

Paper proposal for **The 2009 Workshop of the ECREA's "Communication Law and Policy" Section: New Directions for Communication Policy Research**

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Abstract:

What we talk about when we talk about document analysis

Most studies in communication policy research involve the analysis of policy documents in one way or another. With the growth of the internet and computer-mediated research tools, policy researchers can access and search documents with greater ease than ever before. As a distinctive research method, however, document analysis is not especially well explicated in either textbooks on the methodology of media and communication studies or in actual research contributions.

The purpose of this paper is to review different uses and definitions of the terms "document" and "document analysis" in recent communication policy research and to point out some common problems and confusions surrounding the notions. Drawing also on neighbouring disciplines and the broader field of policy studies, we argue that document analysis as a distinctive research method remains, if not under-developed, at least under-communicated in much of communication policy research. In particular, the paper problematizes the implicit distinctions found especially in textbooks between document analysis, textual analysis and other interpretative techniques used in different strands of media studies.

As different research questions and objectives necessitate different approaches, our aim is not to define one correct way of doing document analysis. Instead, by assessing some recent contributions and their varying methodological approaches, we argue that explicating the process from data gathering through to actual analysis would not only strengthen the validity of communication policy research but also increase its impact in both academic and policy debates. As such, the paper takes up the challenge of assessing methodological approaches to stake out new directions for communication policy research.