Exploring the landscape of qualitative research in international marketing

Two decades of *IMR*

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Abstract

Purpose – The authors seek to show the extent and nature of qualitative research in international marketing in *IMR* (*International Marketing Review*) and then aim to understand and explain developments in this area. They explore the global coverage of extant qualitative work in *IMR* and reflect on the thematic focus, theoretical purpose, research design and transparency of methods prevailing in these studies.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors identify and content-analyze 79 qualitative international marketing-focused articles published in *IMR* from 1990 to 2010.

Findings – The analysis revealed several areas that can assist researchers in identifying gaps to be filled by future qualitative international marketing studies. These include: global coverage needs to be further developed; an increase in the number of comparative studies, yet insights from three or more countries remain scarce; extant qualitative studies seem to explore ten key themes; there is a growing trend in theory elaboration studies; interviews are still the most popular data collection method, yet the repertoire of methods is expanding; there is an upward trend in higher transparency in the description of data collection and analysis, but this needs further development.

Originality/value – The paper fosters the development of qualitative research in international marketing by: highlighting the value of qualitative research for advancing theory in this field; inspiring international marketing scholars to learn more about qualitative methods; and offering guidelines to researchers that seek to advance this field.

Keywords Qualitative methods, International marketing, Publications, Research design, Data analysis

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

International marketing is a rich field of study. Different socio-cultural, political and economic environments, various language influences and challenging cross-border business operations paint a complex research landscape. Early contributions on firms' internationalization processes drew on qualitative methods to understand the phenomena and generate theory (e.g. Daniels, 1986; Johanson and Vahlne, 1977). Yet, Leonidou *et al.* (2010) highlight that, many years later, most international marketing studies largely rely on quantitative, survey-driven data. While theory testing is a cornerstone of the scientific method, it is only one aspect of the larger process of scientific inquiry; theory development and refinements are of equal importance (Shah and Corley, 2006). The lacuna of qualitative studies in international marketing may, therefore, potentially pose limitations on the advancement of this field

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(Pratt, 2009), as the "how" and "why" of different international marketing phenomena are likely to remain unanswered. This is alarming, as the foci of international marketing studies are becoming increasingly complex. For example, contemporary global supply and value chains involve international networks that are built upon personal inter- and intra-organizational relationships. Understanding these relationships and their link to performance, requires an exploratory approach which gets as close as possible to the actors involved. Qualitative research can offer a valued lens in building understanding and extending knowledge across evolving and new topics in this field.

Qualitative research scholars in the international marketing field also highlight challenges in conducting qualitative research in, often, multiple international settings (Leonidou *et al.*, 2010). Qualitative researchers still face a number of added barriers compared to quantitative scholars when attempting to publish their work (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011). Confusion around definitions of what qualitative research is, framing its value for understanding phenomena, and how it should be conducted, presented and evaluated are some of the commonly reported problems associated with publishing qualitative work (Pratt, 2009). Scholars, hence, increasingly call researchers and reviewers to enrich rigor in qualitative studies, as an attempt to overcome the perceived (or actual) bias against qualitative research in major journals (Shah and Corley, 2006). Yet, to date, despite extensive writings on the use of different qualitative research methods (see Bluhm *et al.*, 2011; Eisenhardt, 1989; Lee *et al.*, 1999; Leonidou *et al.*, 2010; Yin, 2003), the literature has been sparse in its attempt to inform and develop the application of qualitative methods in international marketing research. Consequently, the challenges posed in trying to understand international marketing phenomena continue to be inadequately addressed.

In this paper, we seek to show the extent and nature of qualitative research in international marketing in *International Marketing Review* (IMR) and then aim to understand and explain developments in this area. To achieve these aims we embark on capturing the landscape of qualitative studies in IMR in the past two decades, with a view to stimulate qualitative work in this area. We also capture the global coverage of extant qualitative work in IMR and reflect on the thematic focus, theoretical purpose, research design and transparency of methods prevailing in these studies. We draw our evidence from the 79 international marketing qualitative studies published in IMR from 1990 to 2010. Building on these findings, we then focus our attention on providing international marketing scholars and doctoral researchers with some guidelines for best practice and offer a pool of exemplars that can serve as a valued guide. We seek to inspire international marketing scholars to re-think and pursue more innovative approaches to methodological design in this field.

The remainder of the paper is arranged in five sections. In the following section, we begin by grounding this paper in extant debate on the role of qualitative research in the international marketing field and beyond. Then, we explain the method employed to undertake this study. Next, we present our findings outlining the global coverage, thematic focus, theoretical purpose, research design and transparency of methods in extant qualitative IMR studies and refer to exemplars to enrich our understanding of best practice. We then discuss four key guidelines that can foster robust qualitative research in international marketing and conclude with some directions for advancing the use and quality of qualitative work in IMR.

Theoretical background

The functionalism-interpretivism debate

Research paradigms differ in their assumptions on the nature of reality (ontology), how we can come to understand the reality (epistemology) and how we can methodically access what can be known about that reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). At the core of the quantitative-qualitative debate in management research, lie the distinctive differences in the paradigmatic assumptions of functionalism and interpretivism (Shah and Corley, 2006). These research paradigms have different aims, and are both critical for the development of generalizable theory. In functionalism, research seeks to test and refine extant theory. The ontological assumption is that the world is objective and, thus, it can be deductively evaluated (prior theory comprises the basis upon which testable hypotheses are developed).

On the contrary, interpretivism calls for a rigorous interpretation grounded in those experiencing phenomena, so that theory can be developed (Shah and Corley, 2006). Multiple social realities can exist based on multiple interpretations of the world. Researchers, therefore, need to rigorously gather and understand these multiple social realities and draw their own interpretations of the phenomena in relation to current theory. This enables the development of deep insights that aids theory development. Qualitative methods provide an "array of interpretive techniques that can describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520). Following Alvesson and Deetz (2000, p. 4), we see "method" as "a mode and a framework for engaging with empirical material." Qualitative methods can play an important role in discovering new variables and relationships, uncovering complex phenomena and better understanding the influence of the social context (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Shah and Corley, 2006).

The current state of qualitative research in international marketing and beyond

The multi-faceted, contextually situated interactions that characterize today's complex international firms demand a more nuanced interpretivism approach (Redding, 1994). Qualitative research can offer a valuable lens in international marketing research. It allows researchers to study organizations and contexts in their natural settings, enabling a more holistic approach, instead of imposing one's culturally informed pre-conceptions (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991). Researchers can, hence, understand more clearly the meaning of the socio-cultural/work environment and the impact that environmental forces are likely to exert on business/consumer decisions.

However, despite the efforts of some scholars and journal editors to tap into the power of qualitative research in developing theory in this field, the number of papers in leading international marketing and business journals that use qualitative research remain alarmingly low (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011). Rather than embracing the potential richness of a wide-open under-defined field, most international business and management researchers tend to rely on the comfort of quantitative methods. Recent reviews in international business (see Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011; Welch *et al.*, 2011), marketing (Svensson and Wood, 2007) and in management (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011) have unanimously concluded that qualitative studies have been relatively scant in these fields. Birkinshaw *et al.* (2011), for instance, note how qualitative methods have been marginalized in international business research, as quantitative methods have become the norm. Amis and Silk (2008) note that this is possibly rooted into the doctrines of logical functionalism remaining dominant within business schools across the world.

PhD training has echoed this broader trend toward more positivistic empirical methods in the social sciences.

The theory of attachment could provide a plausible explanation for the continued use of quantitative methods. Sable's (2008) studies on individual behavior suggest that human beings have natural inclinations to make and maintain attachments to familiar methods, and that once these attachments have been made this can lead to biases in methodological approaches because of the rigidity that has been generated through established beliefs and work behavior. Attachment theory emphasizes the feelings of stability and security that emerge through attachment to known objects and offers one potential explanation of the way ontological gerrymandering shapes the method employed.

Scholars offer several additional reasons for the under-representation of qualitative methods in mainstream management and international business journals (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011; Pratt, 2009; Shah and Corley, 2006). One of the challenges often cited has been the impression that qualitative enquiry generates new ideas in an unsystematic manner (for instance, through a handful of interviews or a few days of unsystematic research), resulting in many qualitative researchers encountering difficulties in publishing their work (Sutton, 1997). Golden-Biddle and Locke (2007) also suggest that one of the shortcomings of qualitative reporting is that qualitative authors place too much emphasis on "telling" their story and not enough emphasis on "showing" the validity of their data. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) add that, contrary to quantitative research where quantifiable techniques offer an agreed standard against which to measure and evaluate research contribution, authors, reviewers and readers of qualitative work, do not have similar access to standardized ways of reporting and assessing how rigor was ensured.

The extent of global coverage of extant qualitative research may be also explained by exploring the institutional forces and background issues that fundamentally shape, constrain and influence a discipline. These antecedents include factors such as author characteristics, geocentricity, editorial board membership and journal identity in terms of the perceived level of journal global inclusion (e.g. Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2006; Svensson *et al.*, 2008; Svensson and Wood, 2007). A variety of scholars have offered explanations about the way that gatekeepers drive journal strategy. Polonsky *et al.* (2006), for instance, analyzed the globalization patterns of authorship. In their paper, they argue that in top journals there is a significant bias toward academics working in North American institutions. Svensson and Wood (2007) delved deeper into the interplay between research designs and author affiliation in marketing. They found that only 5 percent of papers with North American author affiliations, compared to 28.2 percent with Australian author affiliations, 27.1 percent with European author affiliations and 11.5 percent with Asian author affiliations, have used qualitative designs.

Svensson *et al.* (2008) also looked at the geographic origin of the research data and the authors' affiliations, to explore the empirical characteristics of geocentricity in logistics management journals, concluding that cross-geographical affiliations are rare in this field of research. Further they asserted that, despite globalization, the geographical origin of data was predominately North American and European.

Moreover, Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2006) used content analysis techniques to assess the role that editorial board membership plays in encouraging levels of international involvement. Through their decisions, editorial board members can potentially influence the way academic theory is reported and published. They are gatekeepers that often play an influencing role in shaping methodological trends and research dissemination processes. Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2006) found that top journals in the marketing field have high proportions of North Americans in their editorial boards, and call for wider international involvement.

Svensson and Wood (2007) have also further argued that there is a relationship between empirical research design and the scientific identity of the journal. Their review concludes that leading journals such as the *Journal of Marketing* are characterized by what they describe as "quantitative research designs and a North American paradigm of research values" (p. 419). In contrast, the *European Journal of Marketing* reflects a more "mixed" methodological presence and is informed by a more "multi-continental paradigm of research values."

In response to the gaps identified in this literature review, we seek to show the extent and nature of qualitative research in international marketing in IMR and then aim to understand and explain developments in this area.

Method

To achieve our aims, all papers published in IMR from 1990 to 2010 (617) were read and reviewed. Our approach is based on published work, rather than self-reports of authors that have submitted manuscripts in this journal (e.g. Pratt, 2008). IMR publishes papers that focus only on international marketing topics, hence, minimizing the ambiguity in defining what should and should not be considered an international marketing study. Following a similar approach to Molina-Azorin (2012), our search strategy classified the 617 papers in two groups: non-empirical and empirical. Drawing on Aguinis *et al.* (2009), we classified papers as non-empirical when they did not report data, focussed on theoretical developments, viewpoints and literature reviews. We divided the remaining empirical studies in quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. We coded an paper as quantitative if the data were in numerical form and the analysis was based on this data (Aguinis *et al.*, 2009). An paper was considered to be qualitative if the data featured qualitative techniques (e.g. case studies, ethnographies, interviews, focus groups, observation, diaries/essays, content analysis, grounded theory and document analysis) (see Gephart, 2004; Lee, 2009). Papers that were using both quantitative and qualitative methods where classified as mixed methods studies (Molina-Azorin, 2012). Following Lee *et al.* (1999), we incorporated the mixed methods studies in our review of qualitative papers. Harari and Beaty (1990) reinforce our decision by claiming that qualitative research has an important role to play in theory testing, particularly in cross-cultural research. They argue that qualitative data may further confirm a researcher's interpretations of quantitative data.

Following the recommendations by Berelson (1952), we content analyzed all 79 qualitative papers (qualitative and mixed methods papers) published in IMR during the period 1990-2010. Content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 55). Content analysis has proved to be an effective method in extant reviews of the progress made in qualitative research in management (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011) or in identifying the contribution of leading marketing journals to the international marketing discipline (Leonidou *et al.*, 2010) to name but a few. Content analysis has also offered insightful findings in the areas of cross-cultural advertising and international environmental marketing claims among others (Whitelock and Rey, 1998).

The papers collected were categorized into two periods: 1990-1999 (27 papers) and 2000-2010 (52 papers)[1]. Each paper was then examined. An essential component of any content analysis is the coding protocol used. Consequently, we undertook a careful process being informed by similar research previously conducted in the management (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 1999) and international marketing (Leonidou *et al.*, 2010) fields. The generated coding protocol (including operational explanations or definitions of each item that had to be analyzed) was then used by both authors to code the two time periods. To ensure that the coding protocol was adequately understood, both authors undertook a coding exercise where a couple of randomly selected papers were coded independently. The generated coding protocol adopted in our analysis comprised five sections:

(1) global coverage (e.g. the geographic location of the authors whose work is published in the journal; the geographic origin of the research data; the proportion of national research data (from one country) vs international research data (from two or more countries)) (Polonsky and Carlson, 2011; Polonsky and Ringer, 2009, 2012; Svensson, 2005; Svensson *et al.*, 2008);

(2) thematic study focus (Leonidou *et al.*, 2010);

(3) theoretical purpose (e.g. to generate, elaborate or test theories) (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011);

(4) research design (e.g. methods of data collection and data analysis) (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011); and

(5) transparency of methods of data collection and data analysis in the context of how easy it was for reviewers and readers to reproduce the research based on the level of detail of the information reported in each published paper (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011).

Our analysis then moved to looking at the two time periods. One author coded papers in the first time period, while the other coded qualitative papers published in IMR in the second time period. Coders worked independently to transfer the information contained in each of the 79 papers on to coding sheets. To assess the reliability of the generated codes, we then involved an independent researcher with considerable qualitative research experience. Inter-coder reliability is perceived as a useful measure of quality of research (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). Using standardized coding instructions, the third coder examined a random sample of eight papers (three from the first and five from the second period). We compared codings, resulting in an inter-coder agreement of $k = 0.85$[2] (Cohen, 1960). Reliability around 0.85 and above is considered as acceptable, while studies reporting reliabilities of 0.8 should be treated with suspicion (Kassarjian, 1977). Disagreements were resolved through discussion between the authors and the independent coder.

To identify potential institutional drivers/constraints as explanations for our findings we investigated the international composition of the IMR editorial board (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2006) by taking a snapshot of editorial review board membership.

To examine potential differences in citations of empirical/non-empirical and papers employing different methods (in an attempt to explore how these may have influenced the accumulation of knowledge in this field) we then further employed a citation analysis. We used Harzing's (2007) software program to retrieve and analyze academic citations.

Study findings

We now present and discuss our findings in terms of: capturing the empirical landscape; global coverage; thematic study focus; theoretical purpose; research design; the level of transparency of methods of data collection and data analysis; citation analysis.

Capturing the empirical landscape in IMR

In our review of IMR, 216 non-empirical papers (35 percent) were identified, while 401 papers (64.9 percent) reported empirical findings. Focussing on the 401 empirical papers, 322 (80.3 percent) were quantitative studies, 67 (16.7 percent) were qualitative studies and 12 (3 percent) were identified as mixed methods studies. These were in line with similar patterns in published international business research from 1991 to 2002 as reported by Andersen and Skaates (2004). In their review, Andersen and Skaates (2004) found that 37 percent of the papers reviewed were non-empirical, 52 percent were based on quantitative methods, while 11 percent relied on qualitative research methods. Mixed methods designs are not very common in management and international business research (Birkinshaw, 2004; Hurmerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela, 2004; Jick, 1979). They tend to challenge the positivistic assumption that the role of qualitative research is limited to a pilot study and promise to capture a more comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004; Parkhe, 1993). In the so-called "closet qualitative" phase of inherently quantitative work, qualitative research predominantly informs the development of the questionnaire and the interpretation of results (Birkinshaw, 2004; Hurmerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela, 2004). As such, it is seen as supplementary and somehow subordinate, and, hence, it is sometimes not reported at all, as it is considered mainly as a source of pre-understanding (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela, 2004). Prejudices of reviewers toward qualitative research as well as space limitations in journals often prevent the presentation of rigorous mixed methods work in published manuscripts.

IMR tends to publish papers with more empirical content, which is predominantly quantitative. However, there is a slight increase in qualitative methods papers between periods. More specifically, during the 2000-2010 period, 21.8 percent of the empirical papers were qualitative, while in the first period (1990-1999) only 16.5 percent were based on qualitative data (Table I shows the number and types of papers that appeared in IMR from 1990 to 2010).

Global coverage

In an attempt to provide an insight into the global coverage of qualitative work published in IMR we first analyzed the number of countries that were represented looking into authors' institutions. The findings suggest that over the 20-year period, 26 countries were represented in the sample. Our findings mirror previous results (e.g. Polonsky *et al.*, 2006) that found a globally diverse set of academic contributions in 20 leading marketing journals. However, a closer examination within our sample suggested a significant "bias" of authorship within the qualitative papers examined in the last 20 years, with the majority of works published by academics at institutions in the USA and the UK, followed by Australia, Sweden and the Netherlands (see Figure 1).

In examining regional differences, it can be seen that European academics authored the majority of qualitative work (46.4 percent), followed by North American authors (27.3 percent), Australian (8.7 percent) and Asian contributors (5.7 percent). It is also

Year	Total number of papers	Number of non-empirical papers	Total number of empirical papers	Empirical papers Number of quantitative papers	Number of qualitative papers	Number of mixed papers
1990	28	14	14	13	1	–
1991	27	12	15	14	1	–
1992	23	11	12	8	3	1
1993	25	9	16	15	1	–
1994	23	10	13	11	2	–
1995	28	9	19	16	2	1
1996	30	8	22	17	5	–
1997	28	7	21	18	3	–
1998	26	12	14	12	1	1
1999	27	10	17	12	5	–
1st period	265	102	163	136 (83.4%)	24 (14.7%)	3 (1.8%)
2000	31	20	11	10	1	–
2001	31	14	17	14	3	–
2002	30	10	20	18	1	1
2003	28	9	19	17	2	–
2004	35	13	22	17	5	–
2005	35	10	25	20	4	1
2006	30	6	24	15	6	3
2007	34	6	28	22	5	1
2008	34	11	23	20	3	–
2009	32	9	23	14	7	2
2010	32	6	26	19	6	1
2nd period	352	114	238	186 (78.2%)	43 (18%)	9 (3.8%)
Total	617	216	401	322	67	12

Table I. Count and types of *International Marketing Review* papers (1990-2010)

interesting to note some emerging trends between the two periods. Contributions from European and Australian authors increased in the second period (2000-2010) with 52.2 and 11.1 percent against 40 and 3.6 percent, respectively, in the first period (1990-1999). Also, there was a decrease in the number of papers published by North American and Asian academics (19.7 and 5 percent in period 2, vs 43.6 and 7.3 percent in period 1, respectively).

In terms of the geographic origin of the research data (see Figure 2), our analysis revealed that the majority of data were European in both periods (46 percent in 1990-1999 and 36 percent in 2000-2010). In both periods this was followed by Asian data (23 percent in 1990-1999, 29.8 percent in 2000-2010).

Furthermore, between 1990 and 1999, the majority of qualitative studies employed data from one country (52 percent), while between 2000 and 2010, 56 percent of the qualitative studies used data from two or more countries.

In examining the international composition of the IMR editorial board, it can be seen in Figure 3 that 45.9 percent of the 74 current editorial board members are based in Europe, followed by North America (41.9 percent), Australia (9.5 percent), Asia (1.35 percent) and the Middle East (1.35 percent).

Thematic study focus

The reviewed papers were initially categorized in terms of study type (i.e. countries involved) and thematic content. As Table II suggests, in the last ten years the number

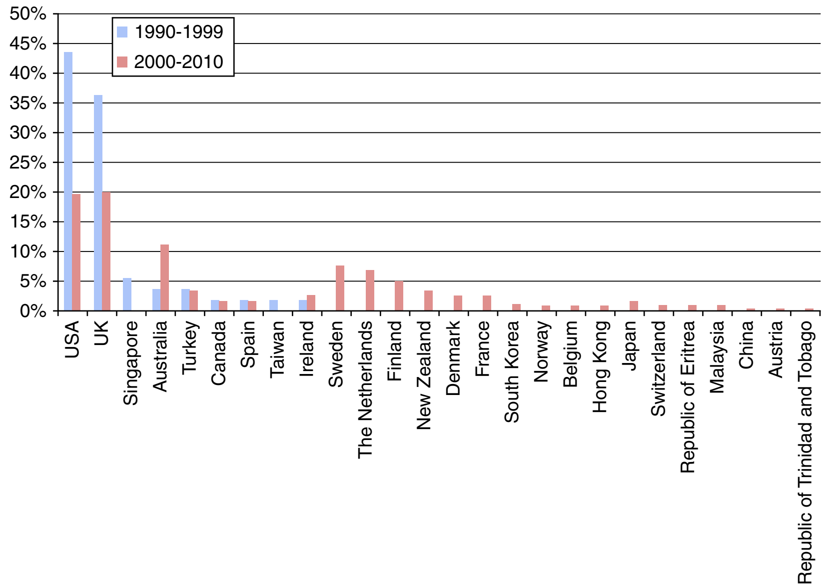

Figure 1.
Authors' geographical affiliation

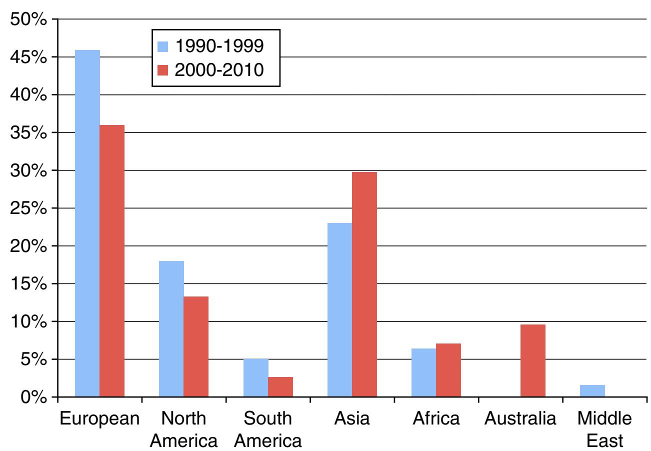

Figure 2.
Geographic origin of research data

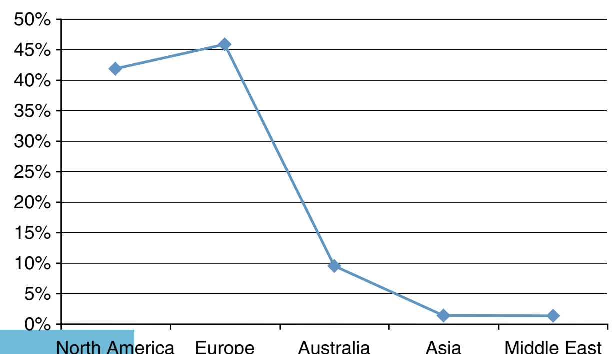

Figure 3.
International composition of the current *IMR* editorial board

Study focus	Total (%) ($n=79$)	Time period 1990-1999 (%) ($n=27$)	2000-2010 (%) ($n=52$)	Trend direction
Type of study				
Individual country	32.9 (26)	33.3(9)	32.7 (17)	↓
Comparative	54.4 (43)	44.4 (12)	59.6 (31)	↑
Others/not available	12.7 (10)	22.2 (6)	7.7 (4)	↓
Countries involved				
One	35.4 (28)	29.6 (8)	38.5 (20)	↑
Two	26.6 (21)	18.5 (5)	30.8 (16)	↑
Three	5.1 (4)	7.4 (2)	3.8 (2)	↓
Four or more	17.7 (14)	18.5 (5)	17.3 (9)	↓
No specific information	15.2 (12)	25.9 (7)	9.6 (5)	↓
Thematic areas				
General international	25.3 (20)	18.5 (5)	28.8 (15)	↑
Macro-environment	3.8 (3)	3.7 (1)	3.8 (2)	↑
Task environment	3.8 (3)	3.7 (1)	3.8 (2)	↑
Market research	1.3 (1)	0 (0)	1.9 (1)	↑
Buyer behavior	11.4 (9)	11.1 (3)	11.5 (6)	↑
Global strategy issues	15.2 (12)	22.2 (6)	11.5 (6)	↓
Market entry strategies	1.3 (1)	0 (0)	1.9 (1)	↑
Marketing mix	26.6 (21)	40.7 (11)	19.2 (10)	↓
Specialized issues	8.9 (7)	0 (0)	13.5 (7)	↑
Miscellaneous	2.5 (2)	0 (0)	3.8 (2)	↑

Table II. Focus of qualitative papers published in *International Marketing Review* (1990-2010)

of comparative studies conducted by international marketing scholars has increased to 59.6 percent (31). This could indicate that cross-border studies are becoming more popular in response to global marketing, but equally the higher figure for the 2000-2010 period could also reflect the fact that qualitative methods have become more popular in the last decade. Single country and two country studies continue to be popular for both decades. However, multiple country (three or more countries) studies remain less popular and have decreased in the 2000-2010 period (from 25.9 to 21.1 percent). Given the equivalence problems associated with cross-cultural research and comparative methodological approaches, the lower figures obtained for three and four country studies are perhaps not surprising (Aulakh and Kotabe, 1993; Bilkey and Ness, 1982; Jackson and Niblo, 2003; Malhotra *et al.* 1996). A number of scholars have highlighted the importance of ensuring equivalence in the dataset (Aulakh and Kotabe, 1993; Bilkey and Ness, 1982; Brislin *et al.*, 1973; Malhotra *et al.*, 1996). The problem emerges because of the vast variety of differences that exist between environmental factors and culture. These differences can make comparability difficult especially if these factors have note been considered in the initial phases of the research design process. Comparability is essential if a cross-cultural study is to achieve equivalence in scales and measurement, within the *emic* (cultural viewpoint) and *etic* (cross-perspective) contexts (Berry, 1980). Equivalence instruments go beyond the notion of ensuring that sample and language can be measured and look at the greater country-specific factors that inform and characterize cross-border decision making. For example, functional equivalence explores whether or not concepts assert the same meaning across cultures. Conceptual equivalence explores whether or not the concept leads to comparable measurement of attitude between and across countries.

For instance, in one country consumers might perceive a high price as a sign of quality, whereas in another a high price might be seen as extortion (Malhotra *et al.*, 1996).

Each paper was then content analyzed against its thematic focus (drawing on Leonidou *et al.*, 2010). In line with the work published by Leonidou *et al.* (2010) we identified ten thematic areas: general international, macro-environment, task environment, market research, buyer behavior, global strategy issues, market entry strategies, marketing mix, specialized issues and miscellaneous (in this category we added papers that featured themes – such as the "entrepreneurial marketing/ opportunities" theme – which did not fit any of the other core themes and were also not listed as a specialized issue in the Leonidou *et al.*, 2010 paper). The theme "marketing mix" was the most popular area of investigation in the 1990-2010 period. Published papers that dealt with areas of marketing strategy, product/brand policy, pricing decisions, distribution channels, physical distribution, advertising and promotion, selling and sales management, were classified as marketing mix-related manuscripts. However, studies focussing on this theme decreased in the period 2000-2010 to 19.2 percent (ten) (from 40.7 percent (11) during the 1990-1999 period). This was interesting given the broad base of sub-themes that fall under the marketing mix agenda. A similar decrease in papers was observed for the theme "global strategy issues." In the 1990-1999 period 22.2 percent (six) of papers published explored areas of global strategy formulation or market segmentation/targeting. In contrast, in the 2000-2010 period the numbers had decreased to 11.5 percent (six).

On the contrary, we identified an increase in qualitative research IMR papers that dealt with a "general international" theme. In 2000-2010, 28.8 percent of these papers explored either the internationalization process or some aspect of international trade analysis. A noticeable increase was also observed in papers that were classified as "specialized issues," focussing on planning and organization, marketing ethics, IT and internet and relationship marketing. In the 2000-2010 time period 13.5 percent of papers demonstrated this theme.

Theoretical purpose

We also classified international marketing qualitative research in IMR in terms of the purpose of the studies (see Table III). Qualitative research that aims for theory advancement strives to generate, elaborate or test theories (Lee *et al.*, 1999). Theory generation occurs when a new theory results in testable research propositions. Theory elaboration takes place when conceptual ideas or a pre-existing model drives the study's design (in which formal hypotheses are not included). Theory testing occurs when formal hypotheses or a formal theory underpins the study's design.

Our analysis identified 17 theory generation international marketing qualitative papers published in IMR between 1990 and 2010. Zou and Ghauri's (2010) multiple case study on the way high-tech firms from China internationalize can be seen as an exemplar of theory generation. This is an paper that stood out in its contribution. The study began by identifying new firms entering into foreign markets as an area that has received scant attention in the otherwise abundant literature on internationalization, hence establishing the need for new theory. Through case analysis from three Chinese high technology new ventures, Zou and Ghauri (2010, p. 225) posed two questions: "(1) how do high technology new ventures from emerging markets become international?, and (2) how do these firms learn, accumulate and utilize knowledge sharing during the internationalization process?." Data collection mainly consisted of in-depth interviews with the authors taking a variety of extra steps to ensure data quality. For instance, they

Author(s)	Year	Theoretical purpose	Research design
Vachani	1990	Theory elaboration	I, A
Mueller	1991	Theory testing	A
Shama	1992	Theory testing	I, Q
Perry	1992	Theory elaboration	I
Miracle, Chang and Taylor	1992	Theory testing	A
Shama	1992	Theory elaboration	FG, A
Mueller, Wenthe and Baron	1993	Theory elaboration	I
Aksoy and Kaynak	1994	Theory generation	I, A
Javalgi, Cutler and White	1994	Theory testing	A
Wee, Choong and Tambyah	1995	Theory testing	A
de Chernatony, Halliburton and Bernath	1995	Theory elaboration	I
Feick, Coulter and Price	1995	Theory testing	I, A, O, FG, Q
McDonald	1996	Theory generation	I
Kase and Yu-Shan Liu	1996	Theory elaboration	A
Winklhofer and Diamantopoulos	1996	Theory generation	I
Egan and Shipley	1996	Theory generation	I, A
Albers-Miller	1996	Theory testing	A
Polonsky, Carlson, Grove and Kangun	1997	Theory testing	A
Neale, Akis and Pass	1997	Theory testing	I, Q
Klein and Quelch	1997	Theory elaboration	A
Whitelock and Rey	1998	Theory testing	A
Melewar and Saunders	1998	Theory testing	Q
Robson and Dunk	1999	Theory elaboration	I, A, O
Merrilees and Tiessen	1999	Theory generation	I
Quinn	1999	Theory generation	I, A, O
Rowley and Slack	1999	Theory elaboration	O
Thomas and Hill	1999	Theory elaboration	I
Quinn and Doherty	2000	Theory generation	O, I,
Wang and Chan	2001	Theory testing	A
Koudelova and Whitelock	2001	Theory testing	A
Wright	2001	Theory elaboration	I
Odekerken-Schroder, De Wulf and Hofstee	2002	Theory testing	A
Nakata	2002	Theory generation	I, O, A, Q
Purchase and Ward	2003	Theory elaboration	I
Kumar and Worm	2003	Theory elaboration	I
Hallen and Johanson	2004	Theory generation	O, I, A
Huemer	2004	Theory elaboration	I
Welch and Wilkinson	2004	Theory elaboration	I, A
Tesfom, Lutz and Ghauri	2004	Theory elaboration	I
Pauwels and Matthyssens	2004	Theory elaboration	I
Bang, Raymond, Taylor and Moon	2005	Theory testing	A
Imrie	2005	Theory elaboration	FG, I
Gurau and Ranchhod	2005	Theory elaboration	I, A
Singh,Zhao and Hu	2005	Theory testing	A
Sugai	2005	Theory elaboration	I
Hutchinson, Quinn and Alexander	2006	Theory elaboration	I, A
Blomstermo, Sharma and Sallis	2006	Theory testing	Q, I, A
Okazaki	2006	Theory testing	A
Penz	2006	Theory elaboration	FG, I
Loane, Bell and McNaughton	2006	Theory elaboration	Q, I, A
Loane and Bell	2006	Theory testing	Q, I, A

(*continued*)

Table III.
Theoretical purpose and research design of reviewed papers (1990-2010)

Author(s)	Year	Theoretical purpose	Research design
Spence and Crick	2006	Theory elaboration	I, A
Mort and Weerawardena	2006	Theory generation	I, A
Gabrielsson, Gabrielsson, Darling and Luostarinen	2006	Theory generation	I
Palmer and Quinn	2007	Theory elaboration	I, A
Nelson and Paek	2007	Theory testing	A
Cova, Pace and Park	2007	Theory elaboration	I, O
Cayla and Eckhardt	2007	Theory elaboration	I, A
Jun and Lee	2007	Theory testing	A
Owusu, Sandhu and Kock	2007	Theory elaboration	I
Ghauri, Tarnovskaya and Elg	2008	Theory elaboration	I, O
Evers and Knight	2008	Theory elaboration	I, A
Elg, Ghauri and Tarnovskaya	2008	Theory generation	I, A
Chandra, Styles and Wilkinson	2009	Theory generation	I, A
Wilson and Amine	2009	Theory elaboration	I, A
Bianchi	2009	Theory elaboration	I, A
Kolk and Margineantu	2009	Theory elaboration	A
Kocak and Abimbola	2009	Theory generation	I, A
Oyedele, Minor and Ghanem	2009	Theory testing	I, A
Crick	2009	Theory testing	Q, I, A
Yin and Ma	2009	Theory elaboration	I
Jorda-Albinana, Ampuero-Canellas, Villa and Rojas-Sola	2009	Theory testing	A
Grunert, Trondsen, Campos and Young	2010	Theory elaboration	I, A
Zou and Ghauri	2010	Theory generation	I, A
Eren-Erdogmus, Cobanoglu, Yalcin and Ghauri	2010	Theory generation	I, A
Dinnie, Melewar, Seidenfuss and Musa	2010	Theory elaboration	I
Bengtsson, Bardhi and Venkatraman	2010	Theory elaboration	D/E , I
Obadia	2010	Theory testing	Q, I, A
Chung, Enderwick and Naruemitmongkonsuk	2010	Theory generation	I, A

Table III.

Notes: A, archival; D/E, diaries/essays; FG, focus group; I, interview; O, observation; Q, questionnaire

supplemented their lengthy interviews with company informants with secondary sources (e.g. papers in newspapers and trade journals, company reports) and investigators' own impressions. The outcome of their efforts yielded six new propositions that not only explain the data but also expand thinking in new directions.

We also identified 37 theory elaboration papers. As an exemplar, we elaborate upon Mort and Weerawardena's (2006) case study. This is a primary example of theory elaboration, as its main aim is the expansion of the international entrepreneurship field through the examination of generative mechanisms and processes of networking capability of born globals. Mort and Weerawardena (2006) employed a comparative case study method. The use of multiple cases allowed a replication logic whereby each case was used to test emerging theoretical insights (Yin, 2003). This process typically yields more robust and generalizable theory than single-case studies (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Following Eisenhardt (1989), they identified theoretically relevant cases (by also referring to an operational definition of a "born global firm," p. 559), collected case data and conducted iterative, inductive analysis. More specifically, they chose six born global Australian firms drawn from low-tech and high-tech industry sectors. They collected their data through open-ended interviews with key decision makers in each organization (e.g. founders, CEOs, senior managers) and documentary evidence. Data gathered from each case were put into a matrix. That helped to organize and analyze the data. This technique tends to promote pattern matching. As is the norm of theory elaboration, Mort and Weerawardena (2006) induced and offered a tentative general model of networking capability and international entrepreneurship in born global firms.

Our review also identified 25 studies with a purpose of theory testing. The majority of them used mixed methods by either completing first a qualitative study and following it up second with a quantitative one (e.g. Feick *et al.*, 1995) or by employing the qualitative findings to support or enrich the quantitative results (e.g. Loane and Bell, 2006). Feick *et al.* (1995) is one of the studies that stands out in this group. Their work expanded a great deal of quantitative work regarding how consumers search for information (Beatty and Smith, 1987; Urbany *et al.*, 1989;) but in an economy that has experienced major shift. Confirming the need to re-examine how consumers search for information during transition, Feick *et al.* (1995) provide a detailed explanation of search mechanisms and consumption behaviors that had not been uncovered in prior studies. Their mixed method research design, conducted in two phases, enabled these valuable insights. In phase 1, they collected data derived from personal interviews conducted in Hungary and in the USA, followed up by participant observation and two focus groups. During phase 2, surveys were mailed to women heads of households in Budapest. The quantitative data served as reliability and validity checks on the qualitative interviews and focus groups responses.

Research design

Qualitative papers published in IMR mainly employed case study, phenomenological and to a lesser degree ethnographic and grounded theory research designs[3]. Yin (1984, p. 23) asserts that case studies can be used to investigate "[…] contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used." Ghauri (2004) notes that a case study is a useful research design when the area under investigation is relatively less known. Case studies have been used to investigate many international marketing topics, such as internationalization of new ventures, international green marketing and international networks, among others. Our analysis revealed that international marketing case studies in the 1990-2010 period, aimed to enhance understanding with an in-depth investigation of one case (e.g. Huemer, 2004, $n = 1$) or with in-depth exploration of multiple cases (e.g. Pawels and Matthyssens, 2004, $n = 12$). Writing, developing and reporting cases requires data to be collected from either single (e.g. Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2006) or multiple sources (e.g. Zou and Ghauri, 2010) and may focus on one period in time (e.g. Robson and Dunk, 1999) or on a longitudinal analysis of a series of events (Hallen and Johanson, 2004).

Phenomenological research designs were often employed when researchers examined human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved (Lee *et al.*, 1999). Data in such studies were primarily based on direct researcher-to-respondent conversations, which occurred either face-to-face or by telephone (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). An exemplar is Cova *et al.*'s (2007) study on brand communities. The authors interviewed 22 Warhammer consumers, in two locations: Marseilles in France and Madison, Wisconsin in the USA. They took several steps to develop rapport and trust with their young informants across the two countries. First, there was a great deal of interaction between the researchers and the consumers investigated. Second, they conducted all the interviews in the informants' environment, namely, game rooms. Third, they tape-recorded the interviews after their informants granted them permission.

Ethnographic research designs are particularly useful for assessing and studying cross-cultural differences. Ethnographies study cultural phenomena, by capturing the social meaning that societies attribute to naturally occurring settings (Burgess, 1984). Typically, ethnographic research explores the opinion systems of communities (Berry, 1969, 1980). Ethnographic research designs are particularly important in international marketing given that unfamiliarity with the cultural environment and social setting can lead to problems when comparing datasets from different contexts. In an international marketing context, too often researchers try to adopt a one size fits all approach to research and in so doing fail to address important questions about data equivalence and transferability. This is in part because the problem definition may be different in a cross-cultural setting (Malhotra *et al.*, 1996). However, in a cross-cultural context data comparability is essential if management is to be able to apply the findings to marketing strategies (Berry, 1969, 1980). Although, ethnographies can occur within a case study, very few studies have used exclusively an ethnographic research design in our sample. Quinn's (1999) paper is an exemplar of a well-executed ethnographic research design, since it uses a lot of best practices in qualitative research: strong theoretical foundation, multiple (triangulation) and novel or less common methods (e.g. observation, archival data) in international marketing, at multiple levels of analysis in an extended period of time (longitudinal). Quinn (1999) clearly demonstrates the state of the literature in the area of control in the internationalization of franchising context and how this informs his study. He then explains how using an ethnographic study within a research setting, which has used franchising as its primary mode of overseas expansion, provides an opportunity to shed more light on the actual mechanisms used to control its international network. To delve deeper into the actual processes, Quinn (1999) became a "participant as observer" within a British retail company and in this role, he spent a substantial amount of energy and time interacting within the organizational setting. Additionally, Quinn (1999) used multiple methods to ensure the trustworthiness of his data. More specifically, he observed a large number of formal and informal meetings over time, interviewed key informants at multiple levels in the firm and collected secondary data (e.g. memos, meeting minutes). From his rich qualitative dataset, several contributions stand out, such as the importance of non-coercive sources of power used to influence franchise behavior and hence improve control, as well as a rich and accurate portrayal of what happens in practice in terms of the development of the support function over an extended period of time.

Those that adopted a grounded theory research design, sought to leverage the value of inducing theory from data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Yin and Ma (2009), for instance, used grounded theory to explore the impact of ISO 14001 certification in developing countries. This enabled an understanding of key concepts such as the effectiveness of international ISO regulations. The theoretical model that the authors propose in their paper was used to study the various dimensions of ISO 14001 certification through the examination of multiple cases. Data were coded and categorized to extract and identify key themes and this led to theory elaboration. Theoretical categories included the "motivation to pursue certification, the certification process, implementation of ISO 14001 standards and the environmental impacts of ISO 14001 certification" (Yin and Ma, 2009, p. 356).

Data collection methods

Our analysis revealed that the majority of the reviewed papers use several methods for data collection as a means to increase the validity and reliability of their findings (see Table IV).

Of the papers reviewed in our study, 49.4 percent (39) used only one method of data collection, 38 percent (30) used two and 12.6 percent (ten) used three or more methods of data collection. It is interesting to note that studies, which used two methods of data collection, have more than doubled in the second period (2000-2010) with 46.2 percent against 22.2 percent in the first period (1990-1999). Also, there was a decrease in the number of studies, which used one method of data collection in the second period (40.4 percent in period 2, vs 66.7 percent in period 1). These trends suggest that qualitative authors in international marketing during the last decade further focussed on addressing readers'/reviewers' concern in terms of the credibility of information collected. Triangulating their findings is seen as a worthwhile direction toward increasing the reliability and validity of their findings.

Of the data collection methods, interviewing was by far the most popular, with interviews conducted in 72.2 percent (57) of the reviewed papers. Moreover, there is an increasing number of qualitative papers published in IMR over time that includes detailed information in their methods section in relation to interviewing. For instance, during the 2000-2010 period, 80 percent of the reviewed papers incorporated data about the number of informants, while in the first period (1990-1999) only 36.8 percent

		Time period		
	Total (%) ($n=79$)	1990-1999 (%) ($n=27$)	2000-2010 (%) ($n=52$)	Trend direction
Number of methods of data collection				
One	49.4 (39)	66.7 (18)	40.4 (21)	↓
Two	38 (30)	22.2 (6)	46.2 (24)	↑
Three	10.1 (8)	7.4 (2)	11.5 (6)	↑
More	2.5 (2)	3.7 (1)	1.9 (1)	↓
Methods of data collection				
Interviews	72.2 (57)	55.6 (15)	80.8 (42)	↑
Observation	11.4 (9)	14.9 (4)	9.6 (5)	↓
Archival material/secondary sources	64.6 (51)	59.3 (16)	67.3 (35)	↑
Focus groups	5.1 (4)	7.4 (2)	3.8 (2)	↓
Diaries/essays	1.3 (1)	–	1.9 (1)	↑
Questionnaire	12.7 (10)	14.8 (4)	11.5 (6)	↓
Transparency of methods of data collection				
Transparent	55.7 (44)	55.6 (15)	55.8 (29)	↑
Mostly transparent	27.8 (22)	29.6 (8)	26.9 (14)	↓
Non-transparent	16.5 (13)	14.8 (4)	17.3 (9)	↑
Transparency of methods of data analysis				
Transparent	39.2 (31)	22.2 (6)	48.1 (25)	↑
Mostly transparent	24.1 (19)	11.1 (3)	30.8 (16)	↑
Non-transparent	36.7 (29)	66.7 (18)	21.2 (11)	↓

Table IV. Methods of data collection and transparency of reviewed papers (1990-2010) had this level of detail. In the second period, papers also advanced their reporting on interviews by incorporating: pilot interviews to inform the topic guide used, representative interview questions in the paper, multiple informants, longer in-depth interviews and verbatim transcription of the interviews. More specifically, in the second time period (2000-2010), we identified more papers that used multiple informants across hierarchical levels (e.g. Elg *et al.*, 2008) or combined external with internal informants (e.g. Palmer and Quinn, 2007). In such studies, different informants' perspectives are more likely to be reported and, hence, offer enriched insights. One example of piloting interviews and including some representative questions is Kumar and Worm's (2003) paper on the impact of social capital on the dynamics of Sino-northern European business negotiations. They suggested that allowing actors to describe in their own words their experiences in cross-cultural negotiations was a more critical, contextually richer and most likely a valid direction. Their interview guide (key questions, p. 268) was informed by a set of pilot interviews undertaken in Denmark. Following Pratt (2009), including interview questions or the interview protocol in the paper is best practice in qualitative research, as it allows the readers to determine the extent to which the study's findings are directly linked to the questions the researchers asked.

Echoing Piekkari *et al.* (2008), limitations of interviewing such as the methodological implications of undertaking interviews across different countries were rarely discussed in interview-based studies (for an exception, see Ghauri *et al.*'s, 2008 paper). Instead, qualitative researchers should explain in greater length their reasons behind language selection during cross-border fieldwork (English or interviewees' native language). If they choose to conduct the interviews in English, then they will have to delve deeper on how they overcame language barriers and established rapport, while ensuring accurate and authentic answers. Lagerstrom and Anderson (2003) and Welch and Piekkari (2006) recommend that using and providing in advance a topic guide, asking frequent clarifying questions, repeating back to the interviewees the answers given are appropriate ways to address these concerns. On the contrary, if they decide to use interviewees' native language, then they would have to explain how they managed to translate their interview transcripts into English without losing the nuances and details of a situation. More specifically, tape recording the interviews, using a language interpreter who can also comment on the answers or provide additional verifications of the interview translations after an interview as well as employing researchers who are proficient in the languages are some of the ways that international marketing qualitative researchers may use to overcome these problems (Ghauri *et al.*, 2008; Napier *et al.*, 2004).

Archival was the second most popular method of qualitative data collection, with 64.6 percent (51) of the papers using at least one form of archival data. Studies mainly relied on internal archival material (e.g. internal memos, meeting minutes) to supplement interview findings, while external secondary data were used as a primary means in content analysis studies (e.g. TV and print campaigns). Regrettably, authors who collected archival material during field visits, hardly ever referred to them in the analysis of their findings and often only made use of archival material as a reference of triangulation of results from other primary data sources (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011). Instead, qualitative authors must include archival data in their findings sections in order to provide the "thicker and more detailed" descriptions of meanings and processes or/and further elaborate one's primary evidence (Gephart, 2004; Lee *et al.*, 1999).

Observation data were collected in 11.4 percent (nine) of the papers. The only paper in our sample that actively employed observation data was by Rowley and Slack (1999). They visited ten airport departure lounges within a period of four months. Their analysis focussed on four elements: servicescape and ambience; the range of retail outlets; marketing messages and communication; and the customer experience.

Less commonly used were focus groups (5.1 percent, (four)) and diaries/essays (1.3 percent (one)). Bengtsson *et al.* (2010) is the only study in our sample that uses diaries/essays for data collection. We deem the use of novel or relatively unfamiliar techniques as a sign of progress for qualitative research in the international marketing field. Bengtsson *et al.*'s (2010) research examined brand meanings for two prototypical global brands, McDonald's and Starbucks, at home (in the USA) and abroad. Data were collected through photo-elicited interviews, personal diaries and essays with 29 middle-class American consumers, before, during, and after a short trip to China. Their data collection procedure followed three phases. Four weeks before the trip, Bengtsson *et al.* (2010) asked informants (at home) to write personal reflection essays regarding brand meanings and relationships of the two brands under investigation. While in China, informants were instructed to patronize the brand to which they had been assigned and take pictures that reflect their experience of the brand. About a week after the trip, in-depth interviews were conducted using a photo-elicitation technique with each informant to elicit stories of their experience with the assigned brand in China. Interestingly, their very elaborate and innovative methods of data collection revealed that the cultural context (e.g. place) impacts consumer-derived brand meanings even among the same group of consumers.

Analytical techniques

Studies in our sample used a variety of analytical techniques to interpret qualitative data. Pattern matching (alternatively known as configuration testing) and content analysis were widely employed (Campbell, 1975; Cao, 2007; Yin, 1984). Yin (1984) outlines two approaches to pattern matching. The first approach explores the patterns that emerge when studying non-equivalent dependent variables. The second explores pattern formation where non-equivalent independent variables are used. Ghauri *et al.* (2008), for instance, conducted an exploratory study of four suppliers of IKEA in Poland and Russia to identify patterns. In their paper, the researchers selected cases, which sought to explore "how a global retailer develops suppliers relationships to support its market driving strategy" (Ghauri *et al.*, 2008, p. 508). Interviews were conducted in three languages and an interview preliminary framework was developed. Four cases were used to enable the authors to explore the different patterns that emerged in the supplier relationships. Pattern matching enabled similarities in data representation to be observed and coded.

Content analysis was also widely employed in our sample. This analytical technique explores the content of messages, addressing specific questions about "what," "who" and "context." Researchers draw on different sources of information. These may involve magazines, web sites, speech or image analysis, or interviews on a specific topic. Coding in this context is very important because it explores both the frequency and saliency of the message. Nelson and Paek (2007), for instance, applied content analysis focussing on advertising in a global magazine across seven countries (Brazil, China, France, India, Korea, Thailand and the USA). The objective of the paper was to examine the degree of advert standardization across the countries investigated. Full-page ads in various Cosmopolitan magazine issues between 2002 and 2003 were the focus of content analysis. Coding frames were developed so that communication channel, message and group inferences could be assessed by the researchers. In total, 14 coders were involved, who were proficient in terms of language and had lived in the country assigned for at least two years. Pilot coding was conducted, followed by discussion groups whereby each coder was given the opportunity to share meaning. Intercoder reliability was also addressed (e.g. Krippendorff, 1980; Perreault and Leigh, 1989).

Transparency of methods of data collection and analysis

Echoing Bluhm *et al.* (2011) who did a similar analysis of qualitative papers in management, we also found little consistency across studies in terms of the transparency of data collection methods and analysis. Adopting Bluhm *et al.*'s (2011, pp. 14-15) definitions, we categorized the reviewed IMR qualitative papers as transparent, mostly transparent and non-transparent. Of the papers reviewed in our study, 55.7 percent (44) featured transparent descriptions of methods of data collection used. In an exemplar of an interview-based inquiry within IKEA (case study), Elg *et al.* (2008) interviewed 43 employees ranging from senior representatives to store managers and staff at the company's headquarters in Sweden and two different emerging markets (Russia and China). The purposeful selection of different employees across the organization and markets provided a richer explanation of the phenomenon under investigation, while enabling triangulation by obtaining multiple views on the same phenomenon from different people. Another 27.8 percent (22) of the qualitative papers that we reviewed were regarded as mostly transparent. Information was missing for one aspect of the study or they lacked the depth for multiple aspects of the design. Several papers in our sample, which adopted a multiple case design, have, for instance, provided some basic information about the case firms, such as its industry, but failed to report information on how the data were collected (e.g. number of interviews, level of interviewees, the collection of secondary material, etc.). Finally, 16.5 percent (13) of the papers were coded as non-transparent, as their descriptions of data collection were incomplete, omitted or exceptionally vague (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011). Papers in this category sacrificed explaining details in relation to the context of the study, as well as the methods of data collection, to allow, possibly, a richer focus on the findings.

The transparency of analysis featured in the reviewed papers paints a less rosy picture, despite the fact that there is an increasing tendency toward higher transparency in the 2000-2010 papers (1990-1999: 22.2 percent compared to 2000-2010: 48.1 percent). Overall, 39.2 percent (31) of the papers were coded as transparent since they are detailed enough that the study could be replicated with great confidence. These papers tend to document the entire scientific process in a similar manner to quantitative papers. In our opinion, Winklhofer and Diamantopoulos' (1996) comparative case study on export forecasting practices stands out for its transparency. Through case analyses from 11 export organizations, they identified three elements (company characteristics, forecasting practices and forecasting performance) that informed a four group typology of firms: forecast receivers, customer dependent forecasters, organized forecasters and intuitive forecasters. Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews, with the authors taking a variety of extra steps to ensure data quality. For instance, they conducted interviews with knowledgeable key informants (e.g. managing director, export director, general manager) who were involved in these forecasting practices and in two cases they interviewed multiple informants. These verbal interview data were transcribed into text and subjected to a six-stage analysis (which was also explained schematically in page 57), including inspecting the transcripts and identifying some "tentative" variables that may underlie the remaining analysis across interviews, reducing the data by extracting case data relevant to emerging variables, comparing cases on these variables, grouping cases that share these variables (certain patterns or configurations), linking these forecasting practices to export characteristics and performance and developing typologies based on general and export characteristics, forecasting practices and forecast performance. Moreover, 24.1 percent (19) were coded as mostly transparent when they only referred to terms like "grounded theory" or included a sentence, such as "[…] for data analysis we have followed the procedure suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994)," but without explaining what these involved. The remaining studies in our sample (36.7 percent or 29 papers) were considered as non-transparent, since they did not include a description of their data analysis or very little was reported about the way the data was reduced and analyzed to produce interpretable results.

It is of paramount importance for qualitative authors in international marketing to show what was done in the research process and more specifically to explain how they moved from their raw data to their findings. Gephart (2004) suggests that the reader needs to be made aware of the data analysis procedure followed and the key decisions made. Lack of transparency in the data analysis practices causes two important problems: first, the reported findings may be weaker/different than those reported when a rigorous data analysis process has been employed and outlined, and, second, it makes it very difficult for the reader to assess the veracity of the methods used (Gephart, 2004; Pratt, 2009). Indeed, qualitative authors in international marketing have to justify further how they have employed a methodological approach in order to address the research questions of their studies. This can help to address the concern of quantitative researchers who sometimes dismiss qualitative research as lacking rigor (Sutton, 1997), while also allowing readers to replicate the study in other settings (Lee *et al.*, 1999).

Citation analysis

To examine potential differences in citations of empirical/non empirical and papers using different methods we then further employed a citation analysis. The initial diagnostic tests for each variable revealed that the scale variable – number of citations – violated the assumption of normality exhibiting a high level of positive skew (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). While parametric tests are often robust to such deviations of normality, the magnitude of skew precluded it from bring appropriate in this instance (15.79). It was also found that kurtosis was problematic (317.65). To compare whether any differences existed in the number of citations between empirical ($n = 400$) and non-empirical ($n = 211$) studies a Mann-Whitney U-test was employed[4]. This is the non-parametric equivalent to an independent-samples t-test when normality is not achieved (Green and Salkind, 2008). The findings suggested that the null hypothesis, being that there is no difference in the mean rank of citations across groups, should be accepted ($U = 38{,}405.00$; $Z = -1.83$; $p > 0.05$). In the second test, this time comparing citations across three research designs (qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods), a Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance was utilized (qualitative $n = 64$; quantitative $n = 324$; mixed methods $n = 12$). While quantitative studies had a higher citations mean rank (mean rank: 205.66) than other categories (qualitative mean rank: 184.18, mixed methods mean mark: 148.17), it was found that research design type has no statistically significant effect on the number of citations provided (H (2) $= 4.38$; df $= 2$; $p > 0.10$). Overall, our analysis revealed that whether a study is empirical and different research design types have no statistically significant effect on citations.

Discussion

In this paper we have attempted to show the extent and nature of qualitative research in IMR and understand/explain developments in this area. It is fair to say that qualitative research remains under-represented in international marketing studies in general and IMR in particular. This reflects similar patterns in the wider international business research field (Andersen and Skaates, 2004; Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011). Although we have seen a slight increase in published IMR papers that employ a qualitative research design, the field is still dominated by quantitative studies. This may serve as a barrier to theory advancement, in terms of generating or elaborating theory in the international marketing area (Lee *et al.*, 1999). We concur with Birkinshaw *et al.* (2011) in arguing that to understand to the complexities of emergent and evolving phenomena across international boundaries, researchers may have to adopt exploratory research and comparative case analysis that focus on inductive theory building.

Another concern relates to the current global coverage of international marketing papers. The majority of studies in IMR are authored by US- and UK-based scholars. There is a clear need for more studies from other under-represented regions including Africa, Asia and the Middle East, to capture subtle cultural differences in the international arena. Wider representation of global regions is also needed in the composition of the editorial board, which is currently largely relying on European and North American academics (Walters, 2001). The shift in focus from the USA to countries like China and India endorses this need for a more inclusive editorial board. Editorial board members and reviewers with qualitative research expertise can also help to move away from a situation whereby qualitative research merely co-exists against the back drop of the more favored quantitative approaches. Moreover, single country or two country studies seem to prevail in extant qualitative IMR studies. To reflect the nuances of global markets, qualitative international marketing work needs to expand to multiple country studies.

Qualitative work in the international marketing field has made some progress on the transparency of methods, particularly in terms of data analysis procedures. Yet, there is still much scope for advancement in enriching rigor in the way that qualitative research is conducted and reported in this area. These concerns mirror similar challenges in qualitative research identified in the wider management and international business literature (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011; Pratt, 2009; Shah and Corley, 2006). Echoing Shah and Corley (2006), we argue that to overcome the prevailing negative image of qualitative research in the international marketing field, qualitative researchers must be cautious in their writing and reviewing, ensuring that papers are methodologically sound and consistent in their use of terminology. Despite the prevailing challenges identified in this study, we continue to be optimistic regarding the future of qualitative research in the pursuit of international marketing knowledge. In this direction, we have handpicked several exemplars throughout this paper, to inspire more systematic qualitative research that will hopefully help researchers in publishing their work and best contribute to the continued advancement of international marketing theory. In the following sections we summarize key learnings.

What makes for a good and publishable qualitative study in international marketing?

Based on our analysis of the qualitative papers published in IMR during the last two decades, we offer some general guidelines that can foster robust qualitative research in international marketing and should, therefore, be considered by scholars and doctoral researchers in advancing this field.

1. Frame the study in terms of existing debates in the literature and justify the need for qualitative research. Qualitative studies are exploratory in nature, aiming to "open the black box" in phenomena, which tend to be poorly understood. This is even truer in international marketing studies, where qualitative research is expected to recognize contextual dimensions, such as differences between countries (Buckley and Lessard, 2005). Addressing the "how," "who" and "why" questions, qualitative researchers should not only offer rich, "thick" descriptions of real phenomena, but also seek to develop rigorous theory (Doz, 2011). Echoing other scholars' concerns about the bias toward the "exploratory" and "contextualizing" nature of qualitative methods (which may lead to casual theorizing), we also stress the importance of explaining how one's research fills the theoretical gaps in current thinking (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011; Pratt, 2009). Qualitative researchers must clearly explain how their research builds upon and extends extant literature to aid theory advancement.

2. Explain why a certain methodology was chosen. Our analysis also revealed that it is essential for qualitative researchers to justify their choice of methodology in a comprehensive and rational way. What can be done? Researchers adopting a qualitative research design must explain how the research question(s) set in the beginning of the project informed the selection of methods (see Whitelock and Rey, 1998). In our opinion, Bengtsson *et al.*'s (2010) study does an exemplary job not only in explaining why the adopted method was chosen. Their study is an exemplar in terms of the detail provided to justify the methods of data collection used (e.g. personal diaries, essays, interviews).

3. Be transparent and detailed about the methods of data collection and analysis. Many studies that employ qualitative methods lack a thorough account of the methodology. Two possible answers to this phenomenon are: first, the lack of an accepted template for writing up qualitative research (Pratt, 2009), and/or, second the lack of in-depth training and some experience in high-quality field research practices (Doz, 2011). Several of the studies that we reviewed, offered a very broad and brief explanation of how they collected and analyzed data by quoting key authors in the adopted methodologies, such as Glaser and Strauss (1967) or Eisenhardt (1989). It is essential for authors to take the reader step by step through the major sections of their methods from sample selection (e.g. boundary conditions of the study, choosing informants) to data analysis (Pratt, 2009). For instance, qualitative researchers may consider complementing their methodological descriptions with tables and figures illustrating how the data were interpreted. This will help them articulate how they go from their data and first-order findings to the aggregate conceptual dimensions they use for generating, elaborating or testing theory.

4. Trustworthiness of the results. The most frequent problem we found with the papers that we reviewed was the absence of steps taken by the author(s) to ensure the trustworthiness of their data and analytical rigor (for exception see Javalgi *et al.*, 1994). We would like to refer to some established techniques that international marketing authors could consider offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell (2007). First, generated data (e.g. interview transcripts, field notes, secondary material) collected throughout the research has to be painstakingly managed (either manually or by using a qualitative data management software). Second, experienced qualitative researchers can act as independent judges, evaluating the coding of randomly selected data and assessing their agreements and disagreements with the author's coding.

Third, peer debriefing, where the field researcher discusses emerging patterns and whether the conclusions reached are plausible with another researcher (not involved in the study) can offer an outsider's perspective. Lastly, randomly selected study informants (member checks) may be used to vet the author(s)'s interpretations and assure the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Conclusions

What conclusions can we draw from our review of these 79 empirical qualitative papers published in IMR? First, our findings highlighted the continuing under-representation of qualitative research in IMR. Second, it was encouraging to see that a growing number of papers in the more recent period (2000-2010) adopted a higher standard of methodological description. They were more exhaustive and transparent, hence, allowing future replication of the study. Third, our results may provide a preview of some data collection tools that are not yet very popular in international marketing research, but may become more popular in the future. For instance, personal diaries, essays and observation are data collection methods that may provide some interesting insights in driving the international marketing field. Lastly, our review of exemplary qualitative studies published in IMR can act as a "good practice" guide for qualitative researchers in this field. Our review is limited in that we only covered one international marketing journal (IMR). As such, our findings may not be representative of the international marketing field as a whole. We are also aware that some material, which may have illuminated further the methods followed in the papers that we reviewed, may have been removed during the reviewing process, to deal with paper length. We encourage scholars not to sacrifice the transparency of methods during the reviewing process and urge researchers to extend our insights by reviewing the state of qualitative research in other international marketing journals. Taken together, we hope that our insights and excitement by the advancements made in qualitative research in this journal will inspire international marketing scholars and doctoral students to expand their methodological toolset by starting to use a variety of qualitative methods to develop new and good theory.

Notes

1. We followed Lee *et al.*'s (1999) and Bluhm *et al.*'s (2011) rationale where they have assessed the progress in qualitative research in management in two periods.
2. *k*-values range between 0.0 (no reliability) and 1.0 (perfectly reliable).
3. Our sample articles employed a case study, phenomenological, ethnographic or grounded theory research design. However our categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The methodological boundaries across these categories are amorphous (Lee *et al.*, 1999). For instance, ethnographies can occur within a case study.
4. Citations could not be found for five non-empirical and four empirical IMR papers.

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Further reading

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