

Case Study Method

Case study method is a descriptive, exploratory or an explanatory analysis of a person, group or event. The importance of case study method cannot be neglected in social sciences. The case study has been especially used in social science, social work, psychology and anthropology. It is a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon. The unit of analysis can vary from an individual to an organization. Basically, a case study is an in-depth study of a particular situation rather than a sweeping statistical survey. Case study method can be defined as:

“Analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more method.”

Data come largely from documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations and participant observation. The case study research design is also useful for testing whether scientific theories and models actually work in the real world. It is argued that a case study provides more realistic responses than a purely statistical survey. For example, a statistical survey might show how much time people spend talking on mobile phones, but it is case studies of a narrow group that will determine why this is so. When informing others about results, case studies make more interesting topics than purely statistical surveys. Mostly people have little interest in pages of statistical calculations but some well placed case studies can have a strong impact.

The advantage of the case study research design is that we can focus on specific and interesting cases. This may be an attempt to test a theory with a typical case or it can be a specific topic that is of interest. In a case study, we are deliberately trying to isolate a small study group, one individual case or one particular population. For example, statistical analysis may have shown that birth-rates in Pakistan are increasing. A case study on one or

two specific areas (Lahore, Multan) becomes a powerful and focused tool for determining the social and economic reasons behind that trend.

Designing a case study, it is important to plan and design how we are going to address the study and make sure that all collected data is relevant. Unlike a scientific report, there is no strict set of rules so the most important part is making sure that the study is focused and concise; otherwise we will end up having a lot of irrelevant information. It is best if we make a short list of 4 or 5 bullet points that we are going to try and address during the study.

Good case studies use a number of different research tools to increase validity. For example, we can use both qualitative and quantitative approaches and different data collection instruments (surveys, interviews, documentation review). We should aim to “triangulate” our research instruments or techniques so they provide different views of the case.

In case study research, data is used to find relationships between the object of study and the research questions posed. Analyzing results for a case study is more opinion based than statistical methods. The usual idea is to try and collect our data into a manageable form and construct a narrative around it. It is always a good idea to assume that a person reading our research may not possess a lot of knowledge of the subject so we should try to write accordingly.

Case study method has the strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- The case study method involves detailed, holistic investigation (for example, all aspects of an organization). For example, a case study about the Al Sadiq Desert Welfare Organization in Bahawalpur might be used to generalise about similar organizations in the social development sector.
- It can utilise a range of different measurement techniques (the case study researcher is not limited to any one methodological tool).

- The histories and stories that can be told about the organization are also important that can be assessed and documented not just empirical data, for example, stories about how the organization interacts grassroots level can be used.

Weaknesses

- Case studies involve analysis of small data sets, such as one or two persons or organizations.
- Case study cannot be generalized to fit a whole population