

Unit 4: Case Studies, Focus Groups and Observations

Welcome to Week 4 where you will be introduced to some data collection methods which are generally used for qualitative research but are sometimes applied in quantitative research.

Case studies involve in-depth research and study of individuals or groups. Case studies lead to a hypothesis and widen a further scope of studying a phenomenon.

However, case studies should not be used to determine cause and effect as they cannot make accurate predictions (due to possible bias on the researcher's part). The other reason why case studies are not a reliable way of conducting descriptive research is that there could be an atypical respondent in the survey. Describing them leads to weak generalisations and a move away from external validity (see unit 7).

A focus group is also one of the commonly used qualitative research methods used in data collection. In such a method, a group of people is chosen and allowed to express their insights on the topic that is being studied.

It is important to make sure that when choosing the individuals for a focus group (limited to 6-10 people), they should have a common background, comparable experiences, and are representative of your target market. The main aim of the focus group is to find answers to the "why" "what" and "how" questions required to reach out to those individuals.

Quantitative observation refers observing numerical values such as weight, volume, shape, usually from a sample that represents the researcher's target market/goal. So, there is an objective collection of data and then statistical and numerical analysis methods are applied to the data to obtain research results. Quantitative observation can be carried via experimentation or surveys (for example, customer satisfaction surveys).

Qualitative observation refers to the monitoring of characteristics. In this case, the researcher observes the predetermined respondents from a distance. In this data gathering method, the respondents should be in a comfortable environment to help ensure that the characteristics observed are natural and effective. For example, a researcher in a supermarket can, from afar, monitor and track the customers' selection and purchasing trends. This offers a more in-depth insight into the purchasing experience of the customer. In a descriptive research design, the researcher can choose to be either a complete observer, an observer as a participant, a participant as an observer, or a full participant.

You may feel that you will need to use more than one of these methods to obtain the data you need for your investigation.

In this unit we shall:

- Introduce you to case studies, focus groups and observation methods.
- Discuss the advantage and drawbacks of these methods.
- Consider the types of data you will obtain.

On completion of this unit you will be able to:

- Understand how to carry out each of these data collection methods.
- Know which method would be suitable, if any, for your investigation.
- Consider the type of data you would obtain.

Reflection:

Focus Groups:

A focus group is a type of qualitative market research in which a group of 6-10 individuals gather to discuss a product, service, concept, or marketing campaign and offer their opinions on it. An experienced facilitator guides a group conversation that lasts anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes and is meant to elicit useful feedback and insights. The facilitator comes prepared with a series of questions (usually between 10 and 12) meant to stimulate in-depth discussion amongst the group members. The role of the moderator is to ensure that all voices are heard and that many diverse perspectives are presented.

Participants in a focus group often do not know each other and are recruited based on their buying history, demographics, psychographics, or behavior. Companies will routinely conduct many focus groups, perhaps in different cities, to collect as many perspectives as possible.

The moderator and/or any observers may take notes throughout the time when participants are answering a question posed by the moderator (Shopify, n.d.).

Pros of Focus Group:

Focus groups are a well-liked method of conducting market research because they:

- are less expensive than other methods.
- produce results quickly.
- are simple to implement.
- supplement verbal responses with body language and other non-verbal cues.
- collect information from respondents in their own words, which is more reliable.
- are adaptable and can be modified based on group behavior.

Cons of Focus Group:

In a focus group, there are more people involved, hence there are more potential opportunities for problems to arise due to interpersonal dynamics. Results from a small group can't necessarily be extrapolated to a broader population because:

- Participants can be affected by others in the group.
- Dominant members can skew the results

Types of Focus Groups

There are various subsets of focus groups that are intended for use in unique contexts. For example:

- The use of smaller focus groups: The number of people involved is reduced from the typical 6–12 to as few as 4–5 customers.
- The use of virtual focus groups: Customers sign up for a video chat service online and take part from afar.
- Conversations in which both participants contribute and receive feedback. The researchers can observe the focus group through the see-through glass. Everyone in the group keeps an eye on each other and shares their thoughts on what they see and hear.
- A discussion panel with not one but two moderators. There are two moderators in the room instead of one; one is in charge of facilitating the conversation, while the other takes notes.
- Group discussion including clients as participants. When someone from the firm or product under investigation is present at the discussion (Chron.com, 2019).

Observational Research:

Observational research is a method that involves seeing people and events as they occur in their natural habitats. Instead of seeing participants in controlled environments like laboratories or focus groups, researchers might observe them in their everyday lives.

Researchers observe participants as they carry out a task or set of tasks without providing them with any specific instructions. Observational research could be used, for instance, to examine the relationship between people's water intake and their dietary habits.

- **Quantitative Observation:**

An objective approach of data analysis, a quantitative observation quantifies and statistically measures study variables. Quantitative research typically involves variables

having values that can be measured numerically, such as age, weight, volume, and scale, hence this type of observation is commonly connected with these types of values.

Qualitative Observation:

To collect information, qualitative researchers apply criteria that are themselves subjective. It uses methods such as inductive reasoning, naturalism, and sympathetic neutrality to quantify qualitative differences and similarities across research variables.

Differentiating characteristics of study variables are the primary focus of qualitative observation, while quantitative observation is typically used in research processes that necessitate data quantification. For more objective results, researchers sometimes need to integrate quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative observation is used when a researcher must classify a data sample according to statistical criteria. To classify qualitative differences in a data set, however, qualitative observation is used (Blog, n.d.).

Case study:

A case study is a detailed analysis of a specific instance, group of people, or situation. Case studies examine a person's entire life in detail, looking for trends and explanations for their actions. Numerous disciplines, from psychology and medicine to education and anthropology to politics and social work, make use of case studies.

To generalize findings from one set of data to a much larger population, case studies seek to collect as much data as possible about a specific individual or set of people. Regrettably, case studies are sometimes highly subjective, making it tough to extrapolate findings to the population at large.

Although the focus is narrower in a case study, the structure is comparable to that of other kinds of psychological writing. APA guidelines should be strictly adhered to when creating a case study.

Benefits and Limitations

Both positive and negative aspects of a case study are possible. Before considering whether to conduct such a study, researchers should weigh the benefits and drawbacks listed above.

- **Pros**

One of the greatest advantages of a case study is that it allows researchers to investigate things that are often difficult to impossible to replicate in a lab. Some other benefits of a case study:¹

- Allows researchers to collect a great deal of information
- Give researchers the chance to collect information on rare or unusual cases
- Permits researchers to develop hypotheses that can be explored in experimental research

Cons

On the negative side, a case study:

- Results cannot be extrapolated to the community at large
- Causal relationships cannot be established
- The study may lack scientific rigor
- Bias may be introduced (Cherry, 2021)

A qualitative data collection tool, focus groups yield descriptive information that cannot be reduced to quantitative form. Observation is a method of information collecting that involves witnessing behavior, events, or physically noting traits in their natural environment.

References:

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