in which it is possible to comment, release content and express one's own opinion, making the information available directly on the web increasingly numerous.

On the basis of these premises, the aim of this article is to provide the reader with a definition of the technique by tracing, some specificities and useful characteristics. Subsequently, it will outline the difference between the quantitative and qualitative approaches to content analysis by examining the digital scenario and its particularities, especially the kind of digital data of which it makes use. Finally, it will offer a practical example of its application to the analysis of tourism narratives in digital spaces, centred on Quartieri Spagnoli in Naples. The example will be used in order to show how this technique could be a solution for specific cognitive objectives that are increasingly fitting in the production of tourism studies which adopt digital data in even more articulated designs that may involve a combination of different techniques.

Keywords: digital narration of the place, tourism research, qualitative quantitative and mixed content analysis, Quartieri Spagnoli, Naples.

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1. Introduction: content analysis in its new life

Among the many definitions of contemporary societies, the term ‘communication society’ often recurs, precisely because of the incessant multiplication of documents of various kinds, their almost boundless speed of transmission, their low-cost accessibility, and the unlimited possibilities of interaction and co-construction of content, as well as their meanings, thanks to the developments of Web 2.0. This proliferation of readily available data has led to a rediscovery of interest in content analysis, a technique which originated in sociology in the last century and subsequently spread to very different disciplinary fields. This is a technique that proposes a systematic analysis of forms of communication of various types, including writing, images, variations of social media, recordings and cultural artifacts to identify and study words, themes, concepts and patterns among them (Krippendorff, 2018).

The development of sophisticated systems of automated analysis, moreover, software and algorithms that allow the retrieval, storage and analysis of the most disparate contents have contributed to an exponential growth in the tools available for analysis, which has not, however, translated into sufficient theoretical reflection. In fact, the strong technical sophistication played out between programming language and empirical complexity, does not correspond to an adequate theoretical systematisation and a robust framing of the different techniques in the paradigms and analytical-conceptual systems that inspire them (Amaturo, Punziano, 2013).

Approaching this strand in the analysis of tourism phenomena implies recognising that much of the construction of the touristic image of place, activities, attractions and experiences passes through communicative processes that characterise contents produced in various ways around, in function of, and in relation to the tourism phenomenon under investigation.

In order to fully understand the methodological approach and technical characteristics, in the following article an attempt will be made to put in order the different possible types of content analysis in relation to their close connection with the evolution of the analytical object to which they refer, especially when this is transposed into digital form. It therefore provides a critical reading of classical and less classical approaches and techniques, updated with respect to the most innovative developments involving the web sphere, understood in a relational and interactive sense. In this space of opportunity, we can place the discovery/rediscovery of content analysis, moving from theory to empirical application on a specific case study concerning tourism: the construction of Quartieri Spagnoli as a tourist destination in Naples.

2. Key perspectives: definitions and differences within the approach

Content analysis is the main tool that sociology uses to investigate the vast amount of documentary traces that individuals and societies produce in the course of their daily activities in connection with specific experiences or in relation to certain issues. It is a research method that systematically describes, classifies and/or makes inferences on content (written, oral, graphic, etc.) with direct communicative connotations (if the content being analysed can be defined as sign-like, i.e. directly connected to the communicative function that connotes it) or indirect (if the content being analysed is instead defined as non-sign-like, i.e. capable of indirectly communicating something through its characteristics; Arosio, 2010). Specifically, content analysis allows the identification of the presence of certain words, concepts or elements within texts, sets of texts or content of different natures, including iconographic. Researchers quantify and analyse the presence, meanings and relationships of these words, concepts or elements, then make inferences about their meanings within the texts or content, about who produces them, about the intended audience and even about the culture and time of which they are part.

Content analysis cannot be recognised as a unique technique (Croucher, Cronn-Mills, 2021), rather this term designates a broader class of procedures that collect almost every analytical technique to extract secondary meaning from information or, in other words, that attempts to derive new meaning from existing content.

In the first definition, it is identified as a technique for breaking down any type of content into simpler constituent elements, the recurrence of which can also be calculated with a view to further processing, possibly after classification procedures in appropriate systems of categories. Berelson (1952: 18) describes it as “research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. In this definition, however, the specific object of knowledge is limited to a single element of the communication process, to *what is communicated*, reflecting the influence of the quantitative approach aimed at measuring content rather than investigating its latent dimensions. The first definitions of content analysis are quite similar to each other, and all have the same tenor as Berelson’s: the emphasis is placed strongly on the objective and systematic character of the procedure precisely because of the need to establish the boundary between the scientific analysis of a text or a symbolic communication and a simple impressionistic or literary reading of it, arbitrary and completely subjective. This makes it possible to distinguish content analysis from non-scientific uses of a text or symbolic production. According to Berg (2009), this method can be seen as a careful, detailed, systematic examination based on the interpretation of a particular set

of contents in order to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings; it can be regarded as a phase of information processing in which the content of communications is transformed, through the objective and systematic application of categorisation rules, into data that can be synthesised and compared. Therefore, content analysis is based on objectivity, systematisation and quantification. Firstly, objectivity refers to the process by which analytical categories are developed and used. The development of these categories should be done using explicit rules, so that when two or more coders collect and analyse data the same results are obtained. In this way the subjectivity bias is reduced, allowing the replicability of the study conducted (Kolbe, Burnett, 1991). Conducting a systematic analysis means, then, determining consistent criteria for including and excluding content or categories. Therefore, the requirement of objectivity eliminates the distortion of the analysis attributable to the subjectivity of the researcher. Moreover, systematicity allows the results achieved to acquire theoretical relevance and be generalisable. This quantitative model assumes the systematic and standardised analysis of the contents as a guarantee of the scientific nature of the interpretations and inferences that can be produced on the analysed contents. This model contrasts a qualitative model based on a subjective and interpretative reading of the message and its context by the researcher who has to establish what the system of inferences is between the content and the other elements of the communicative process in which the content is inserted, i.e., the *context elements*. Thanks to sociology's renewed interest in qualitative methods and in the hermeneutic-interpretive perspective as a procedure for analysing symbolic sets, and thanks to the development and diffusion of fast and acceptable tools for the quantitative processing of large volumes of data, including textual data, content analysis ends up being defined as “a set of research techniques, often very different from each other if not competing and even contradictory” (Rositi, 1988: 63). Content analysis becomes a technique that the researcher uses to draw out meta-inferences and interpretations of content either by having a precise interpretative scheme in mind (*theory-driven approaches*) or by constructing an interpretative scheme as the content under analysis is interpreted (*data-driven or grounded approaches*).

This dynamic of alternating strands of research can be traced back to the very beginnings of the technique. The technique dates back to 1743 with a first attempt at quantitative analysis of the Sion songs. This was the first version of content analysis based on the criteria of systematic and objective data collection with the aim of clarifying whether these songs produced by the popular vulgate deviated from the orthodoxy of the Swedish Church. By counting the religious symbols found in these songs and examining the contexts in which they appeared, the songs were deemed acceptable to the relevant community. It was then, in the early 1900s, that a strand of studies began to take shape in the

United States, where researchers made the analysis of printed texts an object of research, due to the rise of mass culture and the spread of daily and scandalous press. This development was closely linked to the needs of the era in which the control of mass markets, public opinion and the ethics of the journalistic profession began to become problematic. The first studies ended up concentrating on newspapers and the quality of the information they conveyed, quality measured through purely quantitative indices. This gave rise to an intense strand of studies on the quantitative analysis of mass media other than the press (radio, cinema, TV), supported also by the developments and influences of the empirical investigation methods in the social sciences that were then riding the wave, namely the survey approach, with the ambition of investigating public opinion through the recently formulated concepts in psychology of stereotype and attitude (Amaturo & Punziano, 2013). Soon, the focus of these studies began to concentrate on political communication (Katz, 1987): the study conducted by Laswell (1949) on the *political symbols* and *key symbols* in the slogans of the 1st of May in the former USSR between 1918 and 1943, followed by investigations on speeches, broadcasts, propaganda communications in the field of war is exemplary. It was Max Weber (Lazarsfeld, Oberschall, 1965) who, towards the middle of the century, proposed a research programme to the German Sociological Association based on the press and its content - a programme that was never realised, however - which involved measuring quantitative variations in the content of newspapers and then moving on to more exclusively qualitative examinations. Qualitative methods were not slow to take the stage. At the same time as the debate developed in the schools with more quantitative aims, Thomas and Znaniecki's work between 1918 and 1920 on the Polish Peasant in Europe and America was brought to the attention of the scientific community. This study aimed to analyse the variations in the relational and value models of these emigrant subjects through a qualitative sociological investigation. They analysed 700 letters from Polish immigrants to America. The study became the epitome of documentary analysis and interpretive sociology.

However, content analysis is still a controversial technique that rarely finds a place in research methodology manuals, precisely because of the unavoidable discussion of its limits. In fact, it is stressed that the complexity of communicative processes makes it impractical to carry out analyses centred exclusively on the manifest content, ignoring the fact that its comprehension cannot disregard either the interactive processes that are established between the interlocutors, or the multiplicity of meanings that can be traced within the content itself under investigation, which can almost always be read at many different levels. Therefore, the method appears excessively reductive for the complexity of communicative processes and the objective and scientific

criterion of the analysis risks impoverishing the data, especially in the case of computerised and automated analyses. If this is valid in the quantitative approach, there is no lack of criticism of the qualitative approach, which focuses on the arbitrariness of the research process, the absence of explicit methodological criteria and the non-generalisability of the results produced, precisely because they are the result of a subjective and interpretative reading.

With the automation of analysis systems, the boom in software and the contamination of approaches, three main phases of the analytical process have been strongly affected by technical developments. Firstly, the phase of data retrieval and input due to the advancement of the technological infrastructure. In fact, the technological evolution and its effects on the available documentation also affected the acceleration of the progress made in terms of computer programming, improvement of hardware components, text statistics and self-learning systems and software development. The development of algorithms, based on neural networks and advanced and intuitive visualisation systems, have made it possible to carry out analysis by combining the limits of the subjectivity of content analysis with its possible objectification, replicability, greater scientific rigour and inspectability of the empirical basis, procedures and choices made. The tendency to automate the procedures and systems of analysis has led to a continuous approximation of the objectives of quantification and extension in qualitative studies and to a progressive increase in the claims of depth in quantitative studies. This particular combination opens the way to the third phase in which there have been greater developments, namely that connected with the adopted analytical approaches, leading towards the continuous combination of approaches in the conviction that the strengths of one can compensate for the weaknesses of the other and *vice versa* (Denzin, 1978). However, this approach is associated with a need to find a common ground and language to methodologically integrate the results of the two approaches, qualitative and quantitative. It is in this space of mixture that *mixed methods* fit in, with the aspiration of acting as a third approach in research (Tashakkori, Teddlie, 2010).

3. Content analysis: specificity and technicalities among quality and quantity approaches

3.1 Refitting units and principal distinctions

What makes a distinction between the different types of analysis possible, if not more clearly demarcating the claims of the approaches given the continuous commiserations and the pervading aura of mixed methods, remain the different units of enquiry that can be taken into account by content analysis.

In the *quantitative approach*, content is defined as the set of *minimal units of meaning*, such as the single graphic form, word, lemma or text segment. These are simple units of investigation functional to the application of the statistical analysis of the text with the objective of studying the relationships between these units, both with respect to the other units present in the individual texts and with respect to the overall corpus under analysis (i.e., the set of texts under investigation). The purpose of this perspective lies in the possibility of reconstructing the entire structure of the text from the systemic and statistical analysis of the relationships between its individual parts, in contrast to one of the fundamental criticisms made of content analysis. This ambition allows us to bring out the latent dimensions underlying the manifest meanings conveyed in the texts analysed by focusing on the mechanisms of relational association between minimal units of meaning, i.e., individual words, and the units of context in which they are contained, i.e., individual sentences (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2021).

In the *qualitative approach*, instead, the unit of investigation corresponds to an *extended unit*, with an overall and autonomous meaning, inseparably linked to the context unit that contains it. These are sentences, paragraphs, portions of text that can be traced back to a single argument, opinion, behaviour. The purpose of this perspective lies in the desire to provide a profound interpretation of the content rather than to explain the associations between its minimal units. In this, highlighting the thematic relevance of the extended units by working on global decoding operations of the meaning of the whole analysed corpus (Mayring, 2004).

The different adoption of units of investigation in the two perspectives means that: the first approach treats the corpus as numerical data on which to apply statistical analysis, the second treats the corpus as an unstructured set of data to be subjected to interpretive and hermeneutic methods.

This differentiation provides a clear explanation of how there are two different ways of producing knowledge in content analysis. On the one hand, a quantitative, standardised and systematic way of doing content research that looks at recurrences of minimal units of meaning according to the application of statistical analysis techniques. On the other hand, a qualitative, less structured and non-standardised way that considers extended units of meaning as a function of a deeper semantic and cognitive interpretation. Both modes of knowledge production use a systematic approach to organising the data, a series of defined steps to put the data in order and a coding frame, which allows these different modes to be framed under the general umbrella of content analysis. According to Schreier (2012), qualitative content analysis can be defined as data-driven and the frame and coding process it provides can be adapted as the analysis progresses, thus defining exploratory, progressive and *in itinere*

knowledge modes. The coding frame is considered a part of the analysis itself, precisely because as the coding process of the analysed content proceeds, new knowledge and theoretical hypotheses are produced that are tested and retested as the analysis proceeds. This approach focuses on both explicit and latent content, meaning content that is not directly present in the data, but deduced from the uses and functions attributed to the content under investigation and the context within which it is produced. Quantitative content analysis tends to be concept or theory-driven whereby hypotheses will be deduced from theory and data will be sought to confirm them. Precisely because of this extreme formalisation, the coding frame tends to be more rigid and is considered part of the data collection, completely detached from the data analysis phase which, instead, will be conducted following strict statistical procedures.

3.2 The qualitative perspective

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) distinguish three main approaches in qualitative content analysis plus two general approaches. The first approach can be called *conventional or exploratory* and is preferred when limited research has been conducted in the area under investigation and existing theories do not work effectively to understand the phenomenon under investigation. Conducting this type of content analysis implies engaging fully with the data and allowing codifications to emerge from the research experience itself through a properly inductive procedure as no predefined codes, standards or expectations are imposed on the data of a theoretical nature or based on prior knowledge. The second approach has been termed *directive or explanatory* and, unlike the first, relies on theory and research as a guide to the coding process. It is generally used to extend and deepen (or potentially challenge) the literature and theories guiding the analysis. In general, existing literature or theories can focus research questions, help identify important concepts and provide guidance for the development of a coding frame. Where or when existing literature or theories are not up to the task of providing adequate coding systems, the analysis may use the conventional approach. The last approach is identified as a *summative or relational* approach. This is similar in procedures and objectives to quantitative content analysis, so much so that it proceeds with the identification and counting of specific words to show how repetition can be an indication of the relevance of certain issues. But the analysis does not stop there. In the second wave it aims to study the latent dimensions of meaning as part of the process itself by interpreting the underlying meaning of a given configuration of significant words highlighted in the texts. This allows us to understand when and how different terms are used, providing precise elements for a better understanding and deepening of the relational systems between terms

recontracted in the data and investigated in specific contexts. With respect to orientations, on the other hand, we can identify a first class in *thematic analysis* which turns out to be the easiest way to analyse qualitative data, in particular data related to interpersonal and relational issues. It focuses on three key questions: recurrence (e.g., identifying a given message and its repetition by several people); repetition (e.g., identifying explicitly repeated key words or phrases that demonstrate the significance of certain themes for several subjects); and strength or intensity (e.g., identifying how vocal inflection, volume, or pause is used to emphasise or minimise certain statements in discourse or how the use of characters, emoticons, or other particular elements in texts can be traced to specific orientations, feelings, and biases expressed by subjects). The second orientation is *Grounded Theory*, which is in fact a sociological theory arising from systematically obtained research data (Glaser, Strauss, 1967). The aim of this theoretical orientation is to proceed from the bottom up, as the data are analysed string by string, making the most relevant analytical categories emerge from this in-depth interpretation. This produced system represents the real result of the analysis.

Following the discourse of Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2021), whatever the approach or theoretical orientation adopted, qualitative content analysis can be summarised in seven main stages, between which there is circularity, elasticity and non-rigidity in the development of procedures: 1) formulation of the research question and literature review (if existing or where deemed necessary); 2) selection of content and data collection using one or more tools (interviews, ethnographic field notes, documents, digital social exchange, etc.); 3) construction of the empirical base and preparation of the dataset to be analysed (scraping, API or manual collection for material from the web, transcription for interviews, interrogation for images, video, audio, etc.); 4) start of the coding process (inductive or deductive, from data or theory-driven) to develop the coding framework that should guide the identification of categories and themes; 5) identification of the categories and themes that emerge from the coding of the data; 6) analysis and interpretation of the results by reviewing codes, categories and themes; 7) return of the results in the form of an interpretative and analytical frame.

The qualitative content analysis process generally reduces and optimises data into manageable segments, is systematic in order to facilitate the insertion of data into the coding frame and remains flexible throughout to provide the best possible interpretations of the collected data. Data can be collected in a variety of ways, including surveys, questionnaires, interviews, field observations, printed material (books, newspapers, magazines) or audio-visual material (films, online videos, etc.), even to all digital material found on blogs, forums, social media and so on. What remains fundamental in this qualitative approach is to

take into account the meaning of the content under investigation and the contextual significance it assumes, with the aim of classifying large amounts of data into an efficient number of codes, categories and themes (the three central elements in content analysis in this approach), encapsulating similar evidence and meanings in the content under investigation. Central to this is, therefore, the careful scrutiny of the data and their organisation into these increasingly abstract groups in order to understand hierarchies and connections between emerging concepts. Hence, codes can be defined as basic labels assigned to a sentence or segment of text/content in the data. These provide a means of identifying key points in the data and continue to emerge as one moves through the data. Such codes are the basic level of qualitative content analysis. Codes can be developed in three ways:

- *Open coding*: which consists of subdividing data to outline concepts or categories to represent blocks of data (themes). The data is reviewed line by line. Everything is coded in the transcripts to better understand what is being analysed. A researcher typically compares emerging codes to support the identification of further emerging codes. This is known as the constant comparison approach and is a great way for researchers to identify similarities and differences in data.
- *Theoretical coding*: whereby data are selectively coded based on a theoretical lens. Codes are developed from the transcripts and compared with other codes in the transcripts. Themes emerge from the data, but the selective sampling process allows the identification of other aspects of the data to be overlooked as the focus is based on a specific theoretical perspective driven by sensitising concepts or relevant empirical dimensions.
- *Axial coding*: involving an inductive and deductive process of mutual correlation of codes and creation of categories which implies that data are re-read with a theoretical coding in mind after their open coding or, vice versa, with an open coding in mind after their theoretical coding.

The coding process will develop into a coding frame which is a critical component of successful qualitative content analysis. It must be carefully constructed, described and maintained during the study because it represents both the preparation of the material, the analysis and the interpretation and production of the results. An inadequately developed coding structure will result in a weak study. Therefore, a good way to start is to identify a few pre-set codes based on the research questions and then develop and enrich them as the analysis proceeds, as theoretical hypotheses are formulated and as connections are found between the data thus organised. The coding frame is fundamental for the subsequent development of the other two basic elements, categories and themes. Categories are large groups of codes used to structure the analysis. Categories help to reduce the number of codes used to classify data, as they

group them into semantically more abstract and general concepts that reflect the relevant dimension to which the grouped codes in the category relate. Themes are higher level (more abstract and inclusive) groups of categories. Themes identify the main elements in the data and are usually limited in number. They help to make sense of the world and will play a critical role in the interpretation of the data. If we analyse texts describing certain locations, we might find phrases referring to holiday homes, tourist info points, train connections, these labels might become the codes of our analysis. Hierarchically these codes belong to the services category; the central theme to which the discourse is conveyed will be local tourism.

3.3 The quantitative perspective

The research path changes when we move to the side of quantitative content analysis. From this point of view, content analysis is a research method for describing, classifying and/or making inferences about communication messages or, more generally, about contents that explicitly or implicitly possess communicative connotations or intent. In this modality, the research path is rigid, pre-established and highly formalised, therefore divisible between its different parts and to be followed in a linear manner. The structure, this time, can be articulated in the following steps: 1) formulation of the research question, explication of the objectives and review of the literature; 2) identification of the population of reference content for the study, circumscription of scope and context, and their sampling/selection; 3) initiation of the categorisation process, choice of content scale and counting method; 4) construction of the data collection tools and of the empirical base with preparation of coded sheets or coding sheets followed by the conduction of a pilot study and evaluation of inter and intra-coder reliability; 5) data analysis through monivariate, bivariate or multivariate statistical applications, both on the text considered as a set of its minimal units and on the categories and distributions that characterise them; 6) return of the results in the form of graphic and statistical summaries.

Before collecting data, it is necessary to have a clear objective, research question or hypothesis: the key to a successful quantitative content analysis is to make sure that you choose the right data and have an adequate sample of the population to address the research objectives, questions and/or hypotheses. It is crucial to keep in mind that the objectives of the study determine the data that will become the object of the study: when collecting data for a content analysis, it is necessary to be systematic in choosing certain types of data (justifying the choices made, the strategies used, and the cases reached). In this regard, when returning the results of your research it will be useful to provide a

detailed description of the sample, the time frame to which they refer and any other relevant information that helps better circumscribe the population of content under investigation. In other words, it is necessary to clearly define the selection procedure of the communication units to be examined by also clarifying the context within which they are embedded.

In terms of the categorisation process, content categories in this type of analysis are areas, themes, groupings, classes or types with explicit boundaries into which content units (data) are coded for analysis. Firstly, a thorough literature review will need to be conducted to determine which categories other researchers have used in content analysis on related topics by adopting deductive coding, or they will proceed to create their own categories through inductive coding. It will be important to remember that categories in quantitative content analysis must be mutually exclusive (different categories must not overlap), exhaustive (each unit must be classified in a category), and based on a single, unambiguous criterion for assigning each unit in the intended categories.

Next, the researcher has to choose the scale of the content or unit of analysis he/she is going to code, and also has to think about how he/she is going to count the units of analysis: the research objectives of a study determine the scale of the content being coded. The unit of analysis or content scale can be distinguished into:

- *unit of registration*: it is the content that is being analysed, which can be identified and counted (words, sentences, reconstructed categories, etc.); in other words, it refers to the level of decomposition of the content down to the lowest of its articulations on which the analysis will be conducted.
- *unit of context*: this is the domain within which the unit of recording is inserted and is significant because, when conducting a content analysis, it is often necessary to consider the context surrounding the unit of recording to ensure that one does not encode a sentence in the wrong category; in other words, the identification of the unit of context helps to define the importance to be attributed to the so-called external elements which contain the smallest element chosen as the unit of classification (e.g. for words, they can be sentences, paragraphs, texts).

For category counting to detect relevance, data can be assessed in three ways: by using *frequencies* to refer to the number of times a unit is recorded in a piece of content; by using *space and time* parameters, e.g. noting the amount of printed space devoted to a message or the time in minutes a person talks about a topic in an interview; by using *intensity or direction* parameters in order to understand the level of favour/dislike, the polarisation of emotions expressed, and so on.

Once these elements have been preliminarily established, it is possible to move on to the data collection and organisation phase. By systematically coding the contents under analysis, it will be possible to identify all the characteristics considered relevant to the study conducted and to solve the cognitive problem for which the study was launched. In this regard, it is often useful to implement this phase of data collection through the creation of a *coding schedule* or a *coding sheet*. The former is equivalent in every way to a standardised questionnaire used by the surveyor to interrogate the contents being analysed and to code their characteristics into appropriate category systems: this allows each sentence to be placed in a single category describing the purpose of the sentence or to retrieve information on the context or structure of the content by coding it appropriately. The second one is equivalent to a data matrix in which the cases/detection units will be recorded in the row and the variables/characteristics detected on the cases in the column. It is recommended, before starting the actual research, to conduct a pilot study by testing the coding sheet or coding sheet produced to code a portion of the content that will serve as a test. The aim is to test the coding process and possibly ascertain what problems might arise in the coding and analysis (e.g. the researcher can realise that he/she has not considered all possible categories for a given characteristic, or the researcher can realise that there is ambiguity between the meanings of the categories such that the assignment of the contents is not unambiguous, or the researcher can realise that he/she has left out recurring characteristics that could improve the analysis and interpretation of the contents under analysis).

After that, in the analytical process, it is necessary to consider how many people will code the content. If there is more than one coder, it will be necessary to understand how much agreement there is between the different coders in categorising the content (inter-coder reliability) or how much in the coding process the standard of attribution of the same coder does not change (intra-coder reliability).

In the data analysis phase, on the quantitative side of the content analysis, the processing on the coding system produced could start from a very simple level in which the percentage or number of times a certain category is found in the sample is reported. If, on the other hand, a word was chosen as a unit of detection, this simple operation could consist of reporting the occurrence or frequency next to each of the words identified in the analysed content, thus resorting to techniques of monivariate analysis. A further step could consist of analysis of the associations between recurrent categories or between recurrent words, in this case developing techniques of bivariate analysis. And, again, to develop more complex analytical systems, the researcher could utilise multivariate and multidimensional techniques for qualitative or textual data,

aimed at working on the set of interconnections and relationships between all the categories under analysis or all the words constituting the corpus under examination, which aim to detect the latent dimensions and themes contained in a large collection of data (e.g. by means of factorial techniques of correspondence analysis) and their natural groupings (e.g. by applying cluster analysis techniques). Each of these techniques should be used in coherence with the research question and the objectives of the study, but especially by assessing the variability, consistency and robustness of the category systems produced (Amaturo, 2012).

3.4 Some reflections and directions

In both procedures, whether qualitative or quantitative, the analysis can make use of a support system based on the use of software designed to pursue the objectives of content analysis. On the qualitative side, software such as CAQDAS, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis, is commonly used. These tools allow manual labelling of portions of text with codes referring to concepts that the researcher wishes to highlight. This is a reasoned approach to reading, coding and organising documentary material that requires prior reading and knowledge of the documents. They are based on Grounded Theory and are also defined as annotation aid systems, precisely because they reproduce the steps of reasoning that underlie qualitative content analysis procedures, providing the researcher with organisational support and not a tool that replaces his or her interpretative capacity. In other words, they do not produce results directly. On the quantitative side devoted to the application of statistical analysis to category systems or textual data, if the latter are used, one tends, at times, to prefer lexicometric-type approaches based on comparisons of lexical profiles and frequency distributions of enumerated lexicons with production of lexical tables, identification of characteristic and modal forms, calculation of indices, emergence of latent thematic dimensions, also providing the possibility of developing a semi-automatic analysis of the text in categories, which does not require the researcher to read the text under analysis beforehand or to have any prior knowledge. Software of this type allows for synthesis, exploration and analysis of data and is closer to dictionary-based content analysis software or to development environments with autonomisation of procedures and application of mono, bi and multivariate analysis. On the other hand, if the researcher works on coded categories as qualitative variables, all statistical analysis software can be used to support the researcher, precisely in order to produce that base of results for which the researcher will have to provide adequate explanations. In other words, these types of software directly restore results.

Having reached this point of explanation, it can be stated that, in general, in quantitative content analysis procedures, the coding, classification and analysis phases are distinct and sequential; in qualitative content analysis procedures, coding, classification and analysis are one, in an integrated and concurrent process. The choice of using one or the other is dictated by the research question. This constitutes a fundamental element of the success of the analysis: it guides the development of the coding frame and the process of rationalisation of the data, making it necessary to be coherent with the whole system of choices made by the researcher. However, as mentioned at the beginning, since these techniques are controversial, they are very often used in combination and in the case study applied to tourism presented below it takes on precisely this connotation. This leads to demonstrating in practice how a skilful combination of techniques from the same family can help to triangulate results and overcome the limitations of each individual technique by focusing on the potential offered by the others. In a more or less conscious way, this leads to a rapid and progressive approach to mixed methods research as a natural methodological evolution and as a necessary basis for reflection (Amaturo & Punziano, 2016) when the object of analysis is tourism-related content that exists offline but also online (Punziano, 2022).

4. Content analysis in tourism studies

In recent years, an increasing number of studies in the field of tourism have used content analysis as a tool to support the analysis of transcripts of interviews, focus groups or open-ended responses to questionnaires, the analysis of documentary, textual and audio-visual material, and, in recent years, focus on digital material, especially from websites, blogs and social media (Camprubí, Coromina, 2016).

In this context, Hall and Valentin (2005) identified several uses of content analysis in the field of tourism to conduct studies on advertisements and the images of tourist destinations, destinations and places. Zhang and Cameron (2003), for example, examined China's promotional campaigns in the United States through the study of the use of images. Sirakaya and Sonmez (2000), on the other hand, analysed tourist brochures from all tourism offices in the United States to describe potential differences in gender representation. Other studies centred on content analysis were developed to examine content generated by tourists themselves in relation to direct experiences. Yagi (2003), for instance, undertook a content analysis of 120 online travelogues written by Japanese and American tourists in order to investigate how encounters between tourists and their cultural variations are reported. Chen and Gursoy (2001) analysed open-

ended responses to questionnaires given to tourists after visiting industrial heritage sites in southwestern Pennsylvania to ascertain their motivations for visiting these sites. Also, content analysis was used to investigate political content to determine the relevance of tourism in the national political agenda. Padgett and Hall (2001), for example, sought to identify the importance of tourism as a political issue in the 1999 New Zealand general election through an analysis of four major newspapers. And again, content analysis was also used as a tool to enable meta-reflection on the misunderstanding of conceptual issues used by different scholars in the study of tourism. On this topic Sirakaya, Jamal, Choi (2001) conducted a content analysis of definitions of ecotourism in scientific articles. This technique was similarly used as a tool for critical social analysis. Cloke and Perkins (2005) in this way used content analysis to examine the commodification of the adventure tourism product in New Zealand. Finally, content analysis was used as an identity and profiling tool for the tourists themselves, for example by studying images taken by travellers that highlight the relationship between themselves and the landscape or that address the reworking of the meaning of attractions. Albers and James (1988), perhaps, used content analysis to investigate the relationship between photography, ethnicity and travel and laid the foundations for empirically informed semiotic analysis in tourism.

However, the usefulness of content analysis as an analytical tool in tourism studies has probably been largely neglected compared to other research methods (Athiyaman, 1995; Jamal, Hollinshead, 2001). Overall, however, it can be argued that studies that have used content analysis as a primary research tool in tourism studies have not examined newspapers or other media such as television or radio, with the exception of scholars such as Nickerson (1995), who used content analysis to investigate the representation of gambling in newspapers. This makes one wonder how tourism scholars have in fact ignored the fact that it is the mass media in general, and not academic journals, that mainly influence public opinion or tourism choices. Yet, research in this area is surprisingly scarce in earlier times. The reasons for this are unclear, but it is undeniable that the current panorama is bucking the trend: analyses of sites such as Airbnb or TripAdvisor, to mention a few, are rife, not only in academic research, but are also the prerogative of small and large entrepreneurs, and analysts and consultants in the sector, making this technique one of those analytical skills that is indispensable in understanding the tourism phenomena in an increasingly digital society.

5. Digital place narratives on a specific case: Quartieri Spagnoli in Naples

The case study that we have chosen to present to demonstrate the argument made in the first part of this article is intended to show the reader how content analysis can be an excellent tool for the study of a phenomenon through different perspectives provided by different actors involved in the tourism process and in the narrative that is built around this object. This choice was made in order to leave the reader with a useful outline to understand how it is possible to study tourism starting from data on the web and to observe the tourism phenomena from different angles. Taking up the narratives of a very particular neighbourhood in the heart of the city of Naples in Italy, the Quartieri Spagnoli, we will proceed to the development of a research path combined with content analysis tools that simultaneously take into consideration the narratives of the neighbourhood through newspapers, reviews and forms of self-narration. These combined operations will be carried out with a view to investigating the kaleidoscopic digital representation in the construction of a tourist destination from the perspective of information professionals, tourists themselves and those who offer tourist experiences based on that place.

5.1 The case background, data, and methods

Representations linked to history, tradition and folklore, but also to crime and degradation, are the different faces that for years have distinguished the narrative of the Quartieri Spagnoli (QS), one of the areas that most connotes images of the city of Naples. And it is precisely on the narration of these places that the study conducted by Palmieri, Salusto Palmiero and Guadagno is based (2022) which is here used as an exemplar case in the application of content analysis in the study of a tourist destination developed from the digital narrative pre-existing on the net.

Today, the Quartieri Spagnoli (QS) is one of Naples' most popular tourist attractions. The major tour operators, as well as sites and platforms dedicated to tourism, such as TripAdvisor, depict the district as a real attraction, dense with socio-cultural connotations staged in cultural products, performing arts and artistic representations of the city. But the path that has led the district to welcome a large number of tourists has been long and complex, with a starting point that is decidedly at odds with the current representation.

Founded during the Spanish domination, the QS were built for dormitory purposes with an urban structure like a network of narrow alleys, with tall, fragmented, densely populated buildings built behind the city's commercial and busiest streets. This architecture, however, favoured the emergence of crime.

However, over the years, this population of the district has evolved into a broader range of social types, from the renowned entourage of artisans and tailors to the nobles linked to the nearby via Toledo, to the proletarian sector of the first recession, up to more recent times when the different stratifications have been used as an attraction and a feature to the tourist market. The identity of the place and its imaginary have led over time to the QS being seen as central geographically but marginal socially; as a marginal area characterised by great social difficulties, a weak local economy, a degraded built environment and persistent poverty and social exclusion (Amato & Rossi, 2003). Moreover, the reticular structure makes the boundaries of the place recognisable from the gates leading to it, which has led to a strong sense of identity on the part of the inhabitants, who experience a specific territory enclosed within well-established boundaries. This strong sense of belonging is in turn characterised by a dense informal network. It is therefore not difficult to frame the QS as a place with multiple identities, which sees the coexistence of representations linked to history, tradition and folklore, accompanied also by crime and degradation.

The urban regeneration of recent years, conducted from above (institutions, to mention one, the opening of the Toledo underground station on the city's main line, which has made the district more accessible and reachable) or marked by actions from below (citizens' associations, traders and individuals who have filled the area with activities, facilities and services) has, in fact, helped to reduce the marginality of QS in comparison to the rest of the city.

The district has thus also begun to experience a rehabilitation from a tourism point of view, made possible thanks to the construction of a media and digital place-brand (Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013), which incorporates a recovery of historical memory, of objects and places of identification, of construction and deconstruction of an *authentic identity* of the place (Punziano, Saracino, 2021). The place-branding process has made it possible to make QS known to a distant population, redirecting the collective imagination of the place characterised by heterogeneous identity, cultural and urbanistic features.

In order to understand how this change in the centrality of place to the position of tourist destination was possible, the authors posed several questions: how did the different voices in the field narrate and convey representations of place over the last decade? How have these contributed to the identification of QS as a tourist destination? To answer these, the authors devised a mixed research strategy consisting of a content analysis based on documents found on the web and related to:

1. *Journalistic storytelling* (articles from the online archive of the newspaper La Repubblica - Naples).
2. *Tales of tourist experiences* (reviews published on TripAdvisor).

3. *QS forms of representation* (iconographic study on Google Street View).

On the first two narratives, official information and visitors' tales, an automatic and quantitative content analysis was carried out. This was mostly textual and aimed at capturing the representations emerging in the structuring of the imagery of the place. With regard to the iconographic narrative, hermeneutic evaluations were carried out, closing the circle of reflection on the emerging representations of the place and bringing to light the convergence of different narratives over time, an essential basis for the evolution of the collective imagination.

An examination of the databases on newspaper articles and reviews led to the identification of specific categories of meaning along the 2010–2020-time axis. For coding of the articles with respect to the prevailing arguments, the categories used were crime and violence, art and culture, identity and culture, stigma, and living in neighbourhoods. For the coding of the reviews, on the other hand, the rating criteria set by TripAdvisor was used and the material was coded as: terrible, poor, average, very good and excellent. In order to conduct the iconographic analysis, a qualitative content analysis was carried out in order to compare specific places at different points in time over the ten years considered in the study. In conclusion, the results obtained were integrated with those from the first two steps, leading to a joint reflection built on the overall analysis of the materials under investigation.

5.2 *Press reporting and narration of experiences*

The journalistic narratives were preliminary reconduct to the above-mentioned system of automatic categorisation. The preliminary results show how the positive categories of narration increased in terms of the quantity of content as the years went by, while at the same time the negative categories of narration, which were particularly relevant in the first period of analysis and much reduced in the last, decreased in prevalence, showing a helical pattern between the two types of narration and the timeline considered. This result corroborates the hypothesis of the narrative construction of QS as a tourist destination over time and the following analyses highlight its robustness. Subsequently, after a pre-processing and cleaning operation of the texts through lemmatization and lexicalization operations, an analysis of the occurrence of the most frequently used words in the articles of Repubblica Napoli over the last 10 years was developed. Reading the list of the most frequent words by time period, it is possible to notice a change in the storytelling, which starts from the privileging of problematic categories in the first periods investigated (where words such as waste, alleys, square, night, centre, house, municipality, police, and child appear), to the emergence of a spontaneous revitalisation in the last

period considered (where words such as art, theatre, children, associations, social, project, person, municipality, and square are more frequent).

The same operation was carried out for the study of visitors' experiences through the analysis of reviews on TripAdvisor, this time using the rating variable to create lists of the most frequently used words according to the scores attributed by visitors. This operation makes it possible to bring to light that though problematic nodes for tourists are highlighted in structural factors (such as streets, places, degradation, alleys), the highest scores give voice to elements of tradition, culture and local people.

Both corpora of articles and reviews were then aggregated into a single database and subjected to a concatenated procedure of multidimensional analysis, namely multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), lexical correspondence analysis (LCA) and then a cluster analysis (CA).¹

From these procedures there is a clear separation between a journalistic narrative centred on the problems of the city that characterises the first period analysed and a narrative that shifts to positive arguments, which describes a new way of experiencing the neighbourhood and its diverse and multiple connotations that has developed in more recent years. Similarly, negative narratives centred on infrastructure and services are encouraged by those centred on authenticity, art, and the tourist vitality of the place. Within this structure of emerging diversification, five different narrative clusters (here organised from the least recent to the most current) were brought to light through the application of cluster analysis:

1. *Social problems and administration cluster* with a narrative linked to the social problems present in the area in line with the two-year period 2010-2011, characterised by the waste emergency in the city and in particular in the QS.
2. *Danger cluster* in which the narrative of the neighbourhood expressed by visitors who did not enjoy the experience is described. The narrative is linked to a strong sense of danger and lack of safety, which structures the perception of a part of the tourist catchment area, in which the journalistic

¹ Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) is a statistical technique used to summarise and visualise the associations between a set of categorical variables; Lexical Correspondence Analysis (LCA) is a factorial technique on textual data, useful to produce a summary of the information contained in the texts; a graphical representation of the network of associations between words and between words and texts; the connection between textual and contextual data; Cluster Analysis (CA) is an analysis that aims to synthesise the subjects analysed into a few groups (Gherghi, Lauro, 2004). For all the technical specificities of these analyses, statistical choices and representations of results, see Palmieri, Sallusto Palmieri & Guadagno, 2022.

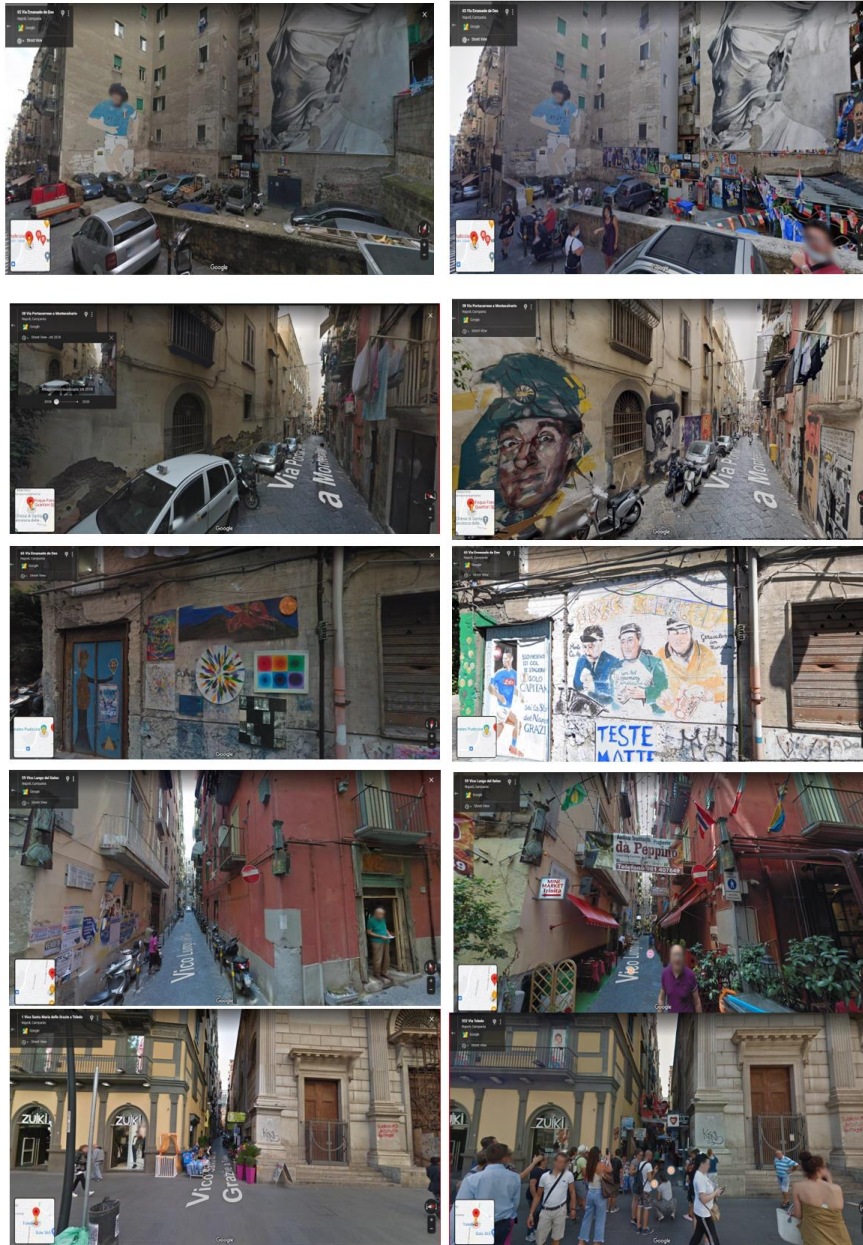
narrative is also determinant and is mostly concentrated in the central years of the period considered in this analysis.

3. *Crime and solidarity cluster* linked to the narration of crime-related themes, which are closely related to the narrative centred on the role of local associations. This shows that this type of narrative linked to the QS is structured according to a strong duality that sees on the one hand the presence of violence and delinquency and on the other a network of associations that act in contrast to crime.
4. *Art and tourism cluster* which represents a significant part of the narrative on QS dedicated to art and culture. It is a journalistic narrative that promotes the strengths of this area, linked to crafts, theatre and cinema.
5. *Cluster of authenticity* in which the narrative constructed by tourists is central and decisive, producing in part a narrative attributed to the imaginary of a chaotic, difficult, dangerous Naples as well as the series of attributes which give it a brotherly, warm and magical character.
6. *The digital iconographic narration of places and the integration of the achieved results*

The second phase of analysis moves from inferred narratives about QS to those denoting objective characteristics through iconographic digital representation. From this phase of content analysis concerned with the digital images collected through *Google Street View* and compared along the various moments of the 2010-2020 window, interesting elements of digital iconographic narration of the place emerge concerning the changes and progress due to the intertwined processes of redevelopment and tourist redestination of the QS. On the one hand, in fact, the restyling of the alleys is due to street-art projects that have leveraged the enormous iconic value of the most significant figures in the cultural history of Naples in the last half century (Diego Maradona, Totò, Marek Hamsik, etc.). On the other hand, strategic points of passage such as the widening of Via Santa Caterina have transformed them from small rundown areas into green areas: the digital iconographic narration of places in these cases promotes a real rebirth due to the strong processes of redevelopment aimed at making the district liveable for both locals and visitors.

In the narratives of the QS taken into consideration in the presented study, an evolution that respects chronological temporality can be highlighted. The iconographic analysis showed the results of the variation over time of the space of the district in terms of urban decorum, proliferation of activities and the scenographic appearance of the place.

FIGURE 1. Iconographic comparisons of characteristic QS places, 2010 and 2020 version.



Source: www.google.it/maps/ from Palmieri, Sallusto Palmiero, Guadagno, 2022.

The journalistic analysis, on the other hand, brought out the role of the administration and institutions, both in the form of demand on the part of the citizens and as an expression of action on the part of the authorities. The tourists' reception focused on the more local soul played out between experiences and local characters offering experiences of authenticity. The three points of view, taken together, thus highlighted a time trend of redevelopment leading to the district becoming a valid tourist destination. In the last decade, the QS area has been the protagonist in two processes: one of redevelopment and one of tourism growth, which very often intertwine in an indistinguishable concatenation of cause and effect. In fact, if the redevelopment process is also developed with the aim of attracting tourists, at the same time tourism is attracted by the redeveloped territory.

Thus, if initially identification with the district took place in its particular spatial conformation of small alleys with clearly visible boundaries, with the advent of the tourist dimension the QS underwent an inversion in the processes of identification, acquiring a new image in which the narrow alley become access to the authentic belly of the city, a place no longer of uncertainty and lack of insecurity, but a gateway to a unique experience. And so, from the kaleidoscopic digital narrative a new image of the place takes shape, perhaps even more real than the previous one, because today it is the subject of delocalised and multi-format narratives.

6. Conclusions

It is not difficult to understand the scope of content analysis procedures in developing a precise investigation of what was happening in analysing the phenomenon of tourism construction in a specific place. This is done by re-reading the study through a double lens that, on the one hand, presents digital content as having undeniable value in the study of processes and phenomena linked to tourism even when this is linked to very specific and well-defined physical places. On the other hand, this study highlights the real value of content analysis procedures not thought of as techniques to be applied in watertight compartments but as techniques that can be redefined in an overall framework that is adequately balanced between qualitative and quantitative procedures. This precise statement underlines that tendency which was recalled at the beginning of this article as a natural convergence towards *mixed methods* (Punziano, 2022).

It must be highlighted that this article is only a starting point in presenting the vastness of the possibilities that this perspective opens for researchers willing to try investigating issues related to tourism in a digital society using

content analysis on digital data. However, many other reflections are needed from a methodological point of view of the construction of research designs dedicated to this type of study as well as the practical implementation of the operational procedures of this proposal. The digital researcher should exercise caution with some steps: the procedures of data collection, of extraction and of organisation of the data; the procedures of automated or supervised classification; the procedures of analysis aimed at extracting meaning from large amounts of data with highly diverse formats and information, to mention a few. And this questioning needs to be conducted without letting technical and implementation issues limit the possibilities of innovation of methodological as well as interpretative processes.

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