

GETTING SINGLE CASE STUDIES PUBLISHED IN ISI-RANKED JOURNALS: SOME DO'S AND DON'T'S

Factum, 2019, Michael Gibbert & Bareerah Hoorani

The fashion industry abounds with single 'cases', i.e. illustrations, stories, narratives and public myths of what made a particular company successful (and sometimes unsuccessful). Fashion, perhaps more than any other industry is therefore akin to the in-depth study of a single company. The most popular research methodology used to explore such singular empirical phenomena is the case study method. Understanding fashion therefore means understanding the case study method. The method has huge potential and some of the most ground-breaking insights in management, for instance, were firmly based on theory-building case study research.

There is a catch: the case study method (perhaps like no other method) has been wrought with criticism regarding its validity and reliability, in short, its rigor. Part of the problem is purely formal, or at least so it seems. The case study method (unlike its quantitative cousins such as experiments or surveys) suffers from less-well codified recording conventions. For surveys and experiments there are standard formulae to describe the research design, how data was collected and analyzed, and how conclusions were derived. There is no such formulaic language in the case study community, and it often appears that rigor is in the eye of the beholder.

The bigger problem is substantial, rather than formal. When it comes to the study of a single case, a number of standard considerations regarding validity and reliability are brought to a critical test. What can we learn from the observation of a single company? Almost by design, single cases are not replicable, let alone generalizable. The conclusions we derive are, at best anecdotal and probably simply subjective. Or are they? To nail down causal effects, we need the systematic comparison of several (not: one) case. Or do we?

The overall aim of this workshop is to help researchers (Ph.D. students, as well as faculty) who intend to use, or are already using, the case-study method for research purposes. We take a problem-oriented approach that looks across research stages into the question of how to craft methodologically sound single case studies so that they have a good chance of publication in ISI-ranked journals. Specifically, we look into each stage of the case-study project, including design (research question, case selection, etc.), data collection and analysis (employing multiple sources of data including surveys, interviews, archival data, and participant-observation, pattern matching, etc.), as well as reporting and write-up (issues of rhetoric and style). At every stage of the process, the emphasis is on validity and reliability, and the different strategies to ensure and even enhance internal validity, construct validity, external validity (also called generalizability), and reliability.

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professor at Bocconi University in Milan, research associate at INSEAD, and post doc at Yale. His highly-cited methodology research appeared in *Organizational Research Methods*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Scientometrics*, as well as several books with *Wiley* and *Blackwell*, *Elgar*, and revied by *The Economist* and *Financial Times Press*. His latest methods book is forthcoming in 2021 by Cambridge University Press.

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Workshop Program

We first take a close look at the essential ingredients of a rigorous case study design, and in so doing deal with several popular myths in case study rigor overall and with regard to the single case study in particular. We do this using a problem-centered approach, i.e. by looking into the main validity (internal, external, and construct) and reliability. We then use these insights to develop in-depth understanding of the application of these principles in published case studies.

Theory

- **Hoorani, B.H, Balachandran Nair, L., & Gibbert, M. (2019). Designing for Impact: The Effect of Rigor and Research Design on Citations of Qualitative Case Studies in Management. *Scientometric*.**
- **Gibbert, M., & Ruigrok, W. (2010). The What and How of case study rigor: Three strategies based on published work. *Organizational Research Methods*,13 (4), 710-737 .**
- **Gibbert, M., Ruigrok, W., & Wicki, B. (2008). What passes as a rigorous case study? *Strategic Management Journal*, 29, 1465-1474.**
- **Gerring, J. (2004). What is a Case Study and What Is It Good for? *American Political Science Review*, 98(2), 341-354.**
- **Geddes, B. (1990). How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics. *Political Analysis*, 2, 131-150**

Application

- **Yin, R.K. (2004). The case study anthology. London: Sage. Chapter 3.**
- **Delmestri, G., & Greenwood, R. (2016). How Cinderella became a queen: Theorizing radical status change. Administrative Science Quarterly, 61(4), 507-550.**
- **Siggelkow, N. (2001). Change in the presence of fit: The rise, fall, and renaissance of Liz Claiborne.**