

Case Study Research Defined - *Single or Multiple?* -

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Definition of a Case Study

A case study is a methodological research approach used to generate an in-depth understanding of a contemporary issue or phenomenon in a bounded system. Case study research requires in-depth investigation conducted into an individual, group, or event to gain an understanding of a real-life phenomenon. It is often used in the social sciences and humanities to explore complex issues and to provide insights into specific phenomena or situations. A case study may involve multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations, or documents. The goal of case study research is to gain detailed and nuanced understanding of the case subject and to generate new theories or insights.

A case study is one of the most widely used and accepted means of qualitative research methods in the social sciences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2022). The case study approach is particularly useful to employ when

there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context (Crowe et al., 2011). Case studies provide researchers with an opportunity for greater depth of understanding of an issue (Stake, 2010). The case study design is preferred as a research strategy when “how,” “why,” and “what” questions are the interest of the researcher (Yin, 2018).

Types of Case Studies

Case studies are typically defined by the intent of the case analysis. There are three types of case studies: (single) instrumental case study, collective (multiple) case study, and intrinsic case study.

In a single case study, the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If the researcher only wants to study one single thing (such as single person from a specific group) or

a single group (for example a specific group of people within a bounded system), a single case study is the best choice (Yin, 2017).

In a multiple case study, the researcher selects multiple cases to illustrate the one issue or concern (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of a multiple case study is to compare cases to identify common patterns, relationships, or similarities. In a multiple case study, the cases may be similar in nature, or they may be diverse, but the researcher is looking for patterns or relationships across cases (Yin, 2017). This method is often used when the phenomenon being studied is rare or difficult to observe.

In an intrinsic case study, the focus is on the case itself because the case presents a unique situation, thus resembling the focus of narrative research but maintaining the analytic procedures of a case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In an intrinsic case study, the case is the primary focus of the research, and the goal is to gain an in-depth understanding of the case itself. Intrinsic case studies are often used in the social sciences and humanities, particularly when the case being studied is unique or rare, or when the researcher wants to gain a deeper understanding of a specific issue or situation.

A Bounded System

One of the most frequent questions regarding case study research is the definition of a bounded system. In case study research, a bounded system refers to the delimited scope or boundaries of the case being studied. A bounded system can refer to a single individual, group, event, organization, or any other phenomenon that the researcher is focusing on.

The concept of a bounded system is important in case study research because it guides the data collection and analysis processes.

Scholars new to case study research are often encouraged to think of a bounded system as a box that contains all the relevant variables, processes, and relationships that are relevant to the phenomenon being studied. By defining the boundaries of the system, researchers can focus on the key elements of the case that are most relevant to the research question. The choice of the bounded system is often based on the research questions of the study.

Characteristics of a Case Study

- The identification of a case is bounded (a case within a bounded system, which means what is being studied can be defined or described within specific parameters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case must be bounded by time and place.
- A case study should provide an in-depth understanding of the case.
- Data is collected through various means, including interviews, focus groups, field notes, documents, autobiographies, historical documents, videos, and more.
- Data analysis differs depending on the case under study. In fact, many case studies are both qualitative and quantitative.
- The successful identification of themes is critical to producing effective descriptions in case study research.
- Case studies offer conclusions provided by the researcher regarding the meaning derived from the case and

are important because case studies have continuity in nature.

Where to Start: Yin & Stake

The reference texts listed at the end of this article, as well as the references cited in this article, are a good starting point for anyone who wishes to learn more and begin conducting case study research.

The two most prominent case study scholars are Robert E. Stake and Robert K. Yin. While case study research has been conducted for some time, Stake established accepted procedures for case study research in 1995 and has produced numerous

articles and books about case study methodology and analysis. Two of Stake's works that continue to impact the academic community are his books, "The Art of Case Study Research," and, "Multiple Case Study Analysis." Yin emerged as a leading scholar in case study research and is still producing academic literature today, as he utilizes both quantitative and qualitative approaches to the methodology. Yin's significant contributions to the development of case study research includes the titles, "Case Study Research and Applications: Designs and Methods," "Applications of Case Study Research," and, "The Case Study Anthology."

Essential Readings on Case Study Research

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