## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

#### : Case Study

Social researches are curious about their social settings. Their interest are virtually unlimited. Any social setting is potential for scientific inquiry. The diversity of social topic and situation made researcher to plan their action. This plan for research is conventionally labeled as research design.

Case study method is considered as one of the popular type of research design used by social scientist. It is an intensive study of a particular case. In sociological investigation a case may be any of the following, taken singly or in combination. (1) A person, (2) A group of person such as family or gang, (3) A class of person such as thieves or professors, (4) An ecological init such as neighbourhood or community, (5) cultural unit such as fashion or institution.

Kvomvey (1986) defined “case study involves studying individual cases, often in their

natural environment and for a long period of time”.

Yin (1991) has defined case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigate contemporary phenomena within its real-life context.

This kind of research design usually involves the qualitative method of data collection. It presents holistic account that offers insights in to the case understudy. Thus case study is not a method of data collection; rather it is a research strategy. An empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon by using multiple source of evidence.

###### Characteristics:

Hartfield (1982) has referred to the following characteristics of case study.

* + - It studies whole unit in their totality.
    - It employees several methods in data collection to prevent errors and distortions.
    - It often studies a single unit: one unit in one study.
    - It perceives the respondent as knowledgeable person, not just as a source of data.
    - It studies typically case.

###### Purpose of case study

Burns (2000) has point out the following purposes of case study.

* + - It may be a source of hypotheses for future research.
    - It helps to establish generalizations about the wider population to which the unit belongs.
    - It provides anecdotal evidence that illustrates more general findings.
    - To refute a universal generalization, a single case can represent a significant contribution to theory building.
    - To test the feasibility of the quantitative study.

###### Advantages of case study

Black champion (1976) enlisted following advantages of case study.

* + - It makes in-depth study possible.
    - It is flexible in data collection methods.
    - It could be used for studying any dimension of the topic; one specific aspect of the problem.
    - It could be conducted practically any kind of social setting.
    - Case studies are inexpensive.
    - It helps to study unique case.

###### Disadvantages or criticism.

Case study method is generally criticised on the following basis,

###### Subjective bias:

Research subjectivity in collecting data for supporting or refuting a particular explanation, personal view of investigation influences the findings and conclusion of the study.

###### Little evidence for scientific generalization:

The common complaint against case study is; how can generalization be made from a single case? As an answer to this case studies are generalize to theoretical propositions, not to statistical populations.

Object of case study is to expand theory and not to undertake statistical generalization.

###### Time consuming:

As it produces a lot of information which is difficult to analyse adequately.

###### Doubtful reliability:

The investigator cannot prove his authenticity for obtaining data or having no bias in analyzing them.

###### Missing validity:

For investigator, what seems to be true is more important than what is true. The case study can oversimplify or exaggerate leading to erroneous conclusions.

1. Case study has no representatives, i.e. each case studied does not represent other similar cases.

**Yin’s criticism**

1. **Findings of case studies are biased because the research is usually sloppy**.

This criticism is probably based on the prejudice that quantitative researchers are against qualitative data. They also believe that qualitative study cannot be replicated.

###### Case studies are not useful for generalization.

* + It is not possible to generalize from a single case
  + If a number of cases are used for generalizations, it will be extremely difficult to establish their comparability.

1. **Case studies take too long time** and produce unmanageable amounts of data. The methods of data collection which are time consuming.

#### : Content Analyses

Human beings communicate through language. Language helps to convey our emotions, knowledge, opinions, attitudes and values. Print media, television, radio; movies also communicate ideas, beliefs and values. The analysis is of communication content-written and pictorial- has now become a methodological procedure for extracting data from a wide range of communications.

###### Definition:

Content analysis is a method of social research that aims at the analysis of the content- qualitative and quantitative- of documents, books, newspapers. magazines and other forms of written material.

According to Berelson (1952), “content analysis is a research technique for the objective,

systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”.

According to Eckhardt and Ermann (1977), as a qualitative technique, content analysis is directed towards more subjective information such as attitude, motives and values.

The content may be manifest or latent. The former refers to the visible actual parts of the text as manifested in the document, sentences, and paragraphs and so on. The latter is the underlying or implied meaning conveyed.

***Characteristics of content analysis***

Gardner (1975) has identified four characteristics of content analysis.

1. **Objectivity:** Explicitly formulated rules of content analysis enable two or more persons to obtain same results from the same document.
2. **Systematic:** It provides enough freedom for the researcher to eliminate unnecessary materials which is not supporting the research hypotheses.
3. **Generality:** In content analysis, the characteristic of the sender or recipient of the communication is little scientific value.
4. **Quantification**: The inferences from the study must be in precise numerical terms. This means that inferences must be derived strictly from counts of ‘frequency’ steps in content analysis.

Sarantakos (1998) formulated following steps in content analysis;

###### step: The selection of the Research Area.

The topic can be one from the newspaper, TV, magazines, books, movies and the like.

###### step: Formulation of Research Topic.

It involves explaining and operationalising the topic, selection of units, determining categories and formulating hypotheses.

###### step: Research Design.

It aims at determining the size of sampling method of data collection and so on.

###### step: Data Collection

It involves counting frequencies, gathering information about the study unit and evaluating

units.

1. **step: Lastly**, the analyses and interpretation of data aims at giving inferences and conclusions.

##### Types of content analyses:

Sanders and piney (1983) have suggested five types of content analysis: (1) word counting analysis, (2) conceptual analysis, (3) somatic analysis, (4) evaluative assertion analyses, (5) contextual analysis.

##### Strength and limitations of content analysis

Following are the strength and limitations of content analysis,

###### Strength:-

* + It is unobtrusive method; it is not threatens respondent directly
  + It is useful in historical research, studying people who are no longer available to answer questions.
  + It makes possible a variety of cross cultural studies.
  + It can be used to test preliminary ideas, hypotheses or theories etc.
  + It is powerful tool for evaluating personal or social values.
  + It is more useful where research budget is small and resources are limited.
  + It is easier to repeat the study through this method.

###### Limitations:

* + Unforeseen aspects of research field.
  + Determining validity is difficult.
  + Some required documents may not be available to the researcher which may affect the conclusion.
  + Its conclusion remains the shadow of personal bias.

###### : Narrative Method

A **narrative** is a constructive format (as a work of speech, writing, song, film, television, video games, photography or theatre) that describes a sequence of non-fictional or fictional events. The word derives from the Latin verb “narrare" to recount", and is related to the adjective “gnarus”, "knowing" or "skilled".

Narrative is often used in case study research in the social sciences. Here it has been found that the dense, contextual, and interpenetrating nature of social forces uncovered by detailed narratives is often more interesting and useful for both social theory and social policy than other forms of social inquiry. Prominent social scientists have pointed out that a social science expressed in terms of narrative case studies would provide better access for policy intervention than the present social science of variables.

Narrative Inquiry emerged as a discipline within the broader field of qualitative research. It is an approach to understanding/researching the way people make meaning of their lives as narratives, linked fields are narrative analysis, narratology and life writing. Narrative Inquiry should be distinguished from storytelling in that the word narrative implies an audience and a narrator. Of interest to narrative inquirers is not what happened so much as what meaning did people make of what happened. Narrative Inquiry is a fairly recent movement in social science qualitative research. It has been employed as a tool for analysis in the fields of cognitive science, organizational studies, knowledge theory, sociology and education studies, among others.

The starting point of the Narrative Method is the story. Story telling is a deeply rooted human phenomenon. It is a natural way of sharing our knowledge, insights and feelings with others.

Stories or personal experiences are especially appropriate for making complicated subjects comprehensible to others. Compared to answers to specific questions, stories (and the context in which they are told) frequently lead to a much richer output and to richer and more profound in- sights.

#### : Focused Group Interview

A **focus group** is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members. The first focus groups were created at the Bureau of Applied Social Research in the USA, by associate director, sociologist Robert K. Merton. The term itself was coined by psychologist and marketing expert Ernest Dichter.

Powell et al define a focus group as

“A group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research. (1996: 499)”

Focus groups are discussions that last one to two hours, usually done with 6-12 people. The discussion is led by a moderator asking open-ended questions.Focus groups can be used to discover

people's general reactions to an interface or services. A wide range of information can be gathered in a relatively short time span.

In the social sciences and urban planning, focus groups allow interviewers to study people in a more natural setting than a one-to-one interview. In combination with participant observation, they can be used for gaining access to various cultural and social groups, selecting sites to study, sampling of such sites, and raising unexpected issues for exploration. Focus groups have a high apparent validity - since the idea is easy to understand, the results are believable. Also, they are low in cost, one can get results relatively quickly, and they can increase the sample size of a report by talking with several people at once.

Focus groups are particularly helpful when used in conjunction with surveys. Your library can follow up a survey with focus groups to clarify the issues revealed, and perhaps hear surprising new ideas or concerns. Unlike doing polls or asking a listserv, the strength of this technique is the interaction between participants. With a skilled moderator, the conversation can go beyond "like it, don't like it" and allow new views to surface. Since there is no pressure to reach a consensus, all views can be encouraged and aired.

The first step is to understand what you want to learn. Focus groups are not polls or surveys; they are in-depth, qualitative interviews with a small number of carefully selected people, to help you develop an idea or specific service. To prepare, you may want to first consider your budget. This is a labor intensive project; time may be the most expensive item. It takes considerable time to plan the sessions, recruit volunteers, and develop your questions. If you hire a professional moderator, that could be a considerable expense, other optional things can add to the cost, including honorariums, refreshments and video taping

##### Features/advantages of focus group interview

* Focus group research involves organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic.
* Focus group interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic.
* The benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people’s shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation.
* Problems arise when attempting to identify the individual view from the group view, as well as in the practical arrangements for conducting focus groups.
* The role of the moderator is very significant. Good levels of group leadership and interpersonal skill are required to moderate a group successfully.
* You can get feedback about what people do over a long period of time.
* Focus groups used early in a project can produce insights and questions from the interaction among different users or stakeholders.
* Focus groups are relatively inexpensive (assuming that participants are from the same geographical area) and can be arranged quickly.

###### Disadvantages of focus group interview

* Impersonal

Group discussions don’t lend themselves to personal revelations, so they might not be suitable for sensitive or controversial issues. For example, group discussions might not be suitable for research pertaining to products people might feel ashamed about using, such as alcohol. If people don't feel comfortable sharing their opinions or experiences, the focus group interview won't generate any useful insights. In these situations, anonymous surveys or confidential interviews might be a better means of obtaining information.

* Difficult to Control

For a focus group interview to be revelatory, the conversation must flow naturally to reveal what the participants are thinking. But group discussions can get out of hand quickly, straying from the original topic and getting lost in useless tangents. An effective facilitator will keep the discussion on track, but this might be impossible if the group is rowdy or young.

* Dominating Individuals

The goal of a group discussion is to discover what all the participants think, but outspoken people might skew those results. For example, a shy dissenter might never reveal important insights, or a single persuasive participant might cause other participants to change their original opinions, meaning you never learn about their initial reactions. To avoid these problems, facilitators must involve everyone to ensure all the participants have equal time and that all points of view are heard.

* Not Representative

The selection of people for the group discussion is unlikely to be representative of the larger population, so you can’t assume the opinions you uncover have any significance past whatever insights they offer into possible thought patterns. For example, unanimous agreement about a product's effectiveness might have no correlation to how most consumers feel about that product, though a discussion of the product’s effectiveness might help you generate targeted questions for future research