Content analysis has been defined as a multipurpose research method for analysing text data in a naturalistic setting (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This method is a systematic analysis of text used in investigating problems (Mayring, 2000). Inferences are made from the content of communication to analyse details such as the source of communication, its author and its effect on intended recipients, the social context, and factors which are stressed or ignored in the communication (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Content analysis is different from other methods of text data analysis such as ethnography, grounded phenomenology and historical research. This is because content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as a means of communication, with attention given to the content or contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It consists of several levels of content, which makes it a reliable and valid method of analysis (Mayring, 2000).

Holsti (1969) identifies the purpose of content analysis as to describe the characteristics of messages. The characteristics include trends in communication content; to relate known characteristics of sources of the message they produce to audit communication content against standards; to analyse techniques of persuasion; to analyse style; to relate known attributes of the audience to messages produced for them; and to describe patterns of communication (Holsti, 1969; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Hence, the importance of content analysis is its use as a tool to understand others’ thinking and perception (Duriau, Reger & Pfarrer, 2007).

Content analysis was used in the nineteenth century for analysing hymns, newspaper articles and speeches (Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).