

# Case Study Research: Single or Multiple?

*Hayden Coombs, Assistant Professor of Communication  
Southern Utah University*

Coombs, H. (2022). *Case study research: single or multiple* [White paper]. Southern Utah University.  
<https://haydencoombs.files.wordpress.com/2022/09/case-study-research-coombs-2022-3.pdf>

## 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.

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).

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.”

### Reference Texts

- Bromley, D.B. (1986). The case-study method in psychology and related disciplines.
- Denzin, N. K. (2001). *Interpretive interactionism* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Sage.
- Feagin, J. R., Orum, A. M., & Sjoberg, G. (Eds.). (1991). *A case for the case study*. UNC Press Books.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2011). Case study. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 4, 301-316.
- Gustafsson, J. (2017). Single case studies vs. multiple case studies: A comparative study.
- Platt, J. (1992). “Case study” in American methodological thought. *Current sociology*, 40(1), 17-48.
- Stake, R. E. (2010). *The art of case study research*. SAGE.
- Stake, R. E. (2015). *Multiple case study analysis*. The Guilford Press.
- Tellis, W. (1997). Introduction to case study. *The qualitative report*, 3(2), 1-14.
- Thomas, G. (2021). How to do your case study. *How to do your case study*, 1-320.
- Yin, R. K. (2004). *The case study anthology*. Sage Publications.
- Yin, R. K. (2012). *Applications of case study research*. SAGE.
- Yin, R. K. (2012). Case study methods. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, Rindskopf, D. & Sher, K. J. *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 141-155). American Psychological Association.
- Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. The Guilford Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Designs and Methods* (6th ed.). SAGE.

### 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.

### **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 instrumental 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). Multiple case studies can be used to either augur contrasting results for expected reasons or augur similar results in the studies (Yin, 2017).

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).

## References

- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2022). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end*. SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE.
- Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A., & Sheikh, A. (2011). The case study approach. *BMC medical research methodology*, *11*, 100. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-100>.
- Stake, R. E. (2010). *The art of case study research*. SAGE.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Designs and Methods* (6th ed.). SAGE.