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A Content Analysis of Editorials in Four North Dakota Newspapers

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**A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF EDITORIALS IN
FOUR NORTH DAKOTA NEWSPAPERS**

by

Robert R. Pyle

B.A. in Political Science, University of Minnesota 1965

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

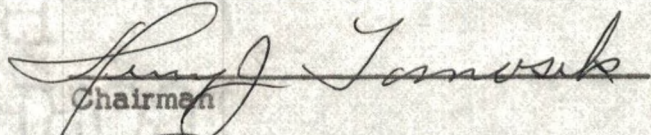
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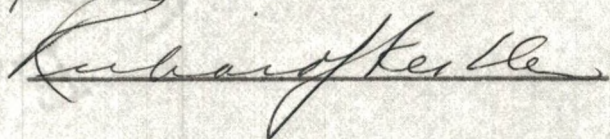
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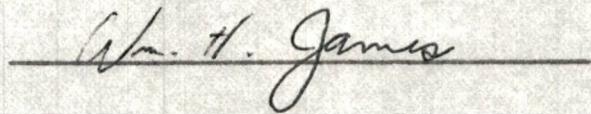
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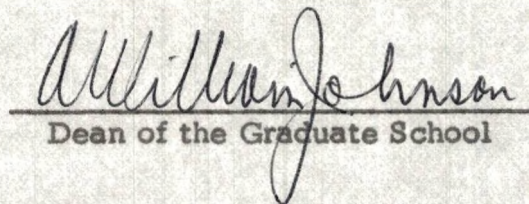
**August
1967**

THIS THESIS SUBMITTED BY ROBERT R. PYLE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA IS HEREBY APPROVED BY THE COMMITTEE UNDER WHOM THE WORK HAS BEEN DONE.


Chairman






Dean of the Graduate School

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study is a content analysis of editorials in the four North Dakota newspapers. Its purpose is to determine the amount of conflict-oriented editorial content of each paper. A representative sample of each of the four papers was chosen for analysis. Two types of content analysis were performed to determine what subjects were discussed, and to determine the direction (whether conflict or cooperation) of the subject matter. Three judges were used to code a sample of the material, and inter-agreement percentages were calculated for each coder. The results of the subject matter and directional analysis are presented in tables to illustrate which subjects were discussed as well as to indicate the direction of the subject matter. This study indicates that each North Dakota paper, with one exception, reflects an emphasis of conflict-oriented editorial content.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem

Political scientists have frequently criticized the American press for its concern with "conflict" situations (e.g. where the communication reports a clash or divergence of opinions, interests, or values). They maintain that in concentrating on the reporting of conflict, newspapers distort reality.¹ This indictment is reflected in a study by Ithiel de Sola Pool. In an analysis of newspaper editorials of the "prestige papers" of the world, he discovered that "negative judgements are more common than positive ones."² Instead of mirroring human activity and affairs as they are, editorials present society as a jungle, replete with struggle and discord.

This study, then, is an attempt to investigate the hypothesis that the non-syndicated newspaper editorials in four North Dakota dailies reflect an emphasis of conflict-oriented editorial content (i.e. the

¹Edward R. Cony, "Conflict-Cooperation Content of Five American Dailies," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 32 (1955), p. 15.

²Ithiel de Sola Pool, H. D. Lasswell, D. Lerner, et al., The Prestige Papers: A Survey of Their Editorials (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1952), p. 44.

volume of conflict-oriented editorials is greater than the cooperation-oriented editorials). A second purpose is an analysis of subject-matter themes, to determine what the editorials said, and an analysis by direction (i.e. reporting the bias) to reveal the treatment (whether conflict or cooperation) of the various subject-matter themes.

Role of the Press

It is to the local or regional paper that the reader turns for information and enlightenment on issues and events that have a direct impact on his life. Detailed information about his immediate surroundings, which the reader can obtain nowhere else, distinguishes the newspaper from all other media of communication. While other media must satisfy a larger audience, newspapers--with some exceptions--are basically oriented toward a largely local readership.

Consequently, the newspaper as a servant of the entire community has this responsibility of providing a rational and open forum for the discussion of significant public issues. Obviously, this does not mean maintaining responsibility for publishing everyone's ideas on all topics, regardless of importance of the subject or regardless of the market for the ideas in the readers' interests. It does mean that the newspaper has the duty to present "important topics of general interest, and to indicate significant ideas [through editorials] which may be contrary to

those of the publisher."¹ It does include the function of keeping the reader abreast of both big news and small news, and making him aware of the world's multitudinous changes. To the extent that it succeeds in these tasks, the newspaper remains unchallenged as a conveyor of news.

Marco Morrow used relatively mild language but the meaning was clear when he wrote:

I am still idealistic enough to believe that the function of the newspaper is cooperation with people in establishing and maintaining a just and righteous order of society. And I am realistic enough to believe that the newspaper which does not take the responsibility of honest leadership in this chaotic day is already on the road to that graveyard from which no newspaper returns.²

It should be remembered that the modern daily paper is a commercial institution directed toward the making of profits. It must hold its readers while attempting to increase its circulation. Because of this relationship, the press, of necessity, must reflect certain reader attitudes and tastes. The readers' interests are largely consistent with local values and standards. Further, the readers' interests and values determine the content of large sections of the daily paper, including the

¹William Albright, Modern Public Opinion (New York: McGraw-Hill Company, 1956), p. 382.

²Curtis P. MacDougall (ed.), The Press and Its Problems (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1964), p. 27.

editorials.¹ The supply must meet the demand.

Needless to say, the influence of the press varies greatly from community to community. A newspaper's influence must be understood in terms of its relation to various segments of society. It is impossible to generalize accurately--the many and various relationships are subtle. Although news accounts can be slanted by the press, the process is by no means complete or entirely effective--opposing viewpoints are often expressed through other media.²

Role of Editorials

Straight news reporting concerns itself with describing facts; interpretative reporting explains the news behind the news. In other words, an editorial deals with opinions. At least theoretically most American newspapers make a distinction between the news and the interpretation of the news. Naturally, in the news columns there is selection, slanting, and distortion at many points. However, in theory there is a deliberate divorce of news from opinions. It is understood that in the editorial columns the policy of the paper is expressed. Certainly it is on the editorial page, more than any other, that the intention of the

¹Of course other considerations do influence editorial policy: the publisher's political outlook, as well as religious and economic (advertiser) interests are important in the determination of editorial position (policy).

²Because most communities have only one paper, the source of divergent viewpoints is largely confined to other media (radio and TV).

newspaper to be influential is apparent and unquestioned; whatever influence the page does have, is as intended, direct, whereas that of other parts of the paper is relatively indirect.¹

The role of the editorial, in an ideal sense, is to:

. . . inform the reader of details omitted from the news columns; to explain the news columns; to interpret as to the real significance of an event; to argue with logical analysis of cause and effect; to urge action; to conduct crusades; to lead by persuasion, often by emotional appeals; to announce policies; to offer entertainment.²

If people make decisions in large part in terms of favorable or unfavorable images (or ideas), relating fact and opinion to stereotypes, then the editorial of a newspaper is a "principal agent in creating and perpetuating these conventional conceptions."³ Responsible performance here simply means that "the images repeated and emphasized be such as are total representation of the social group as it is."⁴ The "truth" about any social group, as reported in an editorial includes a recognition of its strengths and weaknesses, as well as its common humanity.

In a very real sense then, the ideal editorial page is not inflexible except in its profound reverence for facts. Respect for facts is the

¹MacDougall, op. cit., p. 137.

²G. F. Mott (ed.), An Outline Survey of Journalism (New York: Barnes and Nobel, Inc., 1937), p. 254.

³Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz (ed.), Reader in Public Opinion and Communication (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1953), p. 486.

⁴Ibid.

indispensable foundation of editorial influence.¹

Editorial staffs freely assume the following moral obligations to their readers:

(1) That of giving in the newspaper editorial a correct and balanced account of what is happening, and (2) that of expressing opinions on controversial matters in such a way as to advance, by fair argument, tendencies, purposes, etc., that appear to be desirable.²

This becomes all the more important when it is recalled that the trend toward newspaper mergers results in almost all cities being one-paper communities.

Certainly opinion belongs in the editorial, but prejudice and distortion do not. Every person has his pet ideas and his blind spots, but the editorial is no place to exhibit them. The reader seeks intelligent direction, not prejudiced leading.³ When editorials become carping or personal, they abdicate their responsibility--they also run the risk of offending large segments of the reading public. Nothing irks readers so much as the suspicion that an editorial is unfair instead of objective.⁴

¹ Arthur G. Waldrop, Editor and Editorial Writer (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1955), p. 338.

² Berelson and Janowitz, op. cit., p. 491.

³ Siegfried Mandel (ed.), Modern Journalism (New York: Pitman Publishing Co., 1962), p. 496.

⁴ ibid.

Literature

Although a substantial number of studies using "content analysis"¹ procedures have dealt with political topics and have employed political categories--largely due to the influence of Harold D. Lasswell--few studies have primarily been concerned with newspaper editorial content and direction.

The first major study in journalism utilizing content analysis consisted mainly of subject matter classifications of newspaper content.² Foster (1938) was the first to introduce the category of direction (i.e. approval or disapproval). He discovered that the relative approval or disapproval of various educational topics in newspaper editorials indicated the areas in which public education is given the most public praise or criticism.³ Another major use, as developed by Lasswell, was

¹In a sense, content analysis occurs whenever someone summarizes and/or interprets what he reads or hears. But in the more limited sense in which it is used here, content analysis denotes an objective, systematic, and quantitative method for analysis of communication content, intended to provide precise and concise descriptions of what the communication says, in terms appropriate to the purpose or problem at hand. For a general review of the field, see Bernard Berelson, Content Analysis in Communication Research (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951).

²Julian J. Woodward, Foreign News in American Morning News: A Study in Public Opinion (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930).

³Foster, C. R., Editorial Treatment of Education in the American Press (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Press, 1938).

in the analysis of political communication.¹

A book-length survey of content analysis by Bernard Berelson appeared in 1952.² Ithiel de Sola Pool is the editor of a book published in 1959, Trends in Content Analysis, which includes a collection of papers on new approaches to the method. More emphasis on the use of content analysis in psychology and psycholinguistics is clearly evident.

For our purpose two studies are significant. A study of The Prestige Papers (Pool, Lasswell, et al.) was undertaken to discover trends in attitudes in newspaper editorials over half a century.³ This comprehensive study utilized a complex method of symbol analysis and a directional category (i.e. favorable and unfavorable treatment of the symbols) to determine trends in editorial judgement. Their results were illuminating: There was a "prevalent sixty-forty ratio between favorable

¹Harold D. Lasswell, Nathan Leites, et al., Language of Politics: Studies in Quantitative Semantics (New York: Steward, 1949), H. D. Lasswell and Associates, "The Politically Significant Content of the Press: Coding and Procedures," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 19 (1942), pp. 12-23.

²Bernard Berelson, Content Analysis in Communication Research (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952), and Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz (eds.), Reader in Public Opinion and Communication (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950).

³Ithiel de Sola Pool, H. D. Lasswell, et al., The Prestige Papers: A Survey of Their Editorials (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1952).

and unfavorable judgements."¹ Pool maintains that we would be justified in "interpreting this ratio [i.e. sixty percent unfavorable, forty percent favorable] as a fair measure of the balance of attitudes on the editorial page."² Similarly, Cony surveyed five papers to determine the volume of conflict-cooperation content in general news stories.³ Although the author considers Cony's categories something of an oversimplification, along with inadequate sampling (too few issues were selected), and the omission of any duplication by other coders (non-reliability), the results can be usefully interpreted. The charge that the press reports, by volume, more conflict than cooperation was substantiated: 56% of the news paragraphs were devoted to conflict while 38% were cooperation-oriented, the remaining 6% were devoted to a "Common Fate" category-- interpreted as being "neutral."⁴

This study then, seeks to answer the central question, "Is the total volume of conflict-oriented editorials, in North Dakota's four largest circulation newspapers, greater than cooperation-oriented editorials?" On this basis, one would expect that the total number of references to conflict situations should be greater than the total number of references to cooperation situations.

¹Ibid., p. 44.

²Ibid.

³Edward R. Cony, "Conflict-Cooperation Content of Five American Dailies," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 32 (1955), p. 15.

⁴Ibid., p. 18.

Subhypotheses

1. The Grand Forks Herald will reflect more conflict-oriented editorial content than cooperation-oriented content.
2. The Bismarck Tribune will reflect more conflict-oriented editorial content than cooperation-oriented content.
3. The Minot Daily News will reflect more conflict-oriented editorial content than cooperation-oriented content.
4. The Fargo Forum will reflect more conflict-oriented editorial content than cooperation-oriented content.

In addition this thesis will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What were the topics discussed?
2. What percentage of their time did each of the four newspapers devote to these various areas?
3. Does an analysis by direction (orientation) reveal the treatment accorded to a given subject matter theme?
4. In addition this thesis will submit several possible explanations to the question, "Why are the editorials conflict-oriented?"

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis

The message--the actual symbol sequence that is being communicated--occupies the focal point in the communication process. The message stands suspended in time and space between the source that created it and the destination that will ultimately receive it. It is the product of many forces, some obvious and present, others vague and distant.

The orthodox approach to the study of verbal materials usually includes the process of gathering a large number of facts about the subject, organizing the facts into some observable systematic pattern, and writing a readable account. The difficulty with this approach has been that the procedure inherently lacks the degree of objectivity necessary to achieve unbiased conclusions.

One of the methods currently used by several disciplines, especially journalism and psychology, which seeks for a high measure of objectivity is content analysis. As a research tool it has gained wide application where communication analysis is involved. As defined

by Bernard Berelson, content analysis is ". . . . a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication."¹ The key words are objective, systematic, quantitative, and manifest. These key words distinguish scientific content analysis from the ordinary, informal analysis that we do in simply reading daily newspapers or magazines.

The requirement that content analysis be objective means that the categories used to analyze content must be "defined so precisely that different persons can analyze the same content and get the same results."² The requirement of systemization means that the selection of content to be analyzed must be established on a formal, predetermined, unbiased plan. In other words, all relevant content must be utilized for the problem considered; "the analyst cannot choose to examine only those elements in the content which happen to fit his hypothesis and ignore all the others."³ Quantitative means that the results of the analysis are expressed numerically in some manner: in correlation coefficients, in frequency distributions, in ratios and percentages of various sorts. The preference for quantification is

¹Berelson, op. cit., p. 16.

²Ralph O. Nafziger and David M. White (ed.), Introduction to Mass Communication Research (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), p. 181

³Ibid.

understandable; there is simply much more agreement as to what is correct and incorrect procedure within the precise language of mathematics.¹ Whether simple percentages or uneven approximations like "positive" or "negative" are used depends on the degree of precision required for a particular study. Manifest means that the semantic analysis (i.e. classifying signs according to their meanings) involved in content analysis is ordinarily of a fairly direct and simple kind: it deals, as Harold Lasswell, Daniel Lerner and Ithiel Pool have said, with "reading on the lines" and not "between the lines."² As mentioned earlier, the researcher may be interested in the forces which shaped the message (i.e. the intent of the message) or the effects the message is likely to have, but he does not code the content in terms of these latent forces or effects. He codes the content in fairly obvious terms of what it says. That is, the content analyst assumes that the "meanings" which he ascribes to the content, by assigning it to certain categories, correspond to the "meanings" intended by the communicator and/or understood by the audience.

Irving L. Janis provides another definition:

"Content analysis" may be defined as referring to any techniques, a) for the classification of the sign vehicles,

¹Ibid.

²Harold D. Lasswell, Daniel Lerner, and Ithiel de Sola Pool, The Comparative Study of Symbols (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1952), p. 32.

b) which relies solely upon the judgements of an analyst or group of analysts as to which sign vehicles fall into which categories, c) on the basis of explicitly formulated rules, d) provided that the analyst's judgements are regarded as the reports of a scientific observer.¹

This study will be based, in theory, on the common meaning of both the above definitions. A more explicit delineation of the specific rules established for this study is contained in the chapter on procedure.

The fundamental objective of all content analysis is to convert phenomena (i.e. symbolic behavior of people) into scientific data.² Implicit in this objective is the contention that the validity of such data rests on certain assumptions. It is assumed that a common meaning exists for a given content between all parties involved in a communication sequence. If this common meaning is lacking, no basis can be found for analysis. Another assumption is that inferences (i.e. interpretations) about the relationship between intent and content or between content and effect can validly be made. In other words, the content analyst draws on inference about some state in the source which originated the content, or some state in the audience or person who received the communication. Content analysis also rests on the

¹Irving L. Janis, "The Problem of Validating Content Analysis," Language of Politics, ed. H. D. Lasswell, et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: The M. I. T. Press, 1965), p. 55.

²Darwin P. Cartwright, "An Analysis of Qualitative Material," Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences, ed. by Leon Festiner and Daniel Katz (New York: The Dryden Press, 1952), p. 275.

assumption that the quantitative description of communication content is meaningful. The frequency of occurrence of the various characteristics of the content is itself an important factor in the communication process.¹

The problem of inference is basic in any discussion of content analysis. That is, content analysis studies can present conclusions and interpretations of wider application than the content itself. Two kinds of inferences can be made, to the source of a communication or to its effects. Many critics of content analysis point out that few studies have empirically related content data to associated occurrences. Most authors merely generalize from their results. Ideally, it is preferable to have relationships between variables empirically verified, but in most instances this is not feasible. As a result, it is necessary to make inference from the data available. The validity of such inference depends primarily on the scientific rigor of the analysis itself.

In this study the problem of inference was minimal because the author's primary objective was a description of the content in and of itself. More specifically, the author will compare the editorial content of four North Dakota newspapers with Cony's findings.² In this

¹Berelson, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²Even though Cony omitted a reliability test, his study did establish a basis for further investigation. Also, the validity of his study was realized--the study did measure the direction of general news content.

application, the relationship between the content and the standard (Cony) which it should meet, serves as a basis for the inference. This study, then, contains implicit inferences about the possible causes or the consequences of the content, but such inferences are in the nature of addenda to or reformulations of the basic data.

Further, this study utilizes in item analysis in determining the volume of conflict and cooperation. In item analysis, the paragraph is the unit of analysis. As Berelson points out, "The unit most frequently used in content analysis is the item, i.e., the whole natural unit employed by the producers of symbol material."¹ As used in this study, item is actually the plural of paragraph.

In all cases, items are homogeneously placed into specific subject matter categories on the basis of what the paragraph said (i.e. on the basis of its content). An additional process accomplished was the determination of the direction (i.e. attitude, or orientation expressed toward the content) of each item. That is, a determination was made as to whether the item was conflict, cooperation, or neutrally oriented in its treatment of the subject matter.

Several points should be made immediately clear. Content analysis cannot, in and by itself, "prove" bias. Content analysis will not tell the analyst what the writer of the communication had in mind at

¹Berelson, op. cit., p. 141.

the time of its writing, nor the effect the writer sought to elicit from his audience. Content analysis does not indicate the effect of a communication upon the audience. Content analysis will report only the recurrence or absence of content symbols--symbols which have been given certain "meaning" by the analyst.¹ At best, content analysis, particularly in the area of direction analysis, provides material to serve as a basis for subsequent debate.²

Validity and Reliability

The validity of any content analysis must be demonstrated in some acceptable fashion or the conclusions obtained from such analysis will be of questionable worth.³ Validity supposedly answers the question, "Does the measurement technique measure what it is supposed to measure?"

The validity of a measuring device is usually studied by comparing the results or measures obtained from it with those obtained by another device, the validity of which is already established for measuring the same characteristic. If such a measuring device of established validity is not available--and this is often the case--the problem of establishing validity becomes difficult. In cases of direct measures validity is self-evident. In fact, we call those

¹Richard W. Budd and Robert K. Thorp, An Introduction to Content Analysis (Iowa City: State University of Iowa, 1963), p. 18.

²Ibid., p. 16.

³Clifford V. Donnelly, "A Content Analysis of the 1964 Presidential Campaign Speeches" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1965), p. 13.

measures direct which unquestionably measure precisely what we intend them to.¹

In other words, if the study consists of simple symbol counting procedures, the validity is direct and can be accepted at face value. However, in this study the coder was confronted with more complex definitions which are applied to both directional and content (subject) categories.

Therefore, the coder, in determining into what subject-matter category each paragraph should be placed, must exercise judgement. This judgement is, of necessity, subjective in nature. However, this problem was solved to the satisfaction of the author by first, achieving, in a pre-test of eight editorials, high agreement on the identity and definition of the relevant categories; the three coders agreed on the subject matter category definitions as used by the author. Second, the indicators of the categories were considered appropriate to the problem.

When dealing with directional analysis, the problem of validation is more involved. No matter what method of quantifying direction is eventually established, such a measure should not be designed on a priori basis. The author became familiar with the material under analysis and then determined the modes actually employed for revealing a given stand on an issue.

¹Margaret J. Haygood, Statistics for Sociologists (New York: Reynal and Hitchok, Inc., 1941), p. 219.

What kind of references were conflict or cooperation-oriented? This was generally a matter of definition. The author believes his definitions of conflict and cooperation-oriented content identify what they include and what they do not include. While it should be pointed out that such definitions are themselves somewhat subjective, they do tell the reader how the final figures were obtained.

It should be obvious that "to account for every possible situation that might arise in the classification of direction, category definitions would have to be unmanageably large."¹ To be useful, definitions of direction must be broad enough in scope to cover almost every situation that might arise, and yet not be so general in that they will fail to provide the desired discrimination.² These definitions function as a frame of reference within which the researcher can work.

To a large measure validity depends upon reliability. If the study cannot be duplicated by others with comparable results, then the analysis cannot be said to be valid. Reliability refers to the degree of correlation between two or more coders working independently and following the identical procedures and analyzing the same content.³ Obviously

¹Budd, op. cit., p. 17.

²Ibid.

³I. J. Janis, R. H. Fadner, and M. Janowitz, "The Reliability of a Content Analysis Technique," Public Opinion Quarterly, Summer, 1943, p. 293.

there are a variety of ways to determine the reliability of an analysis. Most researchers would agree that, "Reliability in content analysis seems to be a problem that the individual researcher must solve to his own satisfaction within the limits of his study design and resources."¹

This study utilizes Stempel's reliability method. His technique seems to be superior in several respects to other tests of reliability used in content analysis.

The fact that two coders have identical frequency tabulations does not indicate that they agree one hundred percent. It is possible that they disagree on rather sizable number of items, but their disagreements cancel each other out. Evidence shows that these errors may exceed ten percent of the codeable items.²

For the directional analysis in this study, the author utilized Stempel's method of developing, from a subsample, a "percentage agreement score" which is the percentage of time the individual coder agrees with the majority on a given item. In this study three coders were used, therefore, two form a majority. Each coder's score was based on his agreement with the majority. Hopefully, this method of analysis provides a more detailed picture of coding errors, and should offer a more accurate estimate of reliability.

¹Guido Stempel, "Increasing Reliability in Content Analysis," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1955), p. 450.

²Ibid., p. 452.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

The Editorials

"Editorial" is a concept that can be of considerable ambiguity, not being able to be identified with any fixed format. However, in the Grand Forks Herald, The Minot Daily News, the Bismarck Tribune, and the Fargo Forum, non-syndicated editorials can be identified readily enough, for they appear daily with a fixed format on a page set aside for them. In these four papers expression of attitude in the rest of the paper, at least ideally, is kept to a minimum.

It is difficult to determine the net effect of editorial length and editorial format on editorial content. However, it might be well to summarize the general length and format of the four papers' editorials.

1. Grand Forks Herald (circulation 37,486) - Usually their editorials are quite lengthy (in total words), the editorials frequently treated three different subjects, and were placed on the upper left-hand side of the editorial page.
2. The Minot Daily News (circulation 29,902) - This paper consistently had the longest (in words and space editorials) of the four. It frequently discussed three different topics and always appeared on the upper left-hand side of the second page.
3. Fargo Forum (circulation 32,767) - Consistently discussed in

detail one topic per editorial. Not as lengthy as either the Herald or News. Always on upper left-hand side of the second page.

4. Bismarck Tribune (circulation 16,973) - The editorials usually pursued only one topic per issue. The editorials were the shortest in length (words) of any of the four papers, and always placed on the top of the third page.

Although no generalizations can be accurately drawn, we have noted that where editorials were shorter in length (both in words and space), the topics under discussion frequently were limited in scope. On the other hand, those editorials which were longer, incorporated a greater variety of subsidiary topics, as well as allowing for a more elaborate treatment of the central subject matter.

Sample

As previously mentioned, the four largest circulation papers were selected for study. This, of course, is too small a number to provide an adequate cross-section of the North Dakota press. Coincidentally, the papers chosen did represent a wide geographic coverage of the state. The editorials analyzed were drawn from alternate weeks during the two month period, and all editorials published during the selected weeks were analyzed. (Sunday was omitted because the Bismarck Tribune and The Minot Daily News do not publish Sunday editions).

For most purposes in content analysis, according to Bernard Berelson, "a small, carefully chosen sample of the relevant content

will produce just as valid results as the analysis or a great deal more."¹

To obtain a representative sample we read twenty-four issues of each paper. The dates of the selected issues, all during March and April, 1967 (the defined universe), are as follows:

1. March 6th through March 11th (Monday through Saturday)
2. March 20th through March 25th (Monday through Saturday)
3. April 3rd through April 8th (Monday through Saturday)
4. April 17th through April 22nd (Monday through Saturday)

This sampling technique was chosen in order to accommodate the variations in form and content of the different papers' editorials. Jones and Carter² found that estimates derived from a six issue sample compared closely with the entire universe (a one-month period). Similarly, the sample size used here was adequate because the author's objective was to describe the "various kinds of content or percentages of one general category as compared to another."

The decision as to how large a sample should be was necessarily arbitrary. However, the sample size chosen indicates an effort to achieve as representative a sample as possible, as well as controlling for cyclical trends (such as a disproportionate high percentage of

¹Berelson, op. cit., p. 4.

²Nafziger, op. cit., p. 185.

³Budd, op. cit., p. 5.

governmental news when the state legislature was in session).¹

Categories

In order to determine what the editorials talked about, as well as classifying the direction (attitude) of the subject matter, two types of category analysis were used. The first was an analysis of the subject matter (i.e. what the communication is about). This means that each paragraph (the unit of analysis) was classified, in one of nineteen categories, according to its dominant theme as measured by the impact upon the reader. For example, a paragraph about the availability of college training to every qualified student would be included in the "education" category. Even though this kind of judgement is somewhat subjective, subject content is usually quite obvious and hence easily categorized.

These frequencies were then combined and converted into percentages and distributed among each of five broad areas to facilitate presentation of the data. These areas are: (1) Political, (2) Governmental, (3) Economic, (4) International, and (5) Social.

The nineteen categories, designed to be mutually exclusive, are

¹The author attempted to control for cyclical trends by choosing a period (March and April) that should include a "moderate amount" of discussion of items relevant to the study. For example, in North Dakota March and April are "normal periods" when most schools are in session, and when political and farm activities are minimal.

listed below and defined as follows:¹

Political Area:

- 1) Political (Partisan) - references about or to politics on the city, county, state and national level; all aspects, issues, candidates, leaders, criticisms of government activities laden with political implications, and where party designation is given or implied.
- 2) Political (Non-Partisan) - same as above except no party designation is given or implied.

Governmental Area:

- 1) Intra-governmental - activity within the governmental structure (city, state, or national); the legislative process and execution of laws which are non-political.
- 2) Government - other groups
- 3) Government - other individuals
These are both residual categories. They include only such matters (to which government is a party) as are not included within the areas of economic, political, social, or international activity. (These categories are largely concerned with taxes, or tax reform as applied to specific groups or individuals).

Economic Area:

- 1) Business-Labor - news about the economic relationship between business and labor.
- 2) Intra-Labor - internal economic activity of labor.
- 3) Labor-Government-Farmers - references to farming or farm organizations and farm prices as they affect labor/or governmental activity.

¹The category definitions used by the author are an expansion and/or modification of those employed by Cony.

4) Intra-business - all internal activity between/or within business.

5) Business-Farmers - all economic activity between business and farmers.

International Area:

1) War - references to actual hostilities between two or more nations (excluded: internal strife).

2) Short of War - political and economic events that occur in (or between) nations which appear to threaten our economic, political, or military security.

3) Within an International Body - hostile or aggressive activity within or between members of the U. N. , NATO, SEATO, OAS, or Common Market.

Social Area:

1) Education - news of private and public schools, colleges, universities, art galleries, adult education. Statements by educators. All references to the American educational system.

2) Human Safety/Welfare - references about social welfare and safety, originating in non-official organizations.

3) Personal Relations - news about individuals and their character, conduct, motives, and private affairs, as they affect others.

4) Juvenile Problems - references to juvenile (teenage and younger) activity that is considered unlawful or nonconstructive.

5) Crime - news of criminals, trials, acts of crime, violence, or arrests.

- 6) Values - defined as the broad area of religious ethical, moral, political and philosophical values.
- 7) Miscellaneous - includes all references not applicable to any of the other categories, or where the subject-matter designation was unclear.

Directional Analysis

According to Lasswell, Lerner, and Pool, the word "direction" in content analysis refers to the "attitude expressed toward any symbol [i.e. subject matter] by its user."¹ As was mentioned earlier, the author had no way of knowing what attitude the writer of the editorial intended to convey. Only the expressions of such attitudes were categorized by the analyst. The directional analysis was based on three categories--conflict, cooperation, and neutral. They are defined as follows:

1. Conflict - those items that report or reflect discord, strife, clash, struggle, dissension; all discord and tension that is presented within a context that reflects disruption at both levels: referent and reference. (It does not include any constructive (or positive) divergence of opinions, interests, or actions).

An example of conflict is the following paragraph in the Bismarck Tribune on daylight saving time:

All over the country, legislatures are in a frenzy over whether to let their states observe daylight saving time or to hold to standard time. Chickens are off schedule and milk cows are

¹Budd, op. cit., p. 16.

emotionally upset, we're told.¹

2. Cooperation - those items that report or reflect cohesion, agreement, and harmony (individual or corporate); any idea or action that results in unity, mutual profit or benefit, or collective action. (Does not include agreement or collaboration among individuals or groups which are conflict-oriented, either in substance or form).

The following is an example of cooperation:

North Dakota took a big step last week toward the orderly development of water resources in the Red River basin by appropriating \$95,000 as its share of a North Dakota-Minnesota-federal government water planning program.²

3. Neutral - several kinds of relations are found in this category: (a) those items that involve neither conflict or cooperation aspects; i.e. a truly "neutral" item, where impartiality is obvious, (b) ambiguous characterization, where the attitude implied is not clear, (c) coding difficulties--all characterizations which are not otherwise provided for by the rules, or which are of a very complex nature.

An illustration of a neutral paragraph would be The Minot Daily News, commenting on farm auctions:

Scanning through newspapers of the state and region, we notice that at least a normal number of April auction sales are being held in the farm country.³

Upon analysis, each item was placed in one of the above directional categories. Then the frequency for each category was tabulated to determine the total volume of conflict and cooperation, as measured

¹Bismarck Tribune, March 3, 1967, p. 6.

²Fargo Forum, March 6, 1967, p. 4.

³The Minot Daily News, April 17, 1967, p. 4.

by the number of paragraphs devoted to each. The total percentages for each paper were then compared with each other. Also, a X^2 (Chi-Square) test for significance was done between the four papers and the expected breakdown from Cony's research.

Secondly, the editorial topic(s), as a whole, was analyzed to determine its direction, as measured by its total impact upon the reader. In this instance the editorial as a whole became the unit of measurement. In both procedures, Stempel's test of reliability was employed to insure that the results are capable of duplication.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Subject Matter Analysis

As mentioned previously, the method used to determine what the editorials said was a subject matter analysis, classifying each paragraph into a specific category on the basis of its content. The frequency of occurrence of these categories will serve as a measure of what subjects were most discussed. Subject matter analysis also provides an insight into the attitudes of the writer toward the topic under discussion. Table 1 reveals the total number of editorial topics and paragraphs analyzed for each paper.

The method of determining what was said and how much time was devoted to each subject by each paper is based on the subject matter categories previously defined. Frequency of occurrence may be assumed to indicate emphasis and possibly a measure of intensity. Table 2 gives the percentage of time (measured by paragraphs here) devoted to each subject for the four papers.

TABLE 1
 EDITORIAL TOPICS AND PARAGRAPHS
 ANALYZED FOR EACH PAPER

<u>Newspapers</u>	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Editorial Topics</u>
<u>Bismarck Tribune</u>	235	25
<u>Fargo Forum</u>	260	24
<u>Grand Forks Herald</u>	298	61
<u>The Minot Daily News</u>	<u>246</u>	<u>68</u>
	T = 1039	T = 178

TABLE 2

PARAGRAPHS DEVOTED TO VARIOUS CATEGORIES FOR EACH PAPER

<u>Topical Area</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Fargo Forum</u>		<u>Bismarck Tribune</u>		<u>Grand Forks Herald</u>		<u>The Minot Daily News</u>	
		<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1.	Political								
	a. Partisan	34	13	29	12	40	13	13	8
	b. Non-Partisan	9	4	10	4	3	1	7	3
2.	Governmental								
	a. Intra-Government	89	34	30	13	50	18	32	13
	b. Govt.-Other groups	22	9	18	8	7	3	8	3
	c. Govt.-Individuals	36	14	33	14	19	6	11	4
3.	Economic								
	a. Business-Labor	4	1	5	2	12	4	3	1
	b. Intra-Labor	0	0	8	3	4	2	1	0
	c. Labor-Govt.-Farmers	1	0	7	3	7	3	1	0
	d. Intra-Business	9	3	5	2	9	3	10	4
	e. Business-Farmers	8	3	3	2	2	.5	3	1

TABLE 2--Continued

<u>Topical Area</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Fargo Forum</u>		<u>Bismarck Tribune</u>		<u>Grand Forks Herald</u>		<u>The Minot Daily News</u>	
		<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
4.	International								
	a. War	7	2	14	6	47	15	7	3
	b. Short of War	0	0	5	2	3	.5	5	2
	c. Within Int. Body	0	0	3	2	13	4	5	2
5.	Social								
	a. Education	7	2	1	0	12	4	14	8
	b. Human Safety/Welfare	18	9	19	8	49	16	44	17
	c. Personal Relations	10	4	22	9	7	3	38	15
	d. Problems--Juveniles	0	0	7	3	3	.5	1	0
	e. Crime	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
	f. Ethical/Moral Values	6	2	15	6	7	3	32	13
6.	Miscellaneous	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>.5</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>3</u>
	Totals	260	100.0	235	100.0	298	100.0	246	100.0

The newspapers tended to concentrate on different subjects.¹

However, a major portion of each of the four papers' time was spent on several topics: intra-governmental affairs, partisan politics, and human safety and welfare. This, in itself, is meaningful if only for purposes of identifying several common areas of interest.

However, the individual papers showed considerable differences in the subjects to which they gave the most time and space. For example, the subject matter category receiving the highest proportion of space was different in three of the four papers:

<u>The Minot Daily News:</u>	
Human Safety and Welfare	17%
<u>Grand Forks Herald:</u>	
Intra-Governmental Activity	18%
<u>Bismarck Tribune:</u>	
Government-Individual Activity	14%
<u>Fargo Forum:</u>	
Intra-Governmental Activity	34%

In general, there was a wide variation among the papers in their emphasis given to the subject matter. Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 summarize the distribution of paragraphs by the broad topical areas for each paper.

Each of the four papers, of course, gave a different proportion of its space to different subjects. The Grand Forks Herald, for instance,

¹It should be made clear that the author realizes the limitations of his sample--the results are to be viewed in relation to the period under study, the spring of 1967.

TABLE 3
 PARAGRAPHS DEVOTED TO TOPICAL AREAS
 IN THE GRAND FORKS HERALD

<u>Area</u>	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Social	79	26.3
2. Governmental	76	25.5
3. International	63	21.1
4. Political	43	15.2
5. Economic	<u>34</u>	<u>11.4</u>
	T = 298	T = 99.5*

*Miscellaneous category accounts for the remaining (.05%) paragraphs.

TABLE 4
 PARAGRAPHS DEVOTED TO TOPICAL AREAS
 IN THE FARGO FORUM

<u>Area</u>	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Governmental	147	56.5
2. Political	43	16.5
3. Social	41	15.0
4. Economic	22	8.4
5. International	<u>7</u>	<u>2.6</u>
	T = 260	T = 99.0*

*Miscellaneous category accounts for the remaining (1.0%) paragraphs.

TABLE 5
 PARAGRAPHS DEVOTED TO TOPICAL AREAS
 IN THE BISMARCK TRIBUNE

<u>Area</u>	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Governmental	81	34.2
2. Social	64	27.2
3. Political	39	16.5
4. Economic	28	11.9
5. International	<u>22</u>	<u>9.3</u>
	T = 234	T = 99.1*

*Miscellaneous category accounts for the remaining (.9%) paragraphs.

TABLE 6
 PARAGRAPHS DEVOTED TO TOPICAL AREAS
 IN THE MINOT DAILY NEWS

<u>Area</u>	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Social	131	53.2
2. Governmental	51	20.7
3. Political	20	8.1
4. Economic	18	7.3
5. International	<u>17</u>	<u>6.9</u>
	T = 237	T = 96.2*

*Miscellaneous category accounts for the remaining (3.8%) paragraphs.

gave 32.5 percent of all its editorial paragraphs to the economic and international areas. These two areas received only 14.2 percent of The Minot Daily News' space--and an even smaller percentage in the Fargo Forum (11.0%). The Bismarck Tribune devoted 21.2 percent to these areas.

Editorial Judgement

Two aspects of editorial judgement are measured by our data: the amount of judgement and the direction of judgement. The amount of judgement is indicated by the percentage of paragraphs and editorials on which judgement is passed. The direction of judgement is indicated by the balance between conflict and cooperation. Table 7 reveals that the amount of conflict exceeds the amount of cooperation by 18.6 percent if measured by the editorial and by 17.3 percent if more significantly measured by the paragraph.

In this study, 15.1 percent of the paragraphs and 6.2 percent of the editorials were recorded as neutral or unjudged. This was due, in part, to the coding rules adopted in this study. In part, it was the result of the fact that many editorials are written in a detached and objective tone. And, finally, in part, it was the result of the fact that an editorial designed to support a single judgement on political policy will also include many factual statements, used without judgement.

By themselves the results in Table 7 are interesting but not very

TABLE 7
EDITORIALS AND PARAGRAPHS DEVOTED TO
CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

<u>Category</u>	<u>Editorials</u>		<u>Paragraphs</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Conflict	100	56.2	530	51.1
2. Cooperation	67	37.6	352	33.8
3. Neutral	<u>11</u>	<u>6.2</u>	<u>157</u>	<u>15.1</u>
	T = 178	100.0	T = 1039	100.0

meaningful. We have no reliable way to know to what extent they reflect the actual amount of conflict and cooperation occurring daily in each community. However, a comparison of the four papers does yield this information. Over the same period each of the four papers devoted a different proportion of space to each of the three directional categories. Table 8 provides this information.

The Minot Daily News reported the least conflict, proportionately, only 41.8 percent, and the most cooperation, 47.5 percent--clearly devoting more space to cooperation. The Bismarck Tribune stood at the other end of the scale, reporting proportionately the most conflict, 54.5 percent, and the least cooperation, 25.5 percent.

Several possible explanations for this significant difference should be advanced. Obviously, any interpretation as to the cause or effect will be limited--at best we can only offer insight into previously unknown factors. First, it is possible that the variation is the result of the difference in location. Perhaps there is less conflict and cooperation in the Minot area than in Bismarck. Secondly, it is reasonable to assume that given the same--or very similar--subject on which to write, one editor may reflect a greater concern with conflict-oriented situations than another. That is, the message is a mirror in which we may catch images--sometimes clear and sometimes distorted--of forces within the source of the message. Moreover, we could attempt to draw an inference about this state (or condition) in the source (editor) and then

TABLE 8

PERCENTAGE OF PARAGRAPHS DEVOTED TO A CONFLICT,
COOPERATION AND NEUTRAL ORIENTATION
IN EACH OF THE FOUR PAPERS

<u>Category</u>	<u>Forum</u>	<u>Herald</u>	<u>Daily News</u>	<u>Tribune</u>
1. Conflict	52.0	55.0	41.8	54.5
2. Cooperation	28.0	36.0	47.5	25.5
3. Neutral	<u>20.0</u>	<u>9.0</u>	<u>10.7</u>	<u>20.0</u>
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

attempt to link these personality variables to the community and culture in which he lives. Further, is the writer merely reflecting community tastes and norms? Since we cannot submit any of these generalizations to empirical validation, a realistic approach would be to conclude that any or all of the above factors contribute to the deviation.

On the whole, conflict judgements are more common than cooperation ones. There seems to be a prevalent fifty-thirty ratio (excluding The Minot Daily News) between conflict and cooperation judgements. It would be logical to interpret this ratio as a fair measure of the balance of attitudes on the editorial page, for it may perhaps be that--the nature of the editorial page as a place for expressing opinions on controversial matters may invite a predominance of criticism over praise. There is, however, a second possible explanation of this phenomenon in terms of the structure of our category list. The most prominent political topics are perhaps those which are most controversial, i.e., those which are under attack. Conceivably, it is these subject matters which are most heavily represented on our list.

In view of this possibility, it seems wise to interpret this ratio not as an absolute measure but as a relative measure, variations in which are significant. To determine the absolute balance of conflict and cooperation, the familiar technique of the column--inch space count is more appropriate than an item analysis of the kind used here. With the present measure we can, however, record the amount and

distribution of conflict and cooperation accorded to our listed topical areas.

Table 9 indicates the distribution of the conflict and cooperation paragraphs in each of the topical areas. The largest amount of conflict was in the governmental area with 33.9 percent, the smallest in the economic area with 10.0 percent.

On the cooperation side, the social area was the highest category, accounting for 35.8 percent of all the space devoted to cooperation. The least amount of space went to the economic and international areas, each with 8.8 percent.

A clearer picture of exactly what kinds of conflict and cooperation were reported can be gained by analyzing specific categories in the five general topical areas. The five largest subject matter categories of conflict are:

(1) Intra-Governmental	8.1%
(2) Human Safety/Welfare	7.7%
(3) Government-Individuals	6.0%
(4) Partisan Politics	5.4%
(5) War	<u>3.7%</u>
	30.9%

It should be evident that the various subject matters which reflect a conflict-orientation, are uniformly spread over the entire nineteen categories. The individual papers displayed considerable differences

TABLE 9
 PARAGRAPHS OF CONFLICT AND COOPERATION
 IN EACH OF THE TOPICAL AREAS

<u>Area</u>	<u>Conflict</u>		<u>Cooperation</u>	
	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Political	74	13.9	51	14.5
2. Governmental	180	33.9	113	32.1
3. Economic	53	10.0	31	8.8
4. International	69	13.1	31	8.8
5. Social	<u>154</u>	<u>29.1</u>	<u>126</u>	<u>35.8</u>
Totals	530	100.0	352	100.0

in their choice of content categories which they devoted to conflict-oriented communication. For example, the conflict category receiving the highest proportion of space was different in three of the four papers.

Bismarck Tribune:

Government-Individuals 6.2%

Fargo Forum:

Intra-Governmental 12.3%

Grand Forks Herald:

Human Safety/Welfare 10.8%

The Minot Daily News:

Human Safety/Welfare 10.1%

In general, there was greater diversity among the papers in their treatment of cooperation news than in their handling of conflict news.

Reliability

Reliability of the subject matter analysis was not computed as the procedure is not subject to a large margin of error. The method discussed previously in the chapter on methodology was used to compute the reliability of the directional analysis. A sub-sample was assembled, consisting of four editorials per paper, each editorial drawn from every sixth day over the two-month period. That is, a total of sixteen editorials were analyzed by three coders, each working independently. The results of each of the three coders were compared for each item. The percentage of agreement score was computed for each judge with the following results: first coder 89%, second coder 94%, and third coder

93%. These individual reliability percentages result in an average percentage of agreement score of 92%. These reliability scores should be interpreted in view of the nature of the study, the appropriateness of the categories, and the degree of precision desired. For the purposes of most content studies, a reliability figure between 70% and 90% is acceptable. Seldom do reliability scores achieve 95% when the categories are sufficiently exhaustive to involve some necessary independent judgement on the part of the coder. The reliability pattern of 92% achieved in this study is considered adequate.

As mentioned in the chapter on procedure, a X^2 (Chi Square) test for significance was done between the four papers and Cony's research. Taken together the papers were significantly different at the .01 level. Taking each paper separately, significant difference at the .01 level was found between all papers except the Grand Forks Herald and the findings of Cony. Table 10 summarizes the statistical tests done.

TABLE 10

CHI SQUARE VALUES FOR EACH PAPER

<u>Paper</u>	<u>Conflict</u>		<u>Cooperation</u>		<u>Neutral</u>		<u>X²</u>
	<u>Expected values (fe)</u>	<u>Observed value (fo)</u>	<u>Expected values (fe)</u>	<u>Observed value (fo)</u>	<u>Expected values (fe)</u>	<u>Observed value (fo)</u>	
<u>Fargo Forum</u>	145.6	135	98.8	73	15.6	52	92.4477*
<u>Bismarck Tribune</u>	131.6	128	89.4	60	14.1	47	86.3624*
<u>The Minot Daily News</u>	147.76	103	93.48	111	14.76	32	37.0857*
<u>Grand Forks Herald</u>	166.88	165	114.24	107	17.88	26	4.1671

*Significant difference at .01 level with 2 degrees of freedom.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The editorials of the four papers analyzed in this study devoted a considerable amount of time and space to conflict, the exception being The Minot Daily News. The discovery of this general pattern of conflict is the most significant finding of this study. For purposes of further research it could be hypothesized that The Minot Daily News is more cooperation oriented because of the existence of certain political conditions (i.e., the Democratic party is the dominant factor on the local political scene). An investigation of the relationship, if any, between the editorial position and the proportion of registered Democrats in the Minot area should prove interesting, if not significant.

The figures disclose that out of every hundred paragraphs 56 report conflict situations, 37 report cooperation situations, and 6 reflect a neutral orientation. There are, then, three paragraphs of conflict for every two of cooperation. Without elaboration, this is an impressive proportion of conflict, and does support the central hypothesis that the North Dakota press presents society as being replete with struggle and discord.

Of course, we do not have an accurate measure of the actual amount of cooperation and conflict that transpires in our society. Therefore, we do not know to what extent the measured editorial ratio of conflict to cooperation--3 to 2--is a distortion of reality.

However, we do know that the spring of 1967 was a time of intense conflict. Tensions arising from international problems (i.e., Vietnam War) were pronounced, and domestic discord was certainly not lacking. Under such conditions, the amount of conflict reported is understandable, if not predictable.

In all fairness, much cooperation reported by the papers was not within the scope of this analysis. It was missed because this study was confined to the editorial section of each paper. The proportion of cooperation to conflict should be very high in such departments as the women's page, society, club, and financial pages, and the drama and music sections. In other words, taken in their entirety, those sections of the newspaper omitted from this study would seem to include substantially more cooperation than conflict news.

Of significance is the fact that the four papers differed considerably in the amount of time and space devoted to conflict. Even though all the papers were from North Dakota, they were in sharp contrast to each other in this respect. The implication is obvious: Given the same (or very similar) occurrence to discuss, some editors prefer to select and concentrate more on the conflict dimension than others.

There remains a need for a comprehensive study to be undertaken, analyzing a representative sample of the North Dakota press, in order to: (1) discover whether popular attitudes determine communication content, or does content determine popular attitudes, and (2) determine the extent to which communication content can be properly taken as a mirror of community attitudes.

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