UNIT 11 : CASE STUDY

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11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- understand about case study method of conducting research
- explain how to make empirical enquiry about a contemporary phenomenon through this method.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

The case study is a method of intensively exploring and analysing the life of a single social unit, be it an individual, a family, an institution or a community. The aim of case study method is to find out the factors that account for the behaviour patterns of the given unit and its relationships with the environment. An English philosopher Frederic Leplay introduced this method which was adopted by social researcher like Herbert Spencer, Healey, Mitchell etc. Spencer used case materials in his comparative studies

of different cultures. On the other hand, Healey resorted to the case study method in his study of Juvenile delinquency. Today sociologists, political scientists, Anthropologists, Psychologists and ethnologists make use of the case study method while conducting their research. Significantly this method acquired the necessary impetus and recognition or a systematic field-research technique in Sociology with the classic study. Again, anthropologists and ethnologists interested in the systematic description and study of the primitive as well as modern culture have utilised the case study method. It is important to note that case study is not a method of data collection but is a research strategy or an empirical enquiry that uses multiple evidential sources. In the previous unit we have discussed about Ethnography. In this unit we shall discuss another method of collecting data i.e. Case Study. Here we will learn about objectives and characteristics of case study, steps in case study, significance, advantages and disadvantages of Case Study.

11.3 CASE STUDY : MEANING AND DEFINITION

In simple terms, Case study is an in depth study of a particular situation. It is a method through which a very broad area of research is narrowed down into one easily researchable topic. Case study methods attempt to find out the reasons behind the behaviour pattern of the study subjects and its relationship with the environment.

According to P.V.Young (1966), “case study is a comprehensive study of a social unit, be it a person, a group of persons, an institution, a community or a family.”

Kromrey says that case study involves studying individual cases, often in their natural environment and for a long period of time.

According to Goode and Hatt (1952), “ Case study is a method of exploring and analysing the life of a social unit”.

Therefore, we can say that case study is a method that serves different purposes- describing, exploring and explaining a situation as well as generating a theory. It involves qualitative methods of research and presents a holistic account about a particular phenomenon.

11.3.1 Objectives and Characteristics of Case study

➢ **Objectives of Case study :**

- The first and foremost objective of case study method is to analyse the behavioural patterns of a single unit and its relations with the environment.
- Another major objective of a case study is that it forms the basis for a detailed study in the future. So we can say that case study is a preliminary form of investigation.
- Case study determines and defines the research question and develops hypothesis in a quantitative study.
- Case study is used by researchers to refute generalization in research.
- One of the objectives of case study is to test whether a quantitative study can be done or not.
- Case study explores, explains and describe a particular situation.

➢ **Characteristics of Case study :**

- In case study a small number of unit is studied.
- It studies the units in totality and not some specific aspects or variables of the units.
- Case study can be qualitative or quantitative
- In this method, one unit is considered to be one study
- Case study covers a wide cycle of time
- In this method the case is the core or centre of enquiry

11.3.2 Forms of Case Study

For different purposes of evaluation, researchers opt for different types of case study methods. Some of those are explained below-

➢ **Intrinsic Case study :** The study of a case(person, group, department, community) where the case itself is the primary interest in exploration, is known as intrinsic case study. Here the researcher does not have to select one particular case. For example evaluating the implementation of a new principle in an organization.

- **Instrumental Case study :** In this kind of case study, the researcher begins with a research question and makes use of a case that simplifies or illuminates his analysis. So we can say that in Instrumental case study, the case is simply a preliminary technique that paves way for further research. For example , a researcher interested in women and food habits might set up a study with middle aged women and calcium intakes in their food . In this case, the women and the food habits are not the focus. The focus is learning the relationship between women and the food habits, and why certain women have weaker bones.
- **Pilot case study :** Sometimes a researcher conducts some condensed studies before implementing a large scale investigation. Such studies are called pilot or exploratory case studies. The main objective of this kind of case study is to have identifying research questions and selecting types of measurement.
- **Cumulative Case study :** In cumulative case study the researcher aggregate information about the same unit that has been previously collected at different times. This allows him to generalize information on the basis of past data. It also saves time , money and energy.
- **Illustrative Case study :** Illustrative case studies are descriptive in nature. In this type of case study one or two instances of the same events is used to describe an existing situation. Such a study familiarises the researcher with the research area.
- **Historical case study :** Historical case study is dependent on recordings, documents and interviews. This type of study traces the development of a person, organization or a system over time. For example the study of a political party from its formation till its rise to power.
- **Situational case study :** Situational case study studies a particular event or situation. All participants of the event are sought and their views are recorded. That helps the researcher understand and analyse the situation as a whole. For example the reasons behind strike of workers in a factory. Here the management, the participant

workers, the police force who arrived at the scene to control the situation are all interviewed.

11.4 STEPS IN CASE STUDY

A good case study can be conducted if the following steps are followed:

- ***Step 1:*** **Selection of the Case –** Whether or not to opt for a Case Study depends on the type of research a person is conducting. If a case study is required, then he/she has to identify the main objective of conducting the study. The selection of a particular case depends on whether the study is simply a preliminary reading for further investigation or whether the researcher is interested in solving a particular problem through the Case Study.
- ***Step 2:*** **Collection of Data –** After selecting the case, the researcher has to make preparations for data collection through the case. Here, he/she can use different methods such as personal interviews, survey of records and interviews etc. Generally quantitative techniques of data collection are applicable in this procedure.
- ***Step 3:*** **Preliminary Data Analysis –** The third stage in a case study is systematically analysing the preliminary data collected from the case. This will help the researcher to raise more important questions relating to the research as well as to form relevant hypothesis.
- ***Step 4*****: Thorough study of the case** — After identifying the important questions and constructing the hypothesis the researcher conducts a thorough study of the case. Here, he/she uses the method of prolonged observation and formal as well as informal interviews. The researcher keeps on investigating until he/she finds satisfactory answers to the problem and can draw a clear picture of the investigation.
- ***Step 5*****: Follow-Up Investigation**—In order to ensure the reliability of the data so far collected, the researcher repeats the process of observation and interview and repeats questions whenever and wherever necessary. This follow –up helps him/her to arrive at reliable and valid conclusions.

- ***Step 6*: Generalization of the findings**—Through the conclusion of the case study, the researcher ensures a generalization of the data collected and analysed. Through this generalization he/she can draw a clear picture of the investigation and extend this understanding to arrive at a conclusion.

11.5 SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION FOR CASE STUDY

In case study method researcher employs both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The secondary data may be collected by using a number of sources like books, magazine, newspaper, government reports, organizational meetings etc. Generally these sources are used to specify events and issues as well as study an object over a period of time. Case studies often employ two main techniques of primary data collection- Interview and observation. These are discussed below-

- **Interview :** Interview is the simplest form of primary data collection in a case study. In most of the times, it is seen that interviewers choose unstructured interview while conducting case studies. This is because the usually open-ended questions of unstructured interviews pave the way for in-depth conversation that might be helpful to create a clear picture of the problem at hand.
- **Observation :** In case studies , the observation methods used could be of two kinds- participants and non-participants. Both these methods help the researcher to understand the reality of a situation from the view point of an outsider.

11.6 SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF CASE STUDY

Case study method is a very useful way for conducting thorough and quality research. It is a research strategy that is applied in preliminary period of an investigation. So that the researcher has a better understanding of his study as well as forms a relevant hypothesis to carry forward the study.

Case studies focus on gathering deep information about a specific person, group, event or community. They attempt to evaluate the reasons

behind the actions of a particular case in a particular situation over a period of time. Gathering such detailed information about a particular subject is not possible through another type of experimentation. Often a researcher carries out studies on unusual cases through a case study that might not be ethical to carry out through another way. For example a case study of juvenile delinquency or a case studies of female drug addicts. Often these cases deal with sensitive and personal matters that need careful handling through observation. So we can say that usually unethical matters can be tested by a researcher via this method.

Case studies are also important because they give the research or problem realistic a task. The researcher understands that his area is not purely theoretical and, through an in-depth study, he can provide practical solutions to a real dilemma.

Case studies help the researcher to connect with his/her research problem. These are in-depth analysis that makes the researcher simplify and understand the background of a particular case. A good case study opens up like a good story. It provides the researcher with the past and present, what, how, why and when of a particular event and thus inspires him/her to analyse the behaviour patterns of the case.

Thus we can say that case study method allows the exploration, simplification and understanding of complex issues. When a holistic and in-depth investigation is required, case studies serve as a robust method of conducting research.

11.7 ADVANTAGES OF CASE STUDY

- Case study method is an intensive investigation and exploration of a unit through which a researcher can understand an event deeply and thoroughly.
- Case studies expose the researcher to real life situations which is otherwise difficult. That is why we can say that case study simplifies complex concept.
- Through case study the continuous analysis of the life of a social unit can be conducted in order to dig-out the facts.

- It is a very important tool of hypothesis formulation in a research area.
- Case study helps the researcher to compare about the different types of facts collected during the study.
- Case study improves analytical thinking, communication skill, tolerance, capability and the logical mindset of a researcher.
- It increases the researcher's knowledge about a particular social phenomenon
- Case study method is a comprehensive method of data collection in research. It is an inclusive study that enables the researcher to understand a broad range of topics.
- Case study method helps the researcher to develop a questionnaire and interview schedule.

11.8 DISADVANTAGES OF CASE STUDY METHOD

- It is difficult to find appropriate case studies for all types of research.
- Case study has limited representatives because it focuses on a single unit as a whole. That is why generalization through case study may not always be correct.
- Due to his/her deep connection with the participants, the researcher may develop subjectivity while conducting a case study.
- Case study is not an easy and simple method of research. It is very difficult for a lay-man to conduct a case study.
- Case study is a time consuming instrument of data collection. Hence it may not be the best medium for short term research.
- As it is a narrow study, discrimination and biasness can occur while investigating a social unit.
- In case study method, there is a huge possibility of memory and judgement errors both on the part of the participants and the observer.
- It is very difficult to draw a definite cause/effect from case studies.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1 : What is case study method of research?

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Q.2 : Who adopted the method of case study in research?

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Q.3 : Mention one definition of case study?

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Q.4 : Mention four objectives of case study?

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Q.5 : Mention four characteristics of case study?

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11.9 LET US SUM UP

- Case study method of research is an intensive study of a phenomenon .
- An English philosopher Frederic Leplay introduced this method which was adopted by social researcher like Herbert Spencer, Healey, Mitchell etc.
- Case study is not a method of data collection but is a research strategy or an empirical enquiry that uses multiple evidential sources.
- It is a method through which a very broad area of research is narrowed down into one easily researchable topic.
- Kromrey says that case study involves studying individual cases, often in their natural environment and for a long period of time.

- It involves qualitative methods of research and presents a holistic account about a particular phenomenon.
- The first and foremost objective of case study method is to analyse the behavioural patterns of a single unit and its relations with the environment.
- Case study explores, explains and describes a particular situation.
- It studies the units in totality and not some specific aspects or variables of the units.
- In this method the case is the core or centre of enquiry.
- For different purposes of evaluation, researchers opt for different types of case study methods such as Intrinsic Case study, Instrumental Case study, Pilot case study, Cumulative Case study, Illustrative Case study, Historical case study, Situational case study etc.
- Selection of the Case, Collection of Data, Preliminary Data Analysis, Thorough study of the case, Follow-Up Investigation and Generalization of the findings are the steps, with the help of which, a researcher can conduct a good case study.
- In case study method researcher employs both primary and secondary sources of data collection.
- The secondary data may be collected by using a number of sources like books, magazine, newspaper, government reports, organizational meetings etc.
- Case studies often employ two main techniques of primary data collection- Interview and observation.
- Case studies focus on gathering deep information about a specific person, group, event or community.
- They attempt to evaluate the reasons behind the actions of a particular case in a particular situation over a period of time.
- Often these cases deal with sensitive and personal matters that need careful handling and through observation. So we can say that usually unethical matters can be tested by a researcher via this method.

- Case studies help the researcher to connect with his/her research problem. These are in-depth analysis that makes the researcher simplify and understand the background of a particular case.
- Case study method allows the exploration, simplification and understanding of complex issues.



11.10 FURTHER READING

1) Ahuja, Ram (2001). *Research Methods,* Rawat Publications, New Delhi.

2) Chattopadhyay, Krichnadas & Sudarshana Sen (2013). *Rudiments of Social Research,* Levant Books, Kolkata.

3) Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology – Methods and Techniques*, New Age International (P) Ltd, New Delhi.



11.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1 : Case study is an in depth study of a particular situation. It is a method through which a very broad area of research is narrowed down into one easily researchable topic.

Ans to Q No 2 : An English philosopher Frederic Leplay introduced the case study method.

Ans to Q No 3 : According to Goode and Hatt, " Case study is a method of exploring and analysing the life of a social unit".

Ans to Q No 4 : Four objectives of case study are mentioned below-

- The first and foremost objective of case study method is to analyse the behavioural patterns of a single unit and its relations with the environment.
- Another major objective of a case study is that it forms the basis for a detailed study in the future. So we can say that case study is a preliminary form of investigation.
- Case study determines and defines the research question and develops hypothesis in a quantitative study.