**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.