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AACSB standard 8 and case research (part 1): classification of case research

Classification of case research

The current environment of higher education requires business schools to be “more strategic about their research investments and more explicit about assessing return—not because AACSB will require it, but because stakeholders are starting to demand it” (Morris, 2022; AACSB International, 2012) [1]. Students, parents and legislators concerned about the affordability of higher education want some assurance that the high costs of institutional investments in research are worth it. Stakeholders want to know that investments schools make in supporting the creation of new knowledge (research) impact students’ educational experiences or the broader communities served. In response, accrediting bodies have incorporated the assessment of research output, value and impact into accreditation standards. Accreditation by AACSB (AACSB International) requires schools to document the school’s thought leadership aspirations and the societal impact of the collective intellectual contributions of faculty members. Each school’s chosen area for thought leadership and the societal impact of its intellectual contributions are expected to align with the school’s mission. Tenure and promotion success may depend on how well the faculty member demonstrates the quality and impact of their scholarly work. This editorial letter is part of a series that focuses on two objectives:

1. to show how AACSB Standard 8: Impact of Scholarship considers cases published in peer-reviewed journals as intellectual contributions; and
2. to provide resources case writers can use to make the case about the quality and impact of case publications in tenure and promotion materials.

AACSB standard 8

Accreditation Standard 8 addresses the expectation that business schools are “to engage in the creation and dissemination of high-quality, impactful knowledge that is aligned with their missions” (AACSB International, 2020). The 2020 standard addresses metrics for assessing quality and impact of intellectual contributions, differences in the types of intellectual contributions for schools focusing on teaching or research and variations due to the intended stakeholders. The 2020 standards continue the trend to broaden the types of intellectual contributions that may be included in accreditation portfolios by tying the assessment of the quality of these contributions to the unique mission of the school. Business schools must identify thought leadership aspirations that are appropriate to their missions and contexts and evaluate progress and plans toward achieving their aspirations.

Acceptable types of intellectual contributions

Accreditation requirements specify that schools must classify intellectual contributions as basic, applied or teaching and learning scholarship. A broad list of the various types of intellectual contributions considered appropriate scholarship includes peer-reviewed

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articles, scholarly books, case studies, peer-reviewed academic proceedings, research grants and many others (AACSB International, 2020). How should published cases be classified? Are they basic, applied or teaching and learning scholarship? The correct answer to this question may be, “Yes!” Cases could be basic, applied or teaching and learning scholarship depending on the specific case and the mission of the author’s institution.

Cases as basic/discovery research

Cases that lead to the development of innovative theoretical models describing phenomena observed in real businesses may represent basic or discovery scholarship. For published cases to be considered as basic or discovery research, case writers must provide the literature review providing the underlying theoretical foundation and the description of the resultant new theoretical model(s) in the Theory Discussion section of the Instructor’s Manual (IM).

In a 2006 presentation on the importance of case research, Harvard University’s Michael Porter stated,

[...] we have to find ways of capturing the complexity of management. And, the only way we can do that is with in-depth, longitudinal, carefully crafted, rigorously developed case studies. Undertaking case studies has been fundamental to every bit of work that I’ve done. It was, obviously, crucial to my strategy work [...] The big impact I made in strategy was not made until I was able to take a leap and jump away from that (industrial economics) literature [...] The in-depth clinical study of messy complicated problems using the vehicle of cases combined, of course, with an analytical bent, a theoretical orientation, and a desire to synthesize and build frameworks [...] led to whatever success I’ve had. (Porter, 2006)

Michael Porter was recognized as a Distinguished Contributor by the North American Case Research Association (NACRA) in 2005 and was voted the most influential strategic thinker by the Strategic Management Society. Porter topped the list of the 50 most influential thinkers in business, according to *Business Insider* (Feloni, 2015).

Although the published excerpts from Michael Porter’s NACRA speech may be used to support a case writer’s claim that a case should be considered as basic research, comparing oneself to Michael Porter may be difficult for promotion and tenure committees to accept. Following up a case study with an empirical study testing the proposed theory may be necessary to support the claim of basic or discovery research. It is up to the case writer to provide a strong justification to support the classification of the published case as basic research. Depending upon the mission of the case writer’s school, this may be an almost impossible hurdle to overcome. Fortunately, there are other possibilities.

Cases as applied research

Cases and accompanying IMs demonstrating the integrative/application of theoretical models and frameworks to real business problems may be categorized as applied research. Jerry Trapnell, former Chief Accreditation Officer and Executive Vice President of AACSB stated,

Case research that is well grounded in solid field research could really be applied research because you are applying your knowledge into investigating, finding out, building out the facts so that you can build and write the case and all the learning material that goes with it. I think that is a very valid piece (of scholarly activity). (Harris et al., 2018)

Trapnell suggested that the AACSB Standards were intentionally broad and that case research fit within those standards. Still, it was up to the individual school to articulate its own standards relative to case research and writing. Some schools may consider published cases as applied research, while others may not.

It is up to the case writer to provide compelling support for the integrative and applied nature of a specific published case study. Two sections of the IM become critical to support classification as applied research: Research Methods and Theory Discussion section.

Typically, the research methodology section indicates whether the case was based on primary or field research (interviews with the protagonist and others, site visits at the organization) or secondary research (published reports, court transcripts and so forth). Most cases use field and secondary research methodologies to gather the facts that form the basis for the case narrative. Case writers who wish to support an applied research designation for the case should carefully document the primary or field research methods used to develop the case. The case writer may wish to list the interviews (by position title) and the frequency and duration of the interviews. Internal documents and social media posts should also be documented as part of the primary research. Field research such as company tours, retail store observations and so forth should also be listed. Secondary sourced cases will most likely need to be based on more than typical sources such as published news media, websites and the like to be considered applied research.

The Theory Discussion section of the IM must provide evidence of the applied nature of the case by providing a record of the theoretical models and frameworks used in the case analysis. Documentation must go beyond simply listing the models or frameworks to explain each model or framework's analytical importance or significance. Additionally, the case writer must explain why specific models were chosen for developing an understanding of the unique context of the case and for the creation and evaluation of possible solutions to case issues. Reliance on generic models or frameworks (such as SWOT, Ansoff's Matrix, Porter's 5 Forces or PESTEL) may make it difficult to demonstrate the applied aspect of the research. Using newer or specialized models or frameworks may provide more substantial support for the applied research designation, especially if the case writer subsequently shares the models with the case company (after writing the case). Two methods can be used to share the models. First, company executives could be invited to observe the class case discussion to see how students apply various models to analyze the company's situation and make recommendations about what the company should do. Second, the case writer could share excerpts from the IM with the case protagonists once the case has been accepted for publication. Documenting either approach may help establish the applied nature of the case research.

Cases can also be viewed as applied research if they are part of a qualitative research project. Double-impact case research uses qualitative case studies (typically focused on firms in an industry group) and the subsequent development of teaching cases on the same companies as a way for scholars to double the impact of intellectual contributions. Gogan (2020) found that discussing teaching cases (such as those published by *TCJ*) with executives may help the scholar/case writer to achieve "efficiency of effort, theorizing, and useful practitioner guidance". Teaching cases developed from that research can be categorized as applied research. If the outcome of a double-impact research program such as this results in the development of theoretical models, it may be described as basic or discovery research. Vega *et al.* (2015) provide a step-by-step approach to converting a qualitative research case to a teaching case that could be published in *TCJ* (Vega *et al.*, 2015). A double-impact research program, including qualitative research and teaching cases, can assist case writers assert that their work is either applied or basic research.

Cases as teaching and learning research

Many business schools view teaching cases as pedagogical research, focusing on the typical usage of the case rather than the research methodology used by the case writer. Because cases are typically used in a teaching/learning setting, many schools automatically consider them teaching and learning research. If the school's mission is teaching-focused, this may be fitting and to the advantage of the case writer. If the school prioritizes basic and

Table 1 Cases in this issue

<i>Case title and target audience</i>	<i>Authors</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>
<p>"Good" 'Ol Camp Teddy Amidst the COVID Pandemic Target audience: Graduate courses in investment management, hospitality management, corporate finance or business strategy</p>	George De Feis and Donald Grunewald	<p>Camp Teddy is a seasonal camp for families in rural Connecticut adjacent to New York City and suburbs in New York and Connecticut. It is technically a for-profit organization but operates more like a nonprofit organization because many of the campers own shares and have used the Camp sometimes for several generations. The Camp has traditions that are liked by many of the shareholders and campers. Although net income has increased in the past year, there does not seem to be enough funds to support necessary capital expenditures to improve facilities for the future. The largest stockholder has recently died. His immediate heirs' control 30% of the 1,000 shares and other family members control 40% with the remaining 30% of shares in the hands of small shareholders, many of whom use the Camp each summer. A large hotel chain is interested in possibly acquiring the Camp through a buyout or perhaps a hostile takeover, with a potential large gain to shareholders. The Board of Directors must consider a number of issues to ensure good occupancy of the Camp in the future and must decide what to do about a potential takeover attempt</p>
<p>Paranoiabox.ru: Russian Start-up Growth Decision Dilemma Target audience: Undergraduate or graduate students in entrepreneurship courses</p>	Alla Dementieva, Olga Kandinskaia and Olga Khotyasheva	<p>Paranoiabox.ru case presents an entrepreneurial and strategic marketing decision situation. In May 2019, in Moscow, Russia, two young residents of the MGIMO University business incubator Anastasia and Max founded the start-up business called Paranoiabox.ru. This project was a quest in a new format with home delivery: a mixture of escape, detective and board game. The player received by post a box containing various objects. Interacting with them, he or she unraveled the plot thread, found clues and gradually approached the final clue. The game with complex copyright puzzles had a built-in hint system and provided mechanisms for interaction online. By July 2019, 30 boxes for their first quest were sold. The subscribers were waiting for a new quest. Despite the first sales, Anastasia and Max had no budget for hiring freelancers or outsourcing. They were faced with an urgent and challenging dilemma: whether to concentrate on the current product sales and spend all the budget on promotion, or, alternatively, to launch a series of new quests and focus on the target market with high brand awareness. There was an additional funding dilemma: should they apply for crowdfunding?</p>
<p>Qualtrics and the Utah Jazz – A Paradoxical Relationship Target audience: Undergraduate and graduate students in Marketing or Corporate Social Responsibility courses</p>	Skyler King, Anthony Allred and Clinton Amos	<p>This case examines Qualtrics, a company that took an unprecedented approach to social responsibility. Qualtrics paid millions of dollars and provided significant promotional and administrative support for cancer research without directly identifying itself as the sponsor on the Utah Jazz NBA jersey patch</p>

(continued)

Table 1

<i>Case title and target audience</i>	<i>Authors</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>
<p>When Foreign Direct Investment is Threatened: Rio Tinto and Richards Bay Minerals Target audience: Undergraduate and graduate students in International Business or Financial Management courses</p>	<p>Amy Moore and Marianne Matthee</p>	<p>The case highlights the interrelated factors (civil society infrastructure, local and political unrest and community instability) which led to global mining company Rio Tinto announcing the halt of its operations and force majeure at its only South African business, Richards Bay Minerals (RBM). RBM was the largest business and employer in the province. Following destruction of some of its equipment, civil unrest such as blocking of roads and intimidation of staff and the murder of one of their executives, Nico Swart, RBM management consequently announced all supplier contracts and operations would be halted until it was safe for work to be resumed</p> <p>The case allows students to consider the interrelated factors that multinationals operating in developing countries are subject to in terms of different sub-national institutions and the potential impact of a large multinational ceasing operations in a local economy, both directly and indirectly. It concludes with considerations of what needs to be in place for RBM to continue operations</p>
<p>Alkem Laboratories: Managing Employee Motivation During Pandemics Target audience: Undergraduate and graduate courses in Organization Behavior, Organizational Change, and Supply Chain Risk Management</p>	<p>Subrat Sarangi, Ashok Priyadarshi, Gloryson Chalil and Rasananda Panda</p>	<p>Alkem Laboratories Ltd., is a leading pharma major from India with a global footprint. At the break of COVID-19 pandemic, the manufacturing unit of the company at Sikkim is facing the scare of mass absenteeism, especially among the contractual workers who account for 60% of the workforce of the unit. Ashok Priyadarshi, (Vice President, Human Resources) and his team along with the think tank of the unit have to find a solution to the problem at hand. What shall be the measures that the think tank will propose? The team sets out to find an answer to these questions so that Alkem could seize the business opportunity at the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic</p>
<p>Social Shopping at Goel Stores: Forging Ahead Through the Use of Social Media Target audience: Students in Marketing, Digital Marketing or Retail Marketing courses</p>	<p>Anagha Shukre and Naresh Verma</p>	<p>Family businesses, like that of Kiran Rai's, owning a local Mom and Pop store in an emerging city were faced with a serious problem of sustaining their businesses. These family businesses countered immense competition from their own types, i.e. from other local Mom and Pop stores within the same cities; online stores; and the organized stores. The choice of the customers to buy goods from the neighborhood shops has remained largely as an age-old tradition in the households. With the millennials and the Gen Z exposed to an array of brands, can they become the first choice of young customers for shopping for all kinds of products and varieties? Can the local Mom and Pop stores spread their wings across the young generations, particularly the Millennials and Generation Z through inexpensive social media channels? What are their growth options? How can the social media serve this purpose? The case uses the social cognition theory and the use gratification theory to throw light on the new concept of Social Shopping</p>

(continued)

Table 1

<i>Case title and target audience</i>	<i>Authors</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>
Circular Beauty at Nafigate Cosmetics: Balancing New Brand Concepts With Growth Through Contract Manufacturing Target audience: Students in Marketing courses	Kveta Olsanova, Gina Cook and Petr Král	Nafigate Corporation is a small Czech company with a global presence and a solid organizational philosophy to create a better world through scientific knowledge and active use of technology. With an innovative new product, Nafigate is poised to revolutionize the cosmetics industry. The case explores elements of branding, strategic decision-making and how to balance competing priorities during a company's growth phase

applied research in promotion and tenure criteria, the case writer should use the abovementioned approaches to position the case favorably. Although Standard 8 explicitly lists case studies as a possible type of acceptable intellectual contribution (AACSB International, 2020), acceptance of case research continues to be viewed by some scholars as inferior to other research approaches. Unfortunately, young researchers may feel compelled to avoid publishing teaching cases until after they have achieved tenure. The NACRA and the CASE Association have long worked to boost the scholarly recognition of case research and writing and will continue to do so. The explicit recognition of case studies by accrediting bodies such as AACSB and public statements such as those of Michael Porter and Jerry Trapnell help to increase perceptions of the quality and rigor of case research, but it is a slow process. Although it is not impossible to achieve promotion or tenure based on published cases, researchers must recognize that they will need to make a strong case for the quality of the work.

Final caveat

Case researchers would do well to remember that the IM distinguishes case writing from storytelling. The IM is considered the scholarly contribution of the case. If authors want colleagues to consider their published cases as scholarly contributions for tenure and promotion, spending more time crafting an effective IM seems worthwhile – increasing the likelihood of getting the case published and demonstrating scholarly work for career advancement.

In this issue

This issue includes seven cases (see Table 1) focused on various companies, locations and issues. Each case has a strong IM providing effective teaching strategies, theoretical linkages and complete answers and analysis to all discussion questions. *TCJ* IMs have been rigorously peer reviewed to ensure that adopting faculty can teach these cases as well as the authors. Enjoy!

Note

1. Some of the material in this article appears in (Morris 2022).

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