

12. Case Study

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Introduction:

The case study method is a very popular form of qualitative analysis and involves a careful and complete observation of a social unit, a cultural group or even the entire community. The case study places more emphasis on the full analysis of a limited number of merits or conditions and their interrelations. It deals with the processes that take place and their interrelationship. Thus, case study is essentially an intensive investigation of the particular unit under consideration.

The case study method is a widely used systematic field research technique in Social Sciences these days. The credit for introducing this method to the field of social investigation goes to Frederic Le. Play (1806 – 1982) who used it as a hand-aid to statistics in his studies of family budgets. Herbert Spenceer was the first to use case material in his comparative study of different cultures. William Healy resorted to this method in his study of Juvenile delinquency and considered it as a better method over and above the mere use of statistical data. Similarly, Anthropologists, Historians, Novelists, Dramatists etc. have used this method concerning problems pertaining to their areas of interests. Even management experts use case study methods for getting clues to several management problems.

Definitions:

Many definitions of case study are given yet basically the method of exploring and analyzing the life of a social unit be that a person, a family or an institution, or a community, be called 'case study'. Various aspects of this unit are deeply and thoroughly studied, taking in account its past, present and future. Behaviour

patterns of a unit and its relationship with the environments is studied from all dimensions. It is related to natural history and its relationship with social factors and forces on the one hand and complex factors that are operative in a social unit as an integrated totality on the other.

According to P.V. Young – “Case study is a method of exploring and analyzing of life of a social unit, be that a person, a family, an institution, cultural group or even entire community.”

In the words of Goode and Hatt – “Case study is a way of organizing social data so as to preserve the unitary character of the social object being studied. Expressed somewhat differently, it is an approach which views any social unit as a whole.”

H. Odum has defined case study method by saying that – “The case study method of a data collection is a technique by which individual factor whether it be an institution or just an episode in the life of an individual or a group is analysed in its relationship to any other in the group.”

In this way several definitions of case study have been given but all make it clear that it is a method which aims at studying deeply and thoroughly different aspects of social unit. Some thinkers, however, try to establish that it is not an independent method but only a technique, while still others believe that it is only an approach to a social reality and a mode of organising data in terms of some units. But by and large case study is considered an independent unit and helps in examining the complex situation and combination of various factors involved in a given situation with the object of identifying the casual factors operating on it.

Characteristics of Case Study:

Following characteristics of case study are cleared from above definitions:

1. The researcher can take one single social unit or more of such units for his study purpose; he may even take a situation to study the same comprehensively.
2. In this method selected unit is studied intensively.
3. Case study method results in fruitful hypotheses along with the data which may be helpful in testing them, and thus it enables the generalized knowledge to get richer and richer. In its absence, generalized social science may get handicapped.
4. In case study method the behaviour pattern of the concerning unit is studied directly and not by an indirect and abstract approach.
5. An effort is made to know the mutual inter-relationship of casual factors in respect of the case study method.
6. In case study method the approach happens to be qualitative and not quantitative. Every possible effort is made to collect information's concerning all aspects of life.
7. In case study method we make complete study of the social unit covering all facts. By this method we try to understand the complex of factors that are operative within a social unit as an integrated totality.

Assumptions Of Case Study:

Followings are the assumptions of case study method:

1. The assumption of comprehensive study of the unit concerned.
2. The assumption of studying the natural history of the unit concerned.
3. The assumptions of uniformity in the basic human nature in spite of the fact that human behaviour may vary according to situations.

Stages For The Completion Of Case Study:

In case study method there are normally four stages, which need crossing before the whole study is completed. These may briefly be discussed as under:

If the unit is to be studied as a whole it is essential that there should be collection of broad arrays of data, no matter whether such a unit is social relationship, a group or a person. In the words of Goode and Hatt (1952), “Although mere quantity of data is not sufficient since the collection must be guided by research problem, there is greater opportunity to grasp the pattern of individual’s life if a substantial body of data concerning many facets of that is available.”

The case study method is further distinguished by the use of data from other abstract levels than the purely sociological. Recourse to other levels does give added dimensions to the individual being studied. It is rightly pointed out that when an individual is seen in his total network of relationship, it is more difficult to lose sight of him as a unit.

Goode and Hatt (1952) are of the view that in case study method indices and types are most important and as such proper care should be taken in their formation. According to them, “However, the most important technique in preserving the wholeness of social unit is the development of typologies and indexes, so that the various traits are actually used in characterising the units. It is equally essential that the data collected should be timely processed.

1. Statement Of The Problem:

In this respect it is essential that the problem should be clearly stated and specified. In this statement it should be clearly stated as to what type of cases have been selected for the study and that how many cases have actually been picked up for the study. The statement should also show as to what are the types of units which have been picked up and what is the scope of analysis once the data has been collected.

2. Description Of Events:

Next step then is description of events. It is very essential step and implies that every unit must be carefully and clearly studied. We have already said that case study means in depth extensive and quantitative study. Accordingly, in case study method no event can either be completely missed or its study can be slightly overlooked, neglected or under-estimated in any manner.

3. Factors Of Influence:

There are different factors which influence a social unit. Nobody can underestimate the importance of these factors, which can be both general as well as particular. Such factors can be those which might have influenced social unit directly or indirectly. If case study is desired to be complete it is essential that in the first instance these factors should be identified and after that has been done, then each such factor should be very carefully and thoroughly studied. Unusually indirect factors are given less importance as compared with direct factors. It is essential that this tendency should be avoided in case it is desired that study should be complete and perfect.

4. Analysis Of Data:

In this method of study social unit can be an individual/ group or a particular community. The investigator collects data from his social unit and records that after taking into consideration various influences and factors. But once the data has been collected it is essential that it should be carefully and properly recorded and analysed.

Sources Of Case Study Data:

Following are the main sources of case study data:

1. Personal Documents:

These include diaries autobiographies, memories, letters etc. In every society, generally the people keep diaries, write their autobiographies or memories. These documents are personal and contain the description of significant events of the life of the narrator and his reactions towards them. It is likelihood that these documents may also contain the description of even those events in which an important role has been played by the narrator. To quote Allport, “they are self-revealing records which intentionally or unintentionally yield direct information regarding the structure, dynamics and functioning of author’s mental life. Such personal documents, although sufficiently subjective in nature are highly important for social research. Diaries are mostly written for self-satisfaction and the writer is not likely to distort facts deliberately.” The documents of this type may be written for general purpose, or specially kept for the purpose of research. The former type of the document is generally more reliable, but it may not give full facts regarding an event.

Pauline V. Young opines that, “Personal documents represent continuity experience which helps to illuminate the writer’s personality, social relations and philosophy of life often expressed in objective reality or subjective appreciation.” This is how these are of immense help in studying the personality of the writer as well as his reactions to different circumstances of life.

2. Life History:

Life history involves the study of various events of the life of the person concerned. There is also an attempt to find their social significance. ‘It is in this way that life history differs from the pure historical narrative of facts. While the pure narrative aims at narrating the facts only, life history aims at revealing the meaning and significance of these events in the context of motivating factors of social life.’ Analysis of life history is thus a combination of facts and the inferences. The data relating to life history is collected through prolonged

interviews with the respondents and also with the aid of any written material available about his life and thereupon analysis of the facts so compiled to draw valid generalizations from the available information.

These two sources reveal that a case study often adopts two forms i.e.:

1. the use of written material about the respondent; and
2. collection of data through respondent's interviews.

In addition to these, various other methods may be approached to collect the correct information. To quote, P.V. Young, "they may include from simple verification method viz. periodical conferences, impromptu conversations, dramatic productions, observation and post experimental interviews, to more complicated processes like experimental studies, a wide range of tests including hypnotic tests, tests of ability, tests of aesthetic appreciation, emotional conditioning, social reaction to frustration, imaginal productivity psychological insight etc." The whole life history of the informant (from childhood to old age) is put to through probe and tests by treating every aspect of his life.

Advantages (Merits):

There are several advantages of the case study method:

1. Being an exhaustive study of a social unit, the case study method enables us to understand fully the behaviour pattern of the concerned unit. In the words of Charles Horton Cooley, "Case study deepens our perception and gives us a clearer insight into life It gets at behaviour directly and not by an indirect and abstract approach."
2. Through case study a researcher can obtain a real and enlightened record of personal experiences which would reveal man's inner strivings, tensions and motivations that drive him to action along with the forces that direct him to adopt a certain pattern of behaviour.

3. This method enables the researcher to trace out the natural history of the social unit and its relationship with the social factors and the forces involved in its surrounding environment.
4. It helps in formulating relevant hypotheses along with the data which may be helpful in testing them. Case studies, thus, enable the generalized knowledge to get richer and richer.
5. The method facilitates intensive study of social units which is generally not possible if we use either the observation method or the method of collecting information through schedules. This is the reason why case study method is being frequently used, particularly in social researches.
6. Information collected under the case study method helps a lot to the researcher in the task of constructing the appropriate questionnaire or schedule for the said task requires thorough knowledge of the concerning universe.
7. The researcher can use one or more of the several research methods under the case study method depending upon the prevalent circumstances. In other words, the use of different methods such as depth interviews, questionnaires, documents, study reports of individuals, letters, and the like is possible under case study method.
8. Case study method has proved beneficial in determining the nature of units to be studied along with the nature of the universe. This is the reason why at times the case study method is alternatively known as “mode of organising data”.
9. This method is a means to well understand the past of a social unit because of its emphasis of historical analysis. Besides, it is also a technique to suggest measures for improvement in the context of the present environment of the concerned social units.
10. Case studies constitute the perfect type of sociological material as they represent a real record of personal experience which very often escape the attention of most of the skilled researchers using other techniques.

11. Case study method enhances the experience of the researcher and this in turn increases his analyzing ability and skill.
12. This method makes possible the study of social changes. On account of the minute study of the different facets of a social unit, the researcher can well understand the social change then and now. This also facilitates the drawing of inferences and helps in maintaining the continuity of the research process. In fact, it may be considered the gateway to and at the same time the final destination.
13. Case study techniques are indispensable for therapeutic and administrative purposes. They are also of immense value in taking decisions regarding several management problems. Case data are quite useful for diagnosis, therapy and other practical case problems.

Limitations (Demerits):

Important limitations of the case study method may as well be highlighted.

1. Case situations are seldom comparable and as such the information gathered in case studies is often not comparable. Since the subject under case study tells history in his own words, logical concepts and units of scientific classification have to be read into it or out of it by the investigator.
2. Read Bain does not consider the case data as significant scientific data since they do not provide knowledge of the “impersonal, universal, non-ethical, non-practical, repetitive aspects of phenomena.” Real information is often not collected because the subjectivity of the researcher does enter in the collection of information in a case study.
3. The danger of false generalisation is always there in view of the fact that no set rules are followed in collection of the information and only few units are studied.

4. It consumes more time and requires lot of expenditure. More time is needed under case study method since one studies the natural history cycles of social units and that too minutely.
5. The case data are often vitiated because the subject, according to Read Bain, may write what he thinks the investigator wants, and the greater the rapport, the more subjective the whole process is.
6. Case study method is based on several assumptions which may not be very realistic at times, and as such the usefulness of case data is always subject to doubt.
 - a. Case study method can be used only in a limited sphere. It is not possible to use it in case of a big society. Sampling is also not possible under a case study method.
7. Response of the investigator is an important limitation of the case study method. He often thinks that he has full knowledge of the unit and can himself answer about it. In case the same is not true, then consequences follow. In fact, this is more the fault of the researcher rather than that of the case method.

Despite the above limitations, case studies are being undertaken in several disciplines, particularly in Social Sciences, as a tool of scientific research in view of the several advantages indicated earlier. Most of the limitations can be removed if researchers are always conscious of these and are well trained in the modern methods of collecting case data and in the scientific techniques of assembling, classifying and processing the same. In modern times case studies can be conducted in such a manner that the data are amenable to qualification and statistical treatment. This is also the reason why case studies are becoming popular day to day. Case studies allow a research to investigate a topic in far more detail than might be possible if they were trying to deal with a large number of research participants (nomothetic approach) with the aim of 'averaging'. Hence, the method, though useful, is arduous in nature and requires good deal of

experience and training. However, the limitations are only difficulties and therefore it can be usefully used if the method is used expertisely.