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QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN MARKETING: WHAT CAN ACADEMICS DO BETTER?

Abstract

Qualitative research is designed to generate in-depth and subjective findings to build theory. Combined with the quantitative bias of top-tier journals, many qualitative researchers do not utilise the full-benefits of their adopted methodologies. This makes it challenging for qualitative researchers to publish their work at this level. Therefore, this current paper is intended to help academics and postgraduate researchers to be aware of the mistakes that can be made when undertaking qualitative research. These include very small (and weak) sample sizes, single-source studies, and poorly-written data analysis processes. This investigation contributes to the extant literature by suggesting some ways to improve the credibility of these methodologies, like accessing the correct informants, reporting on larger (or richer) samples, conducting pilot studies, clearly presenting qualitative data, and triangulation. By drawing upon a range of best practices from the broader commercial literature, some illustrations are offered on how to effectively undertake qualitative research.

Keywords: Qualitative research, marketing theory, credibility, research methods, marketing research.

Introduction

“Qualitative research is often criticised as biased, small-scale, anecdotal, and/or lacking rigour; however, when it is carried out properly, it is unbiased, in-depth, valid, reliable, credible, and rigorous” (Anderson, 2010, p. 2).

Research methods have been an important topic in the marketing (and broader management) literature, whereby, academics have debated over the best data collection and data analysis techniques to develop certain theories (Bonoma, 1985; Gummesson, 2005; Suddaby, 2006; Woodside, 2010; Gneezy, 2017; Yan & Hyman, 2018). Within such debates, the topic of qualitative, vis-à-vis, quantitative research has been a prominent theme, as scholars have discussed the benefits and drawbacks of both approaches (Gummesson, 2003; Shah & Corley, 2006; Bryman, 2007; Welch et al., 2011; Leeflang, 2017; Pratt et al., 2020). Marketing, as an academic subject, has been dominated by quantitative research, something that is also applicable to other management disciplines, like strategy, international business, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Chandler & Lyon, 2001; Cadogan et al., 2009; Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013; Boso et al., 2013; Eisend, 2015; Reuber et al., 2017; Zapkau et al., 2017; Han et al., 2019). That is, qualitative research has been employed by numerous marketing scholars, but compared with quantitative research, appears to be valued to a lesser extent by journal editors and reviewers (see Davies & Fitchett, 2005; Pratt, 2008; Hulland et al., 2018; Aguinis et al., 2020).

Qualitative research is employed to develop interpretive meanings to explain a phenomenon by scholars immersing themselves within their collected data, e.g., through interviews, focus groups, or participant observation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Jonsen et al., 2018). Quantitative research is utilised to obtain descriptive meanings behind psychological constructs via examining differences and/or

relationships between two or more variables (Srinivasan & Hanssens, 2009; Hair Jr. et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Gneezy, 2017). Indeed, through value freedom, quantitative research involves academics minimising human contact with their participants (Hunt, 1994; Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Ji et al., 2019). There are several key points that marketing academics need to consider when developing stronger (i.e., theory-building) qualitative studies, in terms of the data collection and data analysis techniques that they choose to employ (Hackley, 1998; Gioia et al., 2013; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). That said, some qualitative researchers can be perceived as being their own worst enemy, in which numerous scholars do not exploit the full potential of these methodologies and face the high-risk of being rejected by journal editors and reviewers (Suddaby, 2006; Pratt, 2009; Pratt et al., 2020).

Consequently, the objective of this paper is to highlight the problems pertaining to qualitative research and help marketing academics and postgraduate researchers to overcome such issues with some rigorous data collection and data analysis techniques. The aim of this article is to increase the volume of qualitative research submitted to marketing journals, with authors using the subsequent recommended tools to develop stronger (robust) methodologies¹. Importantly, this investigation is not intended to quantify qualitative research, but instead, should be used to help academics and postgraduate researchers to employ qualitative methods in a credible manner. By achieving the research objective, three important contributions are made to strengthen the extant literature:

1. Some critical mistakes that can occur when conducting qualitative research are identified, so that marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers are aware of (and can avoid making) such errors (responding to Goulding, 1999; Gummesson, 2005; Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Aguinis et al., 2020).

¹ To emphasise a critical point, this current study takes a holistic approach to qualitative research. The paper focuses on contextual matters, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and credibility issues in qualitative research, as opposed to a single aspect of such methodologies. In doing so, several pertinent mistakes concerning qualitative research are identified. More importantly, some solutions to overcome these errors are discussed by drawing upon a range of best practices from the broader commercial literature. It is anticipated that marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers should employ a selection of these approaches to strengthen their qualitative methodologies and contribute to the marketing literature. Also, there have been numerous editorials and “how to” papers in top-tier broader management journals that have highlighted the value of qualitative research (e.g., Suddaby, 2006; Pratt, 2009; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Aguinis et al., 2020; Pratt et al., 2020). Unfortunately, some of these best practices have not been adopted within the marketing domain – potentially explaining why there has been a quantitative bias among top-tier journals in the field. It is intended for the themes of such papers to be incorporated into the marketing literature. Gratitude is expressed to an anonymous reviewer for requesting that more detail should be placed on the positioning of the paper and how it contributes to the existing body of knowledge.

2. By drawing upon a range of best practices from the broader commercial literature, some actionable recommendations are made about how to effectively undertake qualitative research in marketing (following Suddaby, 2006; Pratt, 2008; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Pratt et al., 2020).
3. Several recent, but high-quality methodological tools (sourced from broader management subjects) are evaluated to increase the credibility of qualitative research within the marketing domain (building upon Gioia et al., 2013; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Granata et al., 2018; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019).

To make these three contributions, this article is divided as follows. First, the framing literature concerning qualitative research is reviewed. Second, some of the major problems with qualitative methodologies are discussed. Third, in respect of certain rigorous data collection and data analysis techniques, a series of future research directions are outlined. Fourth, this paper is concluded.

Framing literature

Methodological choices

Before any researcher attempts to investigate his/her topic of interest, they need to decide whether their intended methodology is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods (Perry, 1998; Suddaby, 2006; Davis et al., 2011; Pratt et al., 2020). That is, despite this current paper being used to promote the value of qualitative research designs, it is equally-acknowledged that some studies should not employ these methods (Morgan et al., 2019). Specifically, qualitative research is better-suited to issues that are under-researched within the existing body of knowledge, such as those that require theory to be built, rather than tested (Bryman, 1984; Welch, 2000; Pratt, 2009; Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011; Ji et al., 2019). Alternatively, quantitative research is an approach that is employed to test theory, so should be used when a substantial volume of literature surrounds a certain topic, allowing scholars to develop and evaluate a series of research hypotheses (Cadogan et al., 2009; Combs, 2010; Hulland et al., 2018). Consequently, researchers should select a method (or methods) and broader methodology that aligns with what they intend to investigate and will allow them to generate appropriate findings (Gummesson, 2005; Bryman, 2016; Aguinis et al., 2020). Put another way, research methods should link with a study's objective, so that relevant data collection and data analysis tools are used to achieve the goals set by a researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Easton, 2010; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Pratt et al., 2020).

The quantitative bias in marketing and management journals

The marketing literature has been dominated by quantitative research, for which **respected** journals have published far fewer qualitative articles (Narver & Slater, 1990; Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Martinez-Lopez et al., 2013; Mahajan & Venkatesh, 2014; Becker et al., 2015; Oliveira & Cadogan, 2018; reference withheld). According to Birkinshaw et al. (2011, p. 573), the same has occurred in other academic disciplines (e.g., international business), whereby, “such methods have been progressively marginalised in our field [international business], as quantitative methods have become the norm. This shift in emphasis has mirrored the broader trend toward more positivistic empirical methods in the social sciences”. Consequently, Birkinshaw et al. (2011, p. 574) proposed that if undertaken correctly, qualitative research should be used to “play a critical role to interpret and understand the complex plurality of contexts – institutional, cultural, organisational, and so on”. **Although there are some topics of marketing (e.g., consumer behaviour) that are unique to the domain (Hunt, 1991; Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2013; Goulding & Derbaix, 2019), other areas (as explained below) have conceptual overlaps with subjects within the wider management field. Hence, this current article draws upon the broader commercial literature, including core marketing papers, as well as investigations positioned at the interface between marketing and other disciplines.**

Following on, other marketing topics, including planning, strategy development, strategic alliances (e.g., coopetition), and internationalisation have large overlaps with certain commercial disciplines – for instance, management, entrepreneurship, innovation, international business, and strategy (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Cadogan et al., 2002; Boso et al., 2013; Bouncken & Kraus, 2013; Granata et al., 2018). Ultimately, the broader management literature refers to how people interact with organisations, in terms of customers, competitors, employees, management teams, supply chain partners, governments, and several other stakeholders (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Gnyawali et al., 2016; Felzensztein et al., 2019; reference withheld). As such, this current article draws upon a range of commercial subjects to strengthen the existing body of knowledge surrounding qualitative research. With numerous qualitative data collection and data analysis techniques available to scholars (Goulding, 1998; Stokes, 2000; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Anderson, 2010; Dann, 2010; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Chai and Dibb, 2016; Yan & Hyman, 2018), it is important to ask - how should marketing academics **and postgraduate researchers** improve their use of qualitative methodologies? This question is answered throughout this current study with a range of actionable illustrations of robust data collection and data analysis techniques.

The overall purpose of qualitative research

Extending a previous issue, should marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers pursue qualitative methodologies, they must understand the purpose of such data collection and data analysis techniques. Qualitative research is used to develop a rich and detailed understanding of certain theories, concepts, and constructs, such as why companies pursue their adopted strategies and how managers make decisions (O'Donnell et al., 2002; Shah & Corley, 2006; Suddaby, 2006; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Crick et al., 2016; Ji et al., 2019). Moreover, qualitative research can be used to develop in-depth assertions (via research propositions) about how a theoretical issue works in practice (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Hyde, 2000; Nemkova et al., 2012; Granata et al., 2018). That is, as discussed throughout this article, while qualitative research can be used as a stand-alone methodology, it also has the benefit of being utilised as a pre-cursor or follow-up to quantitative research (Diamantopoulos & Cadogan, 1996; Perry, 1998; Nemkova et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2018). In other words, qualitative research is used to shape scholars' knowledge of a certain theory with subjective (and in-depth) information that cannot feasibly be collected in quantitative research due to its objectivity and descriptive nature (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). These subjective (and in-depth) insights into a phenomenon are achieved through researchers immersing themselves within their data (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Woermann, 2018). This current study explores the different purposes of qualitative research within the marketing domain. Then, after discussing some of the pertinent errors that qualitative researchers can make, some counter-strategies are evaluated. These solutions surround drawing upon a range of best practices from the broader commercial literature and infusing them into the marketing field.

Qualitative research as a pre-cursor to quantitative research

Following an earlier point, qualitative research has been used as a pre-cursor to quantitative research. For example, Kohli & Jaworski (1990) published a seminal study concerning market orientation, as the implementation of the marketing concept and the organisation-wide creation of customer value. In their paper, Kohli & Jaworski (1990) interviewed a large sample of senior managers in the United States, finding that market-oriented behaviours surround companies generating, disseminating, and responding to information about customers and competitors. At the time of Kohli & Jaworski's (1990) study, very limited research had been published on market-oriented firms (e.g., Hise, 1965; McNamara, 1972; Ruekert & Walker Jr., 1987; Gronroos, 1989), meaning that their use of qualitative methods was highly-appropriate, so that they could build theory surrounding the implementation of the

marketing concept. However, once such preliminary qualitative research had been undertaken, these authors developed measures of market-oriented behaviours (the MARKOR scale) and tested their assertions with quantitative data (see Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Kohli et al., 1993). Subsequently, market orientation has become a well-studied topic throughout the marketing literature (Ruekert, 1992; Narver & Slater, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1994; Morgan & Strong, 1998; Cadogan et al., 2003; Kirca et al., 2005; Morgan et al., 2009; Ozkaya et al., 2015; He et al., 2018). Perhaps market orientation might not have become such an established area without this early qualitative evidence.

As another illustration, Diamantopoulos & Cadogan (1996) interviewed a sample of managers in British companies to investigate export market orientation. In their qualitative study, they linked the theory surrounding domestic forms of market orientation with the international marketing literature (see Cadogan & Diamantopoulos, 1995) to examine how companies might engage in market-oriented activities in their export markets. After their preliminary qualitative study, they developed and validated a multi-dimensional measure of export market orientation (EMO activities) using a series of multivariate statistical techniques (see Cadogan et al., 1999). Subsequently, they tested their findings with quantitative data, revealing that export market-oriented behaviours are likely to improve export performance (Cadogan et al., 2002; Boso et al., 2013). Although not all qualitative research needs to drive quantitative research, it can be used to help scholars to obtain theory-building information to later test with more objective methods (Diamantopoulos & Cadogan, 1996; Perry, 1998; Hyde, 2000; Gummesson, 2005). That is, qualitative research provides scholars with in-depth information that can later be evaluated with statistical data, which in turn, can be used to generalise to wider populations (see Nemkova et al., 2015). This includes using qualitative data as an exploratory tool to develop operationalisations of psychological constructs (as done by Katsikeas et al., 2006; Crick & Crick, 2019).

Qualitative research as a follow-up to quantitative research

Another use of qualitative research is to obtain follow-up findings to explain the underlying mechanisms behind quantitative results (Spence & Crick, 2004; Sharma et al., 2018; reference withheld). For example, Nemkova et al. (2015) conducted a multi-method (three studies) investigation of firm-level decision-making across international marketing strategies. They started with an exploratory qualitative study to shape a conceptual framework, followed by a statistical evaluation, in which they tested this model. Then, Nemkova et al. (2015) used qualitative data

(thirteen in-depth interviews with export managers) to explore the reasons behind “how” and “why” their statistical results occurred. In other words, the qualitative data were used to explore the pertinent issues pertaining to their conceptual framework that the quantitative data could not facilitate (Davies & Fitchett, 2005; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Pratt, 2009; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013; Morgan et al., 2019; Pratt et al., 2020). Once Nemkova et al. (2015) had analysed all of their qualitative and quantitative data, they made stronger conclusions than if they had depended on their statistical information. In short, qualitative research can be an effective tool to offer subjective and in-depth explanations to supplement statistical results (rather than just utilising the extant literature) (following Spence & Crick, 2004; Katsikeas et al., 2006; Sharma et al., 2018; reference withheld).

Epistemological perspectives used in qualitative research

As stressed throughout this current study, qualitative research is used to build theories, in which scholars embrace bias by considering human interactions between researchers and their participants (Hackley, 1998; Welch et al., 2011; Pratt et al., 2020). Quantitative research is used to obtain descriptive results to assist researchers to understand the differences and/or relationships between two or more variables (Cadogan et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2011; Boso et al., 2013; Gneezy, 2017). Quantitative research is usually underpinned by positivism (used to test theories), whereby, scholars attempt to reduce bias by minimising human contact with their participants to keep their personal values from affecting their results (value freedom) (Hunt, 1994; Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Ji et al., 2019). In the marketing literature, qualitative research has varied, with some scholars taking an interpretivist (or social constructivist) approach, while others have leaned towards positivism (Hunt, 1991; Szmigin & Foxall, 2000; Styles & Hersch, 2005; Lowe & Rod, 2018). These epistemological perspectives have determined the types of research methods (in terms of data collection and data analysis techniques) that academics have employed to answer their research questions (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Eisenhardt, 1991; Hunt, 1992; Gummesson, 2005; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Lindgreen et al., 2018).

Expanding upon this issue, positivism is an epistemological perspective, in which researchers believe that reality (the truth) can be accessed through scientific and objective tools (Hunt, 1994). Positivists typically favour quantitative research methods, such as experiments and surveys (Morrow, 2005; Hanson & Grimmer, 2007). Interpretivism opposes positivism, since researchers perceive that they can find the truth through immersing themselves within their data by taking a humanistic approach to their investigations (Grove & Fisk, 1992; Szmigin

& Foxall, 2000; Peters et al., 2013). Interpretivists usually prefer qualitative research methods, like interviews, participant observation, and focus groups (Goulding, 1998; Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013). Alternatively, critical realism concerns a philosophy, where researchers use multiple perspectives from their participants to challenge the assumptions of certain mainstream theories (Perry, 1998; Burton, 2001; Davies & Fitchett, 2005; Easton, 2010). In almost all instances, critical realists draw upon qualitative methodologies and underpin their work with political ideologies, particularly, the work of Marx or Foucault (Brownlie & Saren, 1992; Kwan & Tsang, 2001; Reed, 2005; Tadjewski, 2010; Bouchet, 2018). To stress a vital point, these epistemological perspectives are employed to shape academics' choice of methodologies (see Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Gummesson, 2005; Andersen et al., 2018). In other words, research philosophies should manifest into data collection and data analysis techniques that mirror academics' epistemological perspectives (Hunt, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morrow, 2005; Ji et al., 2019).

In the case study literature, collecting and analysing such data can be undertaken through different philosophical viewpoints (Dubois & Gibbert, 2010; Welch et al., 2011; reference withheld; Kriz & Welch, 2018). That is, Yin (2011) takes a post-positivist approach to case studies, in which multiple sources of qualitative data can be collected to produce generalisable findings. Alternatively, Eisenhardt (1989) uses a positivist approach, but instead of focusing on generalisability, highlights the importance of using multiple sources of qualitative data to produce rich findings that deal with complex issues. Furthermore, Stake's (1995) stance on case study research is underpinning by interpretivism, whereby, the findings should be inductive and build theory, for which multiple sources of qualitative data are highly-important. Stake (1995) discusses how scholars should outline the boundary of their case to determine the issues that are (and are not) under investigation. This could include regional-level, national-level, or organisation-level issues (see Ojansivu et al., 2015; Crick & Crick, 2016). Hence, driving these approaches to case study research are philosophical viewpoints that guide the collection and analysis of the relevant qualitative data (Welch et al., 2011). Indeed, there are additional case study authors (e.g., Merriam, 1985; Ragin, 1999), with other research philosophies, but the above-mentioned perspectives are the main ones surrounding this area of qualitative research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2011). Nonetheless, qualitative researchers should utilise an appropriate philosophy (positivism, interpretivism, critical realism, and so on) that is well-suited to answering their research questions (Perry, 1998; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011).

The role of context in qualitative research

To stress a critical issue, in quantitative research, the general rule is to obtain aggregated data that allows academics to make inferences into wider populations (Cadogan et al., 2003; Srinivasan & Hanssens, 2009; Hair Jr. et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Eisend, 2015; Zervas et al., 2017). In qualitative research, the goal is not to yield generalisable results, but rather, should generate in-depth and subjective findings that build theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Suddaby, 2006; Pratt, 2009; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013; Pratt et al., 2020). Hence, qualitative researchers need to collect and analyse data in rich empirical contexts that will achieve this goal (see Redding, 2005; Tsui, 2007; Chandler & Vargo, 2011). The nature of the empirical context will vary, depending on the theory (or psychological construct) that qualitative researchers are seeking to develop from their investigations. According to Welch et al. (2011), empirical contexts (e.g., industries, regions, or countries) in qualitative research should be used to contextualise knowledge (i.e., use a certain setting to build theory), access knowledgeable informants to collect and analyse data, and to acquire a sufficient volume of information to understand the complexities and subjectivity associated with a phenomenon. Welch et al. (2011) added that qualitative researchers should justify the reasoning for selecting a certain empirical context, in terms of “how” and “why” it was ideal for their study.

To illustrate this point, an emerging topic in the broader marketing literature is coopetition, namely, the interplay between cooperation and competition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Ho & Ganesan, 2013; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016; reference withheld). Coopetition has typically been studied as a behavioural construct, involving two or more industry rivals sharing resources and capabilities to yield mutually-beneficial outcomes (Bouncken & Kraus, 2013; Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Crick & Crick, 2016; Gnyawali et al., 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2018; Felzensztein et al., 2019). For example, several investigations have found that behavioural forms of coopetition (e.g., resource and capability-sharing activities) are likely to improve company performance, since organisations can learn new ways to operate within their competitive business environments (Ritala, 2012; Crick, 2018; reference withheld). To explore the complexities of the coopetition construct, scholars have utilised highly-cooperative and highly-competitive empirical contexts. As a recent example, Mathias et al. (2018) collected multiple sources of qualitative data (mostly interviews with owner-managers) from craft breweries across the United States. They found that

persistence is fundamental in managing coopetition strategies because owner-managers must navigate the paradoxical forces of cooperativeness and competitiveness to improve their performance.

Arguably, Mathias et al. (2018) found a suitable empirical context to conduct their qualitative investigation. That is, since coopetition is the interplay between cooperation and competition, it is important to study such activities in settings that simultaneously collaborate and compete (see Mattsson & Tidstrom, 2015; Crick, 2018; Granata et al., 2018). Following on, Felzensztein et al. (2019) investigated coopetition strategies in three wine-producing countries in the Southern Hemisphere, namely, Argentina, Chile, and New Zealand. These authors found that the global wine industry is active in coopetition strategies because vineyards and wineries collaborate with their competitors to achieve mutually-beneficial outcomes, like increased sales and reduced operating costs. Also, Felzensztein et al. (2019) explored some of the international aspects of coopetition, whereby, they needed qualitative evidence from a setting with varying degrees of internationalisation (alongside collaborative and rivalrous behaviours). Therefore, context was crucial in shaping these qualitative papers (Mathias et al., 2018; Felzensztein et al., 2019), as it is with all qualitative research (Perry, 1998; Redding, 2005; Tsui, 2007; Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Welch et al., 2011; Aguinis et al., 2020). That is, scholars should find an empirical context that is relevant to the topics, theories, and psychological constructs that are being studied. Without a strong empirical context, marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers cannot develop a robust qualitative methodology.

The linear versus iterative nature of qualitative research

Although qualitative research can be conducted in numerous ways (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Goulding, 1999; Pratt, 2009; Pratt et al., 2020), there is not a single-agreed process for such methodologies. Some qualitative researchers present their work in a linear manner to process such rich, in-depth, and subjective information (Eisenhardt, 1989; Styles & Hersch, 2005; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). According to Sinkovics & Alfoldi (2012), a linear approach to qualitative research allows scholars to process data with a deductive reasoning. That said, since qualitative research is employed to build (induct), rather than test (deduct) theory (Bryman, 1984; Pratt, 2009; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Ji et al., 2019), it is more likely that these methods are iterative in nature (Welch et al., 2011). Put another way, qualitative researchers should undertake a degree of iteration between theory and their data to shape certain conceptualisations of how the world operates (Sinkovics et al., 2008). In doing so, qualitative researchers can follow a step-by-step procedure when collecting and analysing data (Styles & Hersch, 2005), but it is probable that

research designs will be more complex and fluid (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Eisenhardt et al., 2016). As a strong illustration, Styles & Hersch (2005) used in-depth qualitative data from Australian – Malaysian international joint ventures. They organised their qualitative methodology into a linear fashion to guide their chosen data collection and data analysis techniques. That is, Styles & Hersch (2005) followed nine steps (in a sequential order) when collecting and analysing their qualitative data; yet, there was still some iteration between the theory and the data – despite a linear data collection and data analysis system being employed.

Styles & Hersch's (2005) nine steps are paraphrased as follows. Step 1 – reviewing the pertinent literature (defining key constructs and developing the research questions). Step 2 – selecting cases (to specify the population of interest). Step 3 – crafting instruments and protocols (establishing the key research methods). Step 4 – entering the field (collecting primary and secondary data). Step 5 – data ordering (organising the data in a chronological order). Step 6 – data analysis (coding data, cross-case comparisons, and within-case analyses). Step 7 – theoretical sampling (linking the empirical data with key theories and the extant literature). Step 8 – theoretical saturation (terminating the data collecting stage once themes begin to re-occur). Step 9 – compare emergent data with existing theory (understanding the similarities/differences with prior theoretical research). Importantly, Styles & Hersch's (2005) investigation was underpinned by Eisenhardt's (1989) approach to qualitative research. As described earlier, Eisenhardt (1989) used a positivistic epistemological perspective, which infused into Styles & Hersch's (2005) linear-based qualitative paper. Higher-degrees of iteration would be less likely to follow a linear structure and lean towards other epistemological perspectives, like interpretivism or critical realism (e.g., Stake, 1995; Burton, 2001; Davies & Fitchett, 2005; Easton, 2010; Bouchet, 2018). As discussed later, a large proportion of qualitative research is underpinned by abductive methodologies, in which scholars delve in and out of theories to understand complex issues (Dubois & Gibbert, 2010; Piekkari et al., 2010; Storbacka & Nenonen, 2015; Brodie et al., 2017). This provides a greater emphasis that linear processes are not overly effective tools in qualitative research.

Qualitative research and multi-dimensional constructs

As already noted, qualitative methodologies can take many forms, with there being numerous methods available to academics and postgraduate researchers; these include interviews, participant observation, and focus groups (Eisenhardt, 1989; Wright & Heaton, 2006; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Boddy, 2016 Mathias et al., 2018). By utilising

qualitative research, research questions with a “how” or “why” prefix **can be answered** (Crossan & Berdrow, 2003; Pratt, 2009; **Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011**). Due to qualitative research allowing scholars to obtain a rich and detailed understanding of how a certain theory occurs (or does not occur) in practice, these methods allow complex issues **to be evaluated in ways** that quantitative methods cannot uncover (O'Donnell et al., 2002; **Styles & Hersch, 2005**; Shah & Corley, 2006; Gioia et al., 2013; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; **Aguinis et al., 2020**). More specifically, qualitative **methodologies allow** researchers to observe explanations for a phenomenon, so that **they** can assign in-depth meanings to their findings that are not possible through the aggregated quantitative results (Goulding, 1998; Hyde, 2000; Suddaby, 2006; Kouamé & Langley, 2018). Hence, quantitative research is better-suited to examining the relationships (or differences) between constructs for generalisable conclusions (**Cadogan et al., 2003**; Srinivasan & Hanssens, 2009; Hair Jr. et al., 2012; **Becker et al., 2015**; Carson & Ghosh, 2019).

An example of the in-depth nature of qualitative research is that it can be used to uncover the multi-dimensionality of certain **psychological** constructs (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Diamantopoulos & Cadogan, 1996; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). Returning to coopetition, Crick & Crick (2016) used a case study to investigate such strategies in a Taekwondo (**a martial art with Korean origins**) organisation in New Zealand. **These authors found** that coopetition can occur in three capacities, namely, local-level coopetition (where members cooperate with rival clubs within a close geographic proximity), national-level coopetition (where members cooperate with rival clubs in different regions of the country), and organisation-level coopetition (where members cooperate with indirect competitors domestically and internationally). Through multiple qualitative methods, Crick & Crick (2016) were able to understand the intricate details associated with the ways that members in this Taekwondo organisation cooperate with competing clubs. Thus, qualitative research can be used to obtain information that would not be possible under a quantitative methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Bansal & Corley, 2011; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Jonsen et al., 2018). **Indeed, Crick & Crick's (2016) qualitative approach uncovered new evidence pertaining to the complexities (multi-level and multi-dimensional issues) of the coopetition construct (extending Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Mattsson & Tidstrom, 2015; Gnyawali et al., 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2018)**. Later, these authors built upon their qualitative paper to develop and validate a multi-dimensional measure of the coopetition construct – the COOP scale (Crick & Crick, 2019). Following an earlier point, this is a recent example of how qualitative research

can be used as a pre-cursor to quantitative research (extending Diamantopoulos & Cadogan, 1996; Cadogan et al., 2002; Nemkova et al., 2015).

Research propositions in qualitative research

While research propositions have been used by qualitative researchers for several decades (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Workman Jr. et al., 1998; Marbach et al., 2016), a new approach has emerged in recent years. Research propositions have been employed by certain academics as untested statements about the relationships between two (or more) constructs after some qualitative findings (Hausman, 2005; Nemkova et al., 2012). For example, as described earlier, Kohli & Jaworski (1990) explored market orientation using interview data from a sample of senior managers in the United States. After their qualitative findings, they developed a series of research propositions pertaining to the antecedents and consequences of market-oriented behaviours. Kohli & Jaworski's (1990) approach has been the more conventional research style, whereby, qualitative findings are used to direct a study's research propositions. Put another way, after authors have analysed their qualitative data, they would normally outline a series of research propositions. Subsequently, Kohli & Jaworski's (1990) research propositions have been developed into research hypotheses and tested with statistical data in other studies (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Cadogan et al., 2008; Boso et al., 2013). By developing research propositions, future quantitative investigations have a clearer direction about what psychological constructs can be conceptualised and tested as drivers and outcomes of certain latent variables (as well as moderating and mediating factors).

The use of research propositions in such methodologies demonstrates the potential for qualitative research to guide quantitative research. Quantitative researchers are expected to develop research hypotheses from the extant literature (or exploratory qualitative research), as opposed to from their empirical (statistical) findings (Morgan et al., 2009; Cadogan et al., 2012; Becker et al., 2019). This is because enough information should surround a theoretical issue to develop research hypotheses about likely relationships between psychological constructs. Hence, this is a factor that differentiates the theory-building style of qualitative research from the theory-testing nature of quantitative methodologies (Gummesson, 2005; Combs, 2010; Morgan et al., 2019). That said, a new qualitative approach has emerged from recent research proposition-based qualitative studies. Specifically, instead of presenting such research propositions after the qualitative findings (as per Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Workman Jr. et al., 1998; Hausman, 2005; Nemkova et al., 2012; Marbach et al., 2016), researchers would use a post-

positivist approach to develop them as part of their literature review (see Crick, 2018; Granata et al., 2018). This approach mirrors the hypothesis-testing of quantitative research, but utilises qualitative data to evaluate a series of research propositions (like interviews). While this approach still produces rich findings, it is an uncommonly-used approach in qualitative research – something that would be interesting to follow in the years to come.

Furthermore, the proposition-deduction approach (e.g., Crick, 2018; Granata et al., 2018) is underpinned by a larger methodological issue in qualitative research, namely, deductive, inductive, and abductive research designs. A deductive methodology is one that is designed to test theory, in which academics deduce a topic from the extant literature and evaluate it with empirical data (usually quantitative information) (Eisenhardt, 1989; Hunt, 1992; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2011). Induction is where scholars seek to build theory, with subjective information (very similar to grounded theory) and develop such theory with empirical data (typically qualitative data) (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Nag & Gioia, 2012; Gioia et al., 2013; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Goulding & Derbaix, 2019). Alternatively, abductive methodologies are a combination of deductive and inductive approaches, whereby, scholars delve in and out of theories to extend certain strands of literature to confirm or reject what prior research has found (Piekkari et al., 2010; Storbacka & Nenonen, 2015). Abductive research designs can be driven by qualitative or quantitative data, for which most academic research in the marketing (and broader management) literature employs an abductive approach (Styles & Hersch, 2005; Dubois & Gibbert, 2010; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Brodie et al., 2017).

Indeed, abductive methodologies link with Styles & Hersch (2005), in terms of comparing/contrasting empirical data with existing theory (in a linear fashion). By employing a proposition-deduction approach (e.g., Crick, 2018; Granata et al., 2018), scholars utilise an abductive approach because they are intending to evaluate certain strands of literature with their use of research propositions, but also, are seeking to build theory with in-depth and subjective empirical (qualitative) data. However, it is recommended that qualitative researchers should be cautious about using certain quantitative terminology in their work, such as “testing” qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Anderson, 2010). Specifically, although abductive qualitative researchers might evaluate a series of research propositions, testing only applies to research hypotheses or statistical differences, as quantitative data are required to test a phenomenon (see Morrow, 2005). Thus, qualitative researchers should utilise abductive methodologies (providing that their research questions should be best-answered through this approach), but avoid certain

terminology with quantitative connotations (Gummesson, 2006; Sinkovics et al., 2008). This issue is revisited in later sections of this paper, since some qualitative researchers have used terms with numerical meanings (e.g., Gummesson, 2006; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Anderson, 2010). Some major problems with qualitative methodologies are described in the next section.

Major problems with qualitative methodologies

Limitations of all methodologies

Despite the advantages of qualitative research, there are disadvantages that academics and postgraduate researchers must consider. Indeed, in the marketing literature, and across social science subjects, all methodologies (qualitative or quantitative) have certain drawbacks (Samiee & Jeong, 1994; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Bryman, 2016; Pratt et al., 2020), so it is important for scholars to be aware of the limitations of their research designs before they disseminate any findings. In this article, the following drawbacks of qualitative research are reviewed, namely, too small sample sizes, single-source studies, and poorly-written data analysis processes (Hackley, 1998; Gummesson, 2001; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Anderson, 2010; Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Kriz & Welch, 2018). These limitations were selected, since they are pertinent issues that are frequently discussed throughout the broader management literature – including marketing investigations (Morrow, 2005; Shah & Corley, 2006; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Goulding & Derbaix, 2019). In later sections, some actionable tools to help marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers to overcome these drawbacks are explored.

Too small sample sizes

Qualitative researchers typically present small sample sizes, so that they can understand how theories and psychological constructs apply (or do not apply) in practical situations (Eisenhardt, 1989; Shah & Corley, 2006; Pratt, 2009). By design, small sample sizes allow qualitative researchers to obtain rich findings with a smaller group of participants than quantitative research, which requires larger sample sizes to test theories in an aggregated format (Goulding, 1998; Hackley, 1998; Srinivasan & Hanssens, 2009; Cadogan et al., 2012; Jonsen et al., 2018). While small samples have these benefits, they can be misleading to scholars, whereby, there might be situations where participants provide answers that take an investigator in a wrong direction due to possessing emotionally-charged perceptions surrounding the issue(s) being studied (Shaw, 1999; Moodie & Ford, 2011; Boddy, 2016). For

instance, interviewees might provide answers that do not appear to be biased (via relaxed body language or calmly-spoken answers), but misinform the interviewer, consequently, creating findings that do not credibly shape theory (Hall & Rist, 1999; Stokes & Bergin, 2006; Welch & Piekkari, 2006; Bansal & Corley, 2011). If such issues occur on a few occasions, they could weaken the richness of a qualitative study because they account for a high-proportion of a small sample size. These problems could still occur in quantitative studies (e.g., survey research), but such investigations usually involve larger sample sizes, so the degree of biased answers would probably be a small and insignificant proportion of the results (Sawyer & Ball, 1981; Cadogan et al., 2008; Boso et al., 2013; Hulland et al., 2018).

Also, through numerical tools, quantitative researchers can conduct certain tests to alleviate biases from their data (Siemsen et al., 2010; Souchon et al., 2016; Gneezy, 2017). A frequent illustration is checking for common method variance in survey data (Cadogan et al., 2008; MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Crick & Crick, 2019). This is harder to achieve (if not irrelevant) in qualitative investigations (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Following on, Anderson (2010) discussed how qualitative data can become untrustworthy, as interviewees, observants, or members of a focus group can provide answers that they believe that researcher wants to hear, rather than their honest perceptions. To mitigate the effects of biased qualitative data, Anderson (2010, p. 4) recommended that “a good qualitative researcher should not only examine what people say, but also, consider how they structured their responses and how they talked about the subject being discussed; for example, the person’s emotions, tone, non-verbal communication, etc.”. While it may be helpful for qualitative researchers to outline verbal and non-verbal responses, it can be extremely difficult to interpret individuals’ body language, facial expressions, and other forms of non-verbal communication (Gummesson, 2001; Andersen & Kragh, 2010; Woermann, 2018). Moreover, qualitative researchers often find it difficult to make their work fit the word restrictions of academic journals (Bryman, 2007; Aguinis et al., 2020). Hence, qualitative scholars must focus on the critical aspects of their findings, which are more likely to originate from verbal answers than non-verbal responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Yet, noticing non-verbal cues, like facial expressions, could signify untrustworthy data (Morrow, 2005; Anderson, 2010).

Although larger sample sizes may be an increasing expectation of top-tier journal editors and reviewers (Pratt, 2008; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Pratt et al., 2020), sometimes, collecting larger samples defeats the purpose of qualitative research (Boddy, 2016). As stressed throughout this paper, qualitative research is designed to obtain

in-depth and subjective findings through human interactions with those that provide empirical data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Andropoulos & Slater, 2013; Jonsen et al., 2018). As such, it could be that collecting large sample sizes makes it difficult for academics to report on the interesting (theory-building) aspects of their findings, as they become detached from their data. Likewise, it could be that there is a diminishing-returns effect when collecting and analysing qualitative data. That is, a larger sample size could be positive for qualitative researchers, as they can collect richer insights into a phenomenon (Boddy, 2016). Yet, a larger sample size is only positive up to a certain point, whereby, if qualitative researchers exceed this optimal point, they lose their ability to build theory through their qualitative methodology by accumulating excessive-levels of subjective information (Robinson, 2014). Consequently, qualitative scholars should realise that it is better to have richer and smaller samples than limited and larger samples (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Hence, Styles & Hersch (2005) stressed that theoretical saturation should be remembered as a situation where qualitative researchers should decide to terminate their data collection processes (as per Suddaby, 2006; Eisenhardt et al., 2016).

Single-source qualitative data

Qualitative researchers typically report on single-source data, such as interviews from one individual across different companies (e.g., Spiggle, 1994; Kozinets, 2002; Crick et al., 2016; Malshe et al., 2017). While single-source data can be appropriate to access knowledgeable interviewees (or equivalent participants), it can mean that academics are dependent on the perceptions of only one person within an organisation – which raises concerns about the degree of trustworthiness of the findings (Hall & Rist, 1999; Morrow, 2005). In other words, one individual might be biased and provide answers that are not only untrustworthy, but also, could misrepresent their true feelings towards a situation under investigation. It is appreciated that it can be extremely time-consuming to collect qualitative data due to practical issues, like meeting interviewees, observing their behaviours, and travelling between businesses (or other settings) to conduct such research (Das, 1983; Pope et al., 2000; Welch, 2000; Styles & Hersch, 2005). Moreover, despite the different sampling strategies that are available to qualitative researchers (e.g., judgement, convenience, or snowballing) (Gummesson, 2001; Bryman, 2016; Ji et al., 2019), ultimately, scholars sample informants based on the individuals that are prepared to spare their time – something that does not always occur for personal and professional reasons (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Round & Roper, 2017).

In such instances, obtaining data from one individual per organisation can be difficult, let alone being granted to data from multiple individuals within the same organisations (i.e., multi-level data) (Welch & Piekkari, 2006; Welch et al., 2011). However, if scholars are fortunate enough to access multi-level data, they can triangulate their findings between such stakeholders to evaluate the extent to which there are similarities and differences (Eisenhardt, 1989; Hall & Rist, 1999; Doz, 2011; Eisenhardt et al., 2016). Yet, in some situations, collecting multi-level data could be unnecessary. For example, if researchers are sampling small firms, in which there are very few managers and functional-level employees, interviewing or observing different members of staff could be redundant, as the individuals might not be knowledgeable on the themes of the study (Granata et al., 2018; Felzensztein et al., 2019). Therefore, if qualitative researchers decide to collect and report on single-source data, they must highlight why it was not necessary to collect multi-level data and/or highlight this element of the methodology as a limitation of their investigations (Healy & Perry, 2000; Pratt, 2009). Yet, sampling multiple informants can be highly-effective for shaping theory and publishing in top-tier journals (see Eisenhardt, 1989; Pratt, 2008; Welch et al., 2011; Kriz & Welch, 2018). Nonetheless, single-source qualitative data is a feature and limitation of many methodologies. Importantly, multi-level qualitative data is challenging to collect and analyse, but can enhance the publishing potential of such research designs (Perry, 1998; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Pratt et al., 2020).

Linking with an earlier point, certain academics have investigated the notion of coopetition, which concerns how companies collaborate with their competitors for mutually-beneficial outcomes (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Ritala, 2012; Ho & Ganesan, 2013; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2018; Mathias et al., 2018). As already highlighted, Crick & Crick (2016) found that coopetition is a multi-dimensional construct, as individuals can cooperate with rival firms in different ways, such as domestically versus internationally. When investigating multi-dimensional constructs, it can be beneficial to use qualitative research, involving sampling multiple informants within the same units of analysis (e.g., companies) (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Diamantopoulos & Cadogan, 1996). Turning to another illustration, Crick (2018) used qualitative data from New Zealand vineyards and wineries to study the facets, antecedents, and consequences of coopetition. Crick (2018) utilised interview data (with supplementary primary and secondary data sources for triangulation purposes) from multiple informants within certain organisations (those with a large workforce), so that information could be obtained on the different forms of coopetition. As such, multi-level qualitative can create rich findings, with researchers having access to different

perceptions about the same phenomenon (Anderson, 2010; Yin, 2011; Kriz & Welch, 2018). These insights can develop counter-intuitive findings that extend or challenge existing research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In fact, certain quantitative marketing researchers have collected and analysed multi-level statistical data to strengthen their methodologies (Homburg & Pflesser, 2000; Oliveira et al., 2012; Oliveira & Cadogan, 2018). Thus, multi-level methodologies are becoming increasingly more common throughout the marketing literature.

Again, obtaining multi-source qualitative data means that researchers are not dependent on one type of data (Hall & Rist, 1999; Morrow, 2005; Pratt et al., 2020). Qualitative researchers need to be aware that when sampling participants (e.g., interviewees or members of focus group), they should be talking to the individuals that can provide the best information on what they are investigating (Noy, 2008; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). Supplementing the above-mentioned points (in respect of single, vis-à-vis, multiple informants), sometimes, researchers need to sample different people within the same organisations (e.g., senior managers, middle managers, and functional-level employees) to truly understand their phenomenon of interest. For instance, when examining corporate cultures, academics need to consider that a single-person within a large business (employing multiple members of staff) is unlikely to provide them with a strong understanding of the dynamics of the values, norms, and artefacts that comprise a corporate culture (Gebhardt et al., 2006; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Kalinic et al., 2014). Consequently, when evaluating issues that involve entire organisations (like corporate cultures), it is suggested that sampling a single-informant within a company is unlikely to supply qualitative researchers with enough data to make their necessary claims. Thus, academics and postgraduate researchers, inside and outside of marketing, should be conscious that it can be vital to have access multi-level qualitative data (including archival sources), despite the difficulties that surround accessing such information (Eisenhardt, 1991; Welch, 2000; Alam, 2005; Anderson, 2010).

Poorly-written qualitative data analysis techniques

In academic papers, qualitative researchers often spend a large amount of effort describing their empirical context and data collection techniques, but overlook the data analysis techniques that were employed in their studies (as noted by Pope et al., 2000; Pratt, 2009; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Pratt et al., 2020). That is, scholars might have collected high-quality data (e.g., rich information from multiple sources), but without discussing how the data were analysed, their findings lack transparency (Morrow, 2005; Suddaby, 2006; Bansal & Corley, 2011). Consequently,

it is important to inform readers on the different ways that qualitative data were analysed, so that the findings can be put into context (Spiggle, 1994; Perry, 1998; Goulding, 2005). For example, if qualitative researchers decide to present empirical illustrative quotes from a set of interviews, but do not highlight how their data were analysed, it is extremely difficult for the reader to understand how these quotes were sourced (Anderson, 2010; Bansal & Corley, 2011). As such, while it is critical that scholars should invest a lot of effort into describing their empirical context and data collection techniques, their adopted data analysis techniques are equally-crucial in a qualitative methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Johnson, 2015; Symon et al., 2018).

In quantitative research, scholars are expected to argue why they chose a certain data analysis technique (e.g., multiple regression versus structural equation modelling), so that their statistical results make sense and that readers can follow their thought processes in making any claims from their data (Cadogan et al., 2003; Katsikeas et al., 2006; Boso et al., 2013; Souchon et al., 2016; Hulland et al., 2018). Hence, the same should be applied in qualitative research. Gummesson (2005, p. 309) referred to qualitative research in marketing as a “road-map for a wilderness of complexity and unpredictability”, in which there are so many subjective caveats to such methodologies. This means that qualitative academics should be clear on describing and justifying “how” and “why” their data were analysed – to make their findings as transparent as possible (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Healy & Perry, 2000; Styles & Hersch, 2005; Shah & Corley, 2006; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Gioia et al., 2013; Kriz & Welch, 2018). If qualitative researchers only describe how their data were collected and do not provide a satisfactory account of their adopted data analysis techniques, they have only reported on a very limited aspect of their methodology – something that should be avoided (Perry, 1998; Pratt, 2009; Goulding & Derbaix, 2019). To overcome this problem, the following section of this article describes some credible qualitative data analysis techniques that are likely to be of interest to numerous marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers.

Developing rigorous qualitative methodologies

Techniques to strengthen qualitative research

Following the previous section, although qualitative research can be undertaken incorrectly (Suddaby, 2006; Pratt, 2009; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019), unfortunately, there is not an agreed method (or set of methods) that can solve such problems. Instead, qualitative researchers have a range

of data collection and data analysis techniques at their disposal – many of which are not widely-known by academics and postgraduate researchers (Davies & Fitchett, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Bryman, 2007; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Ji et al., 2019; Pratt et al., 2020). Hence, it of interest to evaluate certain tools to enhance the credibility of qualitative research designs. In this current study, some solutions to help marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers to improve their use of qualitative methodologies cover accessing the correct informants, obtaining larger (or richer) sample sizes, undertaking pilot studies, triangulation techniques, coding processes (to organise qualitative data), the constant comparison technique, bracketing, and the “Gioia methodology” (Goulding, 1998; Stokes, 2000; Dann, 2010; Gioia et al., 2013; O’Reilly & Parker, 2013; Kalinic et al., 2014; Chai & Dibb, 2016; Hagen et al., 2019). It is stressed that these solutions do not form an extensive list, but serve as a series of good examples to help marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers to utilise the benefits of qualitative methodologies. Moreover, this investigation draws upon work published in the broader commercial literature to evaluate some effective, but lesser-known tools within the marketing domain. Again, if marketing academics and postgraduate researchers can undertake credible qualitative research, they are more likely to make their work more attractive to the editors and reviewers of top-tier journals (responding to Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Pratt, 2008; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Hulland et al., 2018; Aguinis et al., 2020).

Addressing credibility in qualitative research

As mentioned earlier, although there can be situations where academics engage in more positivistic forms of qualitative research, like certain case study research designs or deducing research propositions (Styles & Hersch, 2005; Yin, 2011; Nemkova et al., 2012; Crick, 2018; Granata et al., 2018), they should be cautious about using terminology with quantitative connotations (see Gummesson, 2006; Sinkovics et al., 2008). For instance, the terms reliability and validity have been used in qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Healy & Perry, 2000; Riege, 2003; Alam, 2005; Anderson, 2010), but are more applicable to the scientific methods employed in quantitative studies (see Cadogan et al., 2012; Boso et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2013; Souchon et al., 2016). As such, the notion of credibility is a term that is used to help qualitative academics to develop high-quality data collection and data analysis techniques (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Sinkovics et al., 2008). That is, credibility is an all-embracing term that encapsulates how reliability and validity apply to qualitative research (Gummesson, 2005). Further, Morrow (2005, p. 251) suggested that qualitative researchers should be mostly concerned about obtaining

trustworthy findings, which can be done so using the following four factors, namely, “social validity, subjectivity and reflexivity, adequacy of data, and adequacy of interpretation” (a transcendent criteria). Collectively, Morrow's (2005) transcendent criteria is used to develop a credible qualitative research design.

Social validity is how qualitative researchers address subjective information that can be very difficult to condense into an understandable format (Wolf, 1978). If academics can find a tool to examine large volumes of qualitative data, they can develop findings that are socially-valid (Morrow, 2005). Subjectivity and reflexivity refer to the degree to which qualitative researchers might influence their participants and create certain biases in their findings (Rennie, 2004). If scholars can minimise their involvement in these methodologies and maximise the role of their participants (such as through presenting findings in the words of the informants), they can address the subjectivity and reflexivity of their findings (reference withheld). Regarding the adequacy of data, this issue surrounds whether scholars have collected a sufficient quantity and quality of information (Patton, 1990). Researchers should manage the interplay between large, vis-à-vis, rich sample sizes when making this judgement (Miles & Huberman, 1994; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Du et al., 2019). Adequacy of interpretation surrounds there being numerous ways to process qualitative data, for which scholars need to select a technique(s) that is best-suited to their research design (Morrow, 2005). Put another way, scholars (and postgraduate researchers) should utilise qualitative data analysis techniques that will achieve their research objectives and answer their research questions (Hunt, 1992; Gummesson, 2005; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). To best-interpret qualitative data, researchers are advised to employ tools that help them to build theory and delve deeper into the meaning behind psychological constructs (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Jonsen et al., 2018). Following Morrow's (2005) transcendent criteria, if qualitative researchers can fulfil these four factors, their findings should be credible.

Theoretical contributions and rigorous qualitative methodologies

This current study has focused on the limitations of qualitative methodologies and will shortly discuss some remedies to improve such research designs (to supplement the prior points related to credibility). However, as an important point, it has been well-established that when publishing scholarly research (whether it be conceptual, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), authors need to contribute to the extant literature (Suddaby, 2006; Combs, 2010; Jonsen et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2019). Thus, in addition to having a credible and robust qualitative research design, academics should be conscious of how they are contributing towards the existing body of

knowledge. For example, marketing scholars (and postgraduate researchers) might have collected high-quality interview data and analysed such information with appropriate tools to examine the topic of market orientation. Suppose such an investigation uncovers that with higher-levels of market orientation, businesses are likely to perform better. As interesting as it might be, such a finding does not add anything new to the marketing literature (as it mirrors earlier work, like Narver & Slater, 1990; Ruekert, 1992; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Slater & Narver, 1994; Morgan & Strong, 1998; Cadogan et al., 2009; Ozkaya et al., 2015; He et al., 2018). In other words, market orientation is a very well-studied topic within the marketing literature (Kirca et al., 2005; Cadogan et al., 2008; Morgan et al., 2009), meaning that scholars and postgraduate researchers must have a compelling set of qualitative findings that build theory. Again, despite credibility being a vital issue in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morrow, 2005; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Bryman, 2016; Du et al., 2019), studies must contribute to theory and have practical implications. Hence, marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers should constantly scan the extant literature for key research gaps that are relevant to academics and practitioners.

Accessing the correct informants

Qualitative marketing scholars (and postgraduate researchers) need to ensure that they sample the correct number and type of informants (Boddy, 2016). That is, to most accurately answer their research questions, academics should seek to study those (e.g., through interviews, focus groups, and/or participant observation) who are knowledgeable on the issues being explored during the data collection stage (Gummesson, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Chai & Dibb, 2016). Additionally, to help qualitative researchers ask the correct questions to their participants, they should, where possible, derive their questions from the extant literature to incorporate marketing theory into their empirical research (Nemkova et al., 2012; Felzensztein et al., 2019). Researchers should adapt their questions to make them understandable to the practitioners whom are participating in a certain study (Katsikeas et al., 2006; Welch & Piekkari, 2006), but ideally, theory should underpin qualitative research methods (Stake, 1995; Styles & Hersch, 2005; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Crick, 2018). In other words, if a body of literature does not underpin a qualitative study, it is very difficult to build theory (see Eisenhardt, 1989; Styles & Hersch, 2005; Welch et al., 2011; Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Pratt et al., 2020). Even in fully-inductive investigations, authors should ground their qualitative methodologies with the appropriate literature that allows them to build theory (Salvato, 2003; Nag & Gioia, 2012; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015).

As an example of literature-driven qualitative research, Nemkova et al. (2012) examined how export-intensive companies make decisions, in respect of their strategic orientation. Using interview data from British firms, these authors developed an interview guide that drew upon the underpinning theory surrounding export marketing and internationalisation theory. Indeed, Nemkova et al. (2012) created some questions that were not based on the extant literature, so that they could build marketing theory, with new findings, but most of their qualitative work extended the research of prior scholars (e.g., Katsikeas et al., 1996; Moorman & Miner, 1998; Morgan et al., 2004). Consequently, marketing academics should consider using a literature-driven approach when designing their qualitative methodologies. That is, qualitative researchers should not be seeking to test what the extant literature has discussed, as this is the purpose of quantitative research (Hunt, 1992; Hanson & Grimmer, 2007; Combs, 2010; Hair Jr. et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2019). Yet, a literature-driven approach could refine a qualitative research design and limit the degree to which scholars face what Gummesson (2005, p. 309) called a “road-map for a wilderness of complexity and unpredictability”. Nemkova et al.’s (2012) study was better-related to an abductive methodology, for which inductive approaches are less likely to utilise an interview guide. Nonetheless, by employing a literature-driven approach, qualitative researchers can ensure that they have accessed the correct informants (by asking theoretically-relevant questions).

Additionally, in quantitative research, such as surveys, some authors have included “informant quality” scales to measure the extent to which respondents are competent and qualified to participate by answering a set of questions (see Katsikeas et al., 2006; Hultman et al., 2009; Boso et al., 2013; Crick & Crick, 2019). A similar approach could be used in qualitative research, so that scholars are confident that they are sampling knowledgeable people. A limitation of asking participants to rate the extent to which they are competent and qualified to complete a survey is that people (participants) are unlikely to describe themselves as unsuitable to take part in a piece of research due to wanting to seem knowledgeable on a certain subject (induces biases within the qualitative data). It is more important that qualitative researchers take some time to ensure that they talking to the correct (most competent and qualified) informants (O’Donnell et al., 2002; Morrow, 2005; Bryman, 2016). To summarise, in qualitative research, sampling is not just about accessing a certain number of informants, but more fundamentally, it surrounds talking to those that are best-suited to achieving certain research objective(s) and answering a study’s research question(s) (following Hunt, 1992; Gummesson, 2005; Bryman, 2016; Aguinis et al., 2020). Hence, qualitative

researchers should strive to sample the correct informants – a skill that may develop with experience. However, a literature-driven approach is one tool to maximise the odds of accessing high-quality (knowledgeable) informants (following Nemkova et al., 2012; Felzensztein et al., 2019).

Obtaining a sufficient sample size

Following the previous section, as well as accessing the correct informants, scholars should consider whether their sample size is appropriate for the qualitative methodology that they are undertaking (Goulding, 1998; Hackley, 1998; Perry, 1998; Gummesson, 2001; Styles & Hersch, 2005). To obtain more respectable sample sizes and to access data from multiple informants, qualitative researchers should attempt to use triangulation techniques (as discussed later) to increase their volume of empirical data - providing that their participants are knowledgeable on the subject area under investigation (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pratt, 2009; Welch et al., 2011; Boddy, 2016; Kriz & Welch, 2018). This involves generating information from multiple sources to understand complex issues pertaining to the underlying mechanisms behind psychological constructs (Decrop, 1999; Morrow, 2005). Larger sample sizes, with the correct informants, are likely to be more convincing to journal editors and reviewers (Jonsen et al., 2018; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). While sample sizes in a quantitative study are vital, so that scholars can test certain hypothesised relationships (due to the case-parameter ratio) (Srinivasan & Hanssens, 2009; Cadogan et al., 2012; Carson & Ghosh, 2019), in qualitative research, it is more important to be concerned about the quality, vis-à-vis, quantity debate (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Bryman, 2007). As mentioned earlier, it is better to have a rich and small sample than one that is limited and large (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Nevertheless, albeit unfortunate, academics may have to collect and analyse larger volumes of qualitative data to be of interest to top-tier outlets (Suddaby, 2006; Pratt, 2008; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Kriz & Welch, 2018; Pratt et al., 2020). Triangulation techniques (e.g., secondary or multi-level data) are a way of generating richness with small samples in qualitative research (Decrop, 1999; Morrow, 2005; Welch et al., 2011).

Pilot studies in qualitative research

Another data collection technique available to qualitative researchers is the use of pilot studies. Pilot studies in qualitative investigations are used to ensure that researchers are asking questions that participants will be knowledgeable enough to answer, will not be uncomfortable discussing, and any other peripheral issues that might

not have been considered when designing such qualitative methods (see Perry, 1998; Alam, 2005; Bryman, 2016). By conducting pilot studies, scholars and postgraduate researchers may be able to detect problematic issues that they can address before time and/or cash is invested into a core study (something that is also applicable to quantitative research) (Gummesson, 2003). For example, pilot studies can inform researchers about their population of interest (in terms of information not listed in the public domain) to help them adapt their questions (e.g., for interviews) (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stokes, 2000; Katsikeas et al., 2006). Moreover, pilot studies help qualitative researchers to confirm that they are speaking to the correct informants and are pitching their questions towards an appropriate audience (Kim, 2011; reference withheld). Thus, once qualitative pilot study data have been analysed, researchers can be more confident that they have enough information to proceed to their core study (Styles & Hersch, 2005). In fact, pilot studies extend the prior-mentioned literature-driven approach (as per Nemkova et al., 2012; Felzensztein et al., 2019) by making empirical (qualitative) data collection methods contextually-relevant to their key informants.

Triangulation in qualitative research

Extending the topic of obtaining a sufficient volume of qualitative data, triangulation is a fundamental issue in these research designs. Triangulation is the process of using multiple sources of primary and/or secondary data to receive a well-rounded view of the area under investigation (Styles & Hersch, 2005; Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Doz, 2011; Gioia et al., 2013; Kriz & Welch, 2018). Qualitative researchers should compare their empirical data (e.g., interview transcripts and/or observational notes) with primary (empirical) and/or secondary (archival) sources to obtain objective and alternative insights into the phenomenon, in which they are investigating (see Eisenhardt, 1991; Decrop, 1999; Welch, 2000; Morrow, 2005; Yin, 2011). Depending on the research method in question, triangulation can be an expectation, such as in case study research, scholars are highly-likely to utilise a combination of empirical and archival sources to develop their selected case(s) (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Welch et al., 2011; Kriz & Welch, 2018). The more information that researchers can collect, they increase the scope for developing rich findings (Perry, 1998; Styles & Hersch, 2005; Yin, 2011; Kriz et al., 2014; Eisenhardt et al., 2016). Furthermore, by using triangulation methods, scholars might obtain counter-intuitive findings, such as contrasting information between two or more interviewees (perhaps longitudinal information) within the same business (or another unit of analysis, like strategic alliances) - something that could shape or

challenge existing theory, depending on the magnitude of the differences (Deshpande, 1983; Doz, 2011; Crick, 2018).

For example, Kalinic et al. (2014) explored how organisations can change their planning strategies to maximise their performance in an international arena and overcome certain liabilities. Using case studies from five Italian organisations (with overseas subsidiaries), they collected multiple sources of empirical and archival data. Kalinic et al. (2014) obtained primary data in the form of several interviews and hours of on-site visits to all five organisations. They collected secondary data from internal and public documents, like balance sheets and business plans. Although it could be argued that Kalinic et al. (2014) did not have a large sample size (i.e., just five organisations), the amount of time and effort it took to collect such a vast array of information signifies how difficult it can be to conduct qualitative research (see Morrow, 2005; Boddy, 2016; Round & Roper, 2017). Moreover, despite collecting data from five case studies, the multiple sources of empirical and archival can be used to overcome this limited sample size (see O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Returning to an earlier point, Kalinic et al.'s (2014) study embraced the purpose of qualitative research, namely, to obtain in-depth and subjective information surrounding a phenomenon and not seek to generate generalisable findings (as per Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Gioia et al., 2013; Jonsen et al., 2018; Pratt et al., 2020). Thus, their small (but rich) sample size was an effective element of their theory-building investigation. Arguably, through triangulation techniques, Kalinic et al. (2014) had acquired stronger insights that allowed them to contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

It can often be difficult enough to be granted access to companies, meaning that multiple interviews (or other qualitative methods) can be even more challenging to obtain (Hackley, 1998; Boddy, 2016; Round & Roper, 2017). However, since it is becoming harder to publish in top-tier marketing (and broader management) journals, academics must attempt to have access to more powerful datasets (using multiple informants) to reach the thresholds that many journal editors and reviewers are expecting (Pratt, 2008; Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Combs, 2010; Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011; Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013; Mahajan & Venkatesh, 2014; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Aguinis et al., 2020). Of course, in certain instances, multiple data sources are harder to acquire, like when studying companies owned and operated by one individual, meaning that researchers cannot interview (or observe) additional people, since they do not exist (Hall & Rist, 1999; reference withheld; Granata et al., 2018;

Felzensztein et al., 2019). Nevertheless, if qualitative researchers are fortunate enough to access multiple interviews from the same businesses, they should promote such aspects within their methodologies to highlight how it serves as an advantage – by making a theoretical contribution (following Healy & Perry, 2000; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Eisenhardt & Graeber, 2007; Anderson, 2010; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Kalinic et al., 2014; Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Kriz & Welch, 2018). That is, multi-source qualitative data are only relevant when they can be utilised to build theory. If scholars and postgraduate researchers have collected rich qualitative datasets, but such information does not enhance a theoretical debate, there is little value to be offered to the academic community (Suddaby, 2006; Jonsen et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2019).

Coding qualitative data

Qualitative researchers need to code their data in a suitable manner, which fits the volume of empirical and archival data that they have collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Welch, 2000; Styles & Hersch, 2005; Herz & Diamantopoulos, 2013; Jonsen et al., 2018). Coding is the process of organising raw data into themes; scholars and postgraduate researchers have the option to manually-code their qualitative data (e.g., interview transcripts) or utilise computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Goulding, 2005; Cocker et al., 2018). While such electronic forms of data analysis software can save time and detect patterns within qualitative data, manually-coding empirical data, can also be a credible technique (Sinkovics et al., 2008; O'Dwyer et al., 2009; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Specifically, manual coding involves researchers sifting through their data, whereby, they search for key and sub-themes (primary and secondary codes respectively) to identify patterns in a similar style to computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Balducci & Marinova, 2018). If scholars choose to manually-code their data, they are recommended to use a robust system, in which they code their key and sub-themes, such as using numbers, letters, or colours - whatever is clearest for them (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2017). Further, manual coding needs to be transparent, so that readers can follow an adapted style of analysing qualitative data (Morrow, 2005; reference withheld).

Manual coding is an effective data analysis technique when researchers have collected such data themselves. That is, if a scholar has undertaken a set of interviews, they are likely to know the intricate details of their data and be able to code themes based on their knowledge of the events of the study (Rettie et al., 2008; Dann, 2010). For example, when analysing interview data from a sample of New Zealand vineyards and wineries, Crick (2018)

manually-coded such data to develop themes and empirical findings. “While qualitative researchers have used electronic data analysis software, manual coding can allow them to have an in-depth perspective and analysis strategy” (Crick, 2018, p. 260). Providing that qualitative researchers use manual coding in a way that is systematic and follows the same robustness as electronic data analysis software, it is a perfectly acceptable data analysis technique (Sinkovics et al., 2008; O’Dwyer et al., 2009; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Qualitative scholars should select a process that works for them (**one that is understandable**) and yields transparent findings for readers to follow (Dann, 2010). In short, coding should be used to create organised and transparent qualitative findings (Goulding, 2005). **Since qualitative data are typically messy and iterative in nature (Styles & Hersch, 2005; Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Eisenhardt et al., 2016), coding is an effective (if not necessary) tool to organise such information. Coding (manual or electronic) could be a way to mitigate the problems associated with Gummesson’s (2005, p. 309) so-called “wilderness of complexity and unpredictability”.**

Constant comparison technique

A useful tool that can be employed to process large volumes of qualitative data is the constant comparison technique (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). The constant comparison technique involves researchers comparing their qualitative data on a continual basis to understand how different participants’ insights (e.g., interviewees) are comparable with one another (Goulding, 1999; Suddaby, 2006; Thomas et al., 2011; Lenka et al., 2017). For instance, if qualitative researchers have collected several sources of data (e.g., interviews, observations, and archival documents) from a sample of businesses, they could use the constant comparison technique as follows. First, researchers should accumulate their data from each of the sampled **organisations**. Second, they should compare all the data between the units of analysis. This would involve comparing Firm 1 with Firm 2, followed by Firms 1 and 2 with Firm 3, Firms 1, 2, and 3 with Firm 4, and so on. This process should be repeated until all companies have been evaluated (Suddaby, 2006; **reference withheld**). Naturally, the constant comparison technique is easier to conduct if academics are working with a relatively small sample size and/or fewer sources of data. **That is, as the volume of qualitative data increases (determined by the number of units being analysed), the longer it will take to constantly compare such information.**

The advantage of the constant comparison technique is that researchers can understand when patterns emerge within a certain dataset and can determine when they have reached a point of theoretical saturation (i.e., themes

begin to re-occur), as well as knowing when to terminate their data collection and data analysis stages due to possessing a sufficient volume of information (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Koerner, 2014). That said, scholars must be sure that they have reached a point of theoretical saturation before they formally stop collecting and analysing data – otherwise, they could make poor conclusions, with insufficient data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Styles & Hersch, 2005). The constant comparison technique helps to inform qualitative researchers when they have collected enough data and the extent to which themes are re-occurring (Goulding, 1999; Thomas et al., 2011; Crick, 2018). Indeed, the constant comparison technique is just one tool that can be used to analyse qualitative data (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). If academics do not choose this tool, they should undertake and present their adopted data analysis techniques to yield transparent and credible findings (see Pope et al., 2000; Pratt, 2009; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Gioia et al., 2013; Pratt et al., 2020). Yet, the constant comparison technique has been strongly encouraged within the broader commercial literature (see Suddaby, 2006; Thomas et al., 2011), suggesting that it could be effectively utilised by marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers.

Bracketing in qualitative research

When working with qualitative data, such as semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and/or focus groups, researchers may risk being overloaded with empirical data and could unintentionally misconstrue participants' insights by putting their own perspective on a certain topic (Das, 1983; Gummesson, 2005; Anderson, 2010). As such, bracketing is a data analysis technique that can be used to present qualitative data in the words of a study's participants (i.e., as illustrative quotes), rather than in the words of a study's research team (Tosey et al., 2014). By using bracketing, scholars can be assured that they have presented their qualitative data in a way that reflects what their participants have stated (even if this involves using slang and informal language), which minimises the risk of them, based on human error, misrepresenting such information (Morrow, 2005; Bryman, 2016). However, when utilising bracketing, qualitative researchers must still add their own perspective to the meaning behind the selected quotes, so that they can highlight how their empirical data contributes to a theoretical issue in marketing (Tufford & Newman, 2012; reference withheld). More importantly, researchers should avoid selecting the quotes that suit their research objective(s) and ignoring more complicated issues (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Anderson, 2010). That is, following the purpose of qualitative research, bracketing can help scholars to

embrace the complexities of a phenomenon to explore theoretical issues (Johnsen et al., 2018). Likewise, bracketing reduces the biases of collecting and analysing qualitative data (Tosey et al., 2014).

Utilising illustrative quotes in qualitative research

Extending the previous section, there are additional techniques that researchers can use to outline the structure of their empirical data. As a basic (but highly-effective) tool, it is recommended that when working with a sample of two or more units of analysis (e.g., companies), researchers should highlight the proportion of the sample that indicated a certain theme and the reasons why this was the case (see Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Crick, 2018; Krisjanous & Carruthers, 2018). It is useful to present empirical quotes (as they indicate what participants have stated), but they could be perceived as being abstract (meaningless) without outlining the proportion of participants that represented each theme (Pratt, 2009; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Harley & Faems, 2017). By using this technique, qualitative researchers minimise the scrutiny of being perceived to be presenting a series of abstract quotes (as noted by Anderson, 2010). By representing the proportion of a sample, scholars and postgraduate researchers can argue the degree to which their key and sub-themes were prominent within the empirical data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is stressed that qualitative researchers must highlight the reasons why a certain proportion of a sample represented their key and sub-themes - to add meaning to the data. Without such work, their analysis could be perceived as being too descriptive and scarcely contributing to the existing body of knowledge.

An advanced form of presenting the structure of empirical qualitative data has been explored under the “Gioia methodology” (as per Gioia et al., 2013). Specifically, the “Gioia methodology” uses three categories to represent qualitative data, namely, primary codes or first-order concepts (illustrative quotes from a sample), secondary codes or second-order themes (the themes that the primary codes feed into), and aggregate dimensions (factors that outline a core concept under investigation) (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Crick et al., 2020). Please refer to Figure 1 for the structure of an adapted “Gioia methodology” to indicate its presentation for qualitative researchers. The “Gioia methodology” has been employed differently across the broader management literature, but acts as a sophisticated tool to understand patterns that emerge within a qualitative dataset (Thomas et al., 2001; Corley, 2004; Nag & Gioia, 2012). Further, such a technique allows qualitative researchers to concentrate on the most prominent issues that exist and avoid becoming distracted on peripheral (less important) themes that could also be present within their datasets (Gioia et al., 2013; Hagen et al., 2019). Interestingly, the “Gioia methodology” has been employed

more frequently within the management and entrepreneurship literature, as opposed to by marketing scholars (Thomas et al., 2001; Nag & Gioia, 2012; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; reference withheld). Consequently, there is ample scope to incorporate this technique into the broader marketing domain.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

As an example of the “Gioia methodology”, Jaskiewicz et al. (2015) used this qualitative data analysis technique in the context of transgenerational entrepreneurship in German vineyards and wineries. These authors structured their data, so that their illustrative quotes (from various interviewees) served as direct examples (primary codes) of information linked with the area of investigation. Further, they outlined how these primary codes link with certain secondary codes, which in turn, feed into large-scale aggregate dimensions. Jaskiewicz et al. (2015) supplemented their “Gioia methodology” with additional illustrative quotes to demonstrate the richness of their empirical findings. That is, while the “Gioia methodology” is an effective tool to condense large qualitative datasets into a succinct model to highlight how the key and sub-themes interact with one another (Nag & Gioia, 2012; Hagen et al., 2019), qualitative researchers should also promote to journal editors and reviewers the intricate details of their work to show the amount of time and effort that the authors have invested into a study (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Kalinic et al., 2014; Kriz & Welch, 2018; Pratt et al., 2020). The “Gioia methodology” can be an effective way to enhance this aspect of qualitative research (Corley, 2004; Corley & Gioia, 2004). Nonetheless, since the “Gioia methodology” can be applied in different ways, it is advised that qualitative researchers should refer to an adapted approach if they deviate their employment of this data analysis technique. (as per Salvato, 2003; reference withheld; Crick et al., 2020). Some directions for future research follow in the next section.

Directions for future research

Based on the state of the existing body of knowledge surrounding qualitative research (in terms of the positive and negative issues), the following directions for future research should be pursued. First, it is recommended that qualitative researchers should obtain larger (or richer) sample sizes to ensure that they are accurately contributing to the marketing literature, with sufficient empirical and/or archival data (Perry, 1998; Welch & Piekkari, 2006; Boddy, 2016). Yet, scholars should be aware that it is better to have a richer and smaller sample than one that is

limited and larger (Suddaby, 2006; Bansal & Corley, 2011; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Second, qualitative marketing scholars (and postgraduate researchers) should aim to obtain data from a combination of sources, as such primary data (e.g., interviews, participant observation, and/or focus groups) and secondary data (e.g., company reports, websites, and industry information) could provide alternative or supplementary insights (perhaps using longitudinal sources) into certain issues to add depth and rigour to these methodologies (Eisenhardt, 1989; Decrop, 1999; Welch, 2000; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Pratt, 2009; Welch et al., 2011; Kalinic et al., 2014; Kriz & Welch, 2018). That said, qualitative researchers should only employ triangulation techniques when they have some epistemological justification from their research philosophy (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2011; Eisenhardt et al., 2016). The reason being is that certain research philosophies do not support the use of triangulation (e.g., Stake, 1995). Such points return to the argument that theory should underpin qualitative research, including choosing appropriate data collection and data analysis tools (Styles & Hersch, 2005; Pratt, 2009; Nemkova et al., 2012; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Felzensztein et al., 2019).

Third, qualitative researchers should describe to their readers the ways that their data were analysed; this is a major drawback of many qualitative studies and must be addressed (Morrow, 2005; Pratt et al., 2020). In this current investigation, several data analysis tools were outlined, such as manual, vis-à-vis, electronic coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012), the constant comparison technique (Goulding, 1999; Suddaby, 2006; Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2017; Hagen et al., 2019), bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2012; Crick, 2018), and the "Gioia methodology" (Thomas et al., 2001; Corley, 2004; Gioia et al., 2013). Qualitative marketing scholars are advised to select the techniques that are most effective for their study (in terms of answering the research questions) and defend their use of such approaches². That is, qualitative research is intended to be far less scientific than quantitative research (O'Donnell et al., 2002; Davies & Fitchett,

² It is vital to stress that the aim of this article is not to quantify qualitative research. Instead, it is recommended that qualitative scholars and postgraduate researchers should use the solutions discussed in this paper to avoid some of the mistakes that can be made in these methodologies. Also, academics and postgraduate researchers must offer strong theoretical contributions to make their qualitative research attractive to the editors and reviewers of top-tier journals. Marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers should consider drawing upon the broader commercial literature to understand some best practices to develop stronger qualitative methodologies (management, strategy, international business, entrepreneurship, and innovation). Several of these techniques are relatively unknown throughout the marketing field. Hence, there is a good opportunity to incorporate certain robust qualitative data collection and data analysis techniques from other commercial disciplines into the marketing literature.

2005; Morrow, 2005; Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013; Jonsen et al., 2018). Nevertheless, qualitative academics must develop high-quality data collection and data analysis techniques to convince the editors and reviewers of top-tier journals that their work is as important as quantitative material that has been favoured in the extant literature (Suddaby, 2006; Pratt, 2009; Bansal & Corley, 2011; Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Morgan et al., 2019). This article is concluded in the next section.

Conclusions

The objective of this paper was to highlight the problems pertaining to qualitative research and help marketing academics and postgraduate researchers to overcome such issues with several rigorous data collection and data analysis techniques. To achieve this objective, some robust qualitative research designs were reviewed from the extant literature to yield the following four conclusions. First, it is concluded that a key problem with qualitative research is a lack of detail surrounding researchers' adopted data analysis techniques - something that can be helped by the key actionable tools that were discussed within this paper. Second, it is also concluded that qualitative researchers should use multiple sources of data for triangulation purposes (empirical and/or archival – perhaps using longitudinal information). Third, another conclusion is that qualitative marketing academics should aim to obtain larger (or richer) sample sizes to maximise the degree to which they can obtain transferrable findings to populations outside of their chosen sample. Fourth, it is lastly concluded that marketing scholars and postgraduate researchers should draw upon other commercial disciplines to understand a range of best practice approaches to develop stronger qualitative methodologies. That is, there are some effective throughout subjects, like management, strategy, innovation, international business, and entrepreneurship that have scarcely infused into the marketing literature. Consequently, there is ample scope to improve the use of qualitative research in marketing. In closing, this paper should be used to help strengthen marketing academics' utilisation of qualitative research methods. It is anticipated that if these approaches are employed, alongside making strong theoretical contributions, there will be a greater volume (and higher standard) of qualitative research throughout the marketing literature.

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Figure 1. The structure of an adapted “Gioia methodology”