Case Studies

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Overview

- Basic
- Case study from the text Skarbek
- Suitable
- Process
- Design
- Comparative Case Studies
- Data Source
- Data quality
- Example
- Key Findings
- Source

What do you know about case study?

- Methodology
- Mostly use Qualitative Method as a Basic
- Viewing the case from different perspectives
- Case can be many things (place/event)
- Case is linked to theory
- Longitudinal character: data collection over a longer period of time
- Goal: Understanding complex phenomena in context using a variety of methods

Case study (Skarbek 2025)

- Intensive investigation of a single case or a few cases based on detailed observational data
- Goal: Maximize explanatory power within the case
- Example: Card - ship lift (single case with many observations)
- Important: Number of cases ≠ number of observations
- Observation = unit of analysis
- Decision: many cases with few observations vs. few cases with many in-depth observations
- Causal process observations (CPOs)
- Complex phenomena require in-depth, context-rich analysis

Case study (Skarbek 2025)

- Qualitative and quantitative data can be used
- Qualitative data enables detailed studies and informal evidence
- Contribute to the reduction of measurement errors through context-based evidence
- Support in understanding complex concepts that are difficult tomeasure
- Criteria of qualitative information quality: relevance, proximity to there search question, authenticity, validity, diversity of perspectives
- External validity can suffer, but internal explanatory power increases
- Traceability: Who was interviewed, how was it documented?
- Tests for Causal Claims: Hoop Test, Smoking Gun Test, Doubly Decisive Test, Straw-in-the-wind Test

When is the case study suitable?

- For how/why questions
- When behavior cannot be manipulated
- When contextual conditions are decisive
- When the boundary between phenomenon and context is unclear
- Unique or atypical cases
- Hypothesis testing
- Prime examples (ideal types)

Process

- Define research objective
- Select case
- Find literature/ theory
- Describe case
- Analyze case

- Combination with expert interview, group discussion- possible Mixed Method or Triangulation

Design

- Single case vs. multiple cases
  - Single case: deep understanding, limited transferability
  - Multiple: Comparison possible, cross-case synthesis
- Holistic vs. embedded
  - Holistic: focus on entire case
  - Embedded: different levels of analysis within the case
- Purpose:
  - Intrinsic
  - Instrumental
  - Collective

Comparative Case Studies

- Intensive study of one or a few cases to uncover causal mechanisms
- Design: Comparison of cases with similar background conditions and variation in the variable to explain difference in outcome
- Evaluation criteria:
  - Similarity in background factors
  - Quality and variation in the explanatory variable
  - Number and uniqueness of empirical implications
  - Handling of potential confounders

Data source

- Triangulation: Combination of e.g. interviews, documents, artifacts, observations, quantitative data
- Data collection and analysis simultaneously

- Techniques:
  - Pattern matching
  - Explanation generation
  - Time series analysis
  - Cross-case synthesis
  - Logical models

Data quality

- Criteria: Credibility, transferability, reliability, confirmability
- Measures:
  - Clearly defined research question
  - Appropriate study design
  - Systematic data collection & evaluation
  - Reflection and triangulation
- Involvement of several researchers to reduce bias
- As transparent and process-oriented as possible
- Comparison with existing literature to contextualize the results
- Measures:
  - Case study protocol: Documentation of all steps
  - Peer review, disclosure of the analysis paths
  - Reflection on own values prior to research

Example

- The Impact of the Mariel Boatlift on the Miami Labor Market (Card, 1990)
  - Assessing the effect of the Mariel Boatlift on wages and unemployment rates in Miami, particularly among:
    - Less-skilled non-Cuban workers
    - Black workers
    - Earlier Cuban immigrants
- Methodology
  - Used Current Population Survey (CPS) data from 1979 to 1985
  - Compared trends in Miami to those in four similar cities (Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles, Tampa-St. Petersburg)
  - Focused on wages, unemployment, and employment-population ratios across skill levels

Key Findings

- No Negative Impact on Less-Skilled Non-Cuban Workers
  - Wages and unemployment rates for less-skilled Black and non-Cuban Hispanic workers remained stable
  - Economic trends in Miami mirrored those in comparison cities
- Small, Contained Impact on Cuban Workers
  - Average Cuban wages dropped modestly
  - No widening wage gap between Cubans in Miami to Cubans elsewhere
- Miami Absorbed the Shock Efficiently
  - The city's labor market structure absorbed the new workers quickly
  - Industries, which employed many immigrants, were already prominent in Miami
  - Domestic migration may have slowed, offsetting population pressure

Source

- Skarbeck (2025) Qualitative research methods for institutional analisis
- Scribbr - Fallstudie (Link: Eine Fallstudie in 5 Schritten durchführen))
- Priya (2020) Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in its Application; In: Sociological Bulletin Vol 70, Issue 1
- Baxter, Jack (2010) Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers
- Card, D. (1990), 'The Impact of the Mariel Boatlift on the Miami Labor Market', ILR Review, 43(2): 245-257.