

Reflections on Writing on Case Study Research

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Case study research is often frowned upon with scholars criticising the approach as limiting because it does not allow predictability and generalisation. Though true for qualitative case study research, a great advantage is the deep and extensive insight it provides. In this piece, we reflect on conducting case study research in our Masters' theses.

I (Seriane Morapeli) explored how a health-focused not-for-profit organisation (NPO) uses social media activism to mobilise health activism amongst South African millennials. A South African health-focused NPO was the case explored. Despite the growing number of NPOs in South Africa (SA) and their impact on SA societies, there is minimal research attention on these organisations. Scandals such as the Life Esidimeni tragedy and the comforting aid provided by Gift of the Givers during lockdown in the covid-19 pandemic and the recent KZN floods. Demonstrated the role of NPOs as change agents. Positive or negative. It was important that I provide intensive and meaningful insights to answer the research questions. Moreso for the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA (HSFSA) which is a NPO operating to save lives through the treatment and prevention of heart diseases.

Moreover, considering the vulnerability of the NPO to donors, it was essential that the research findings be trustworthy. I thus drew on three qualitative data collection methods of interviews, qualitative content analysis and a document study. Ploughing through the data, I constantly asked myself why. It was exhausting and time-consuming but triangulating the research methods enhanced the credibility of the case study research by providing three sources of verification and interpretation of the data to ensure rigour. Interviews provided personal experiences and opinions of the phenomena under investigation from the HSFSA staff. Social media content analysis and the document study supported and opposed the interview findings. The results? Rich research findings. One research finding revealed that while the HSFSA can play a crucial role in addressing heart disease amongst millennials, a lack of funding and poor health literacy about heart disease amongst this generation are challenges..

However, in some cases the depth and probe provided by interviews is enough to attain the required insights. I (Elmon Motloutsi) employed case study research to explore stakeholder engagement practices in Greater Tzaneen Municipality (GTM) to find out which methods, systems and processes are put in place to facilitate public participation and service delivery decision-making. I used semi-structured interviews to collect data from the municipality officials, councillors and members of the community in ward 6 and 8 to gain holistic insights into the challenges and opportunities of using stakeholder engagement in improving service delivery in GTM. Unlike structured interviews that compel the researcher to stick to the prescribed questions during the interviews, semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in making follow-up questions and deviation from original questions for in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. One of the insights of using semi-structured interviews for this study was the integration of local native languages of Xitsonga and Sepedi to gain more information from the interviewees. Trust and relationship-building through the use of the local languages during the interviews provided detail and meaningful insights. This perfectly aligned with the finding that change happens when one feels heard, in service delivery people

wish to have a say in governance not for local government to impose often unwanted decisions.

In sum, case study research proved valuable for in-depth and detailed exploration and understanding of our different cases. It also allowed us to appreciate the cases and their phenomena.

Additional readings

Harrison, H., Birks, M., Franklin, R. & Mills, J. (2017). Case study research: foundations and methodological orientations. *Forum qualitative social research*, 18(1).

Yin, R.K. (2018). *Case study research and applications*. California: Sage publications.