Comparative Analysis and Case Studies

MEV1T 4800 - 09.11.2010
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Plan for lecture

➢ Case study
➢ Comparative method
➢ Participant observation

Definition: ‘Case Study’

A case study is an empirical enquiry that...

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined.

The case study inquiry...

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points.
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion.
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

Six types of case studies

- Theoretical case studies
- Interpretative case studies
- Hypothetical-generating case studies
- Theory-confirming case studies
- Theory-informing case studies
- Deviant case studies

Generating theory

Case study: Units of any size
RQ:
- Does the incest taboo exist in all societies?
- Are almost all nurses women?

Theory confirming or theory generating.

The Case Study Investigator

Desired skills

- A basic list of skills:
  - demands of a person’s intellect, ego, and emotions are far greater than any other research strategy
  - not routinized

- be a good ‘listener’
- be adaptable and flexible
- have a firm grasp on the issues
- unbiased by previous notions
A journalistic case study

*All the President’s Men* (1974)
Account of the Watergate scandal
Dramatic and suspenseful book
Solid journalistic methods
Asking Q: How and Why?

Comparative approach

- "Scientific approach is unavoidably comparative".
- The comparative approach is a broad, general method, not a specialized, narrow technique.
- A method or an approach?
- A research strategy (Lijphart 1971)

Statistical method

- There is no clear dividing line between the statistical and comparative method;
- the difference depends entirely on the number of cases.

(Lijphart 1971)

Anthropological and sociological research

Primitive societies, fewer variables than advanced societies.
Almost a laboratory for the quasi-experimental approach to social phenomena.

But also...
- Comparative politics
- Comparative literature

A classic contribution

Late 1960s and early 1970s: comparative method became widespread.

Key contribution: (Lijphart 1971)

Comparative studies

Selection of cases (not random, but information-oriented)
- Apples and bananas?

Selection of analytical focus
- Variables?
Q: What is the most appropriate strategy for comparative research?

Most similar systems design (Lijphart and Smelser)

In the most similar system design this is done by choosing as research sites political systems that are similar in as many variables as possible with the exception of the phenomenon to be examined.

Most different design (Pawsonski and Tanze).

In the most different design the aim is to maximize the number of variables on which the system differ, in order to investigate the phenomenon. E.g.: If rates of suicide are the same among the Jun, the Swedes, and the Russian, those factors that distinguish these three societies are relevant for the explanation of suicide.

Most similar or most different?

Discussion in pairs (3–5 minutes)

Comparing PSB institutions in four different countries

Selection strategy in the article "Redefining public service broadcasting" (Enti 2008).

- Theoretical approach: Choosing one PSB institution from each of four theoretical categories.
- The strategy enables an examination of similarities and differences between the media institutions’ engagement with audience participation.

The chosen institutions:
1. SVT (Partial confrontation)
2. BBC (Opposition)
3. NRK (Identification)
4. PBS (consolidation)

The US case had to be justified as an exceptional case, which highlights the other three because of the institutional differences.

Comparative method:
Weaknesses

- The ‘small N’ problem: Many variables, small number of cases - increase the number of cases as much as possible. - reduce the variables. - choose comparable cases.
- Cases are picked in accordance with the hypothesis - should be picked systematically.

Combine the two?

- Ideal types rather than viable research approaches.
- A representative sample of cases could improve the study.
- Can include both most similar and most different types of comparison.
A Comparative analysis of P2s Dagsnytt Atten and P4s Syyten Trett

1. Level: Institutional level
   - NRK (public broadcaster, licence)
   - P4 (commercial, private)

2. Level: Channel level
   - P2 (role in the NRK universe)
   - P4 (here channel, not company)

3. Level: Production
   - Dagsnytt Atten = editorial unit / staff
   - Syyten Trett = editorial unit / staff

Case study
- A single case

Comparative method
- Many cases (min. two)

+ Permits intensive examination of cases even with limited resources.
- Contributes less to building theory than studies with more cases.

Collecting the Evidence
- Documents
- Archival records
- Interviews
- Direct observation
- Participant observation
- Physical artefacts

Written examination
- 9 December at 09:00
- 4 hours
- Gymnas 4 Idrettsbygningen