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**ADDRESSING RESEARCH QUALITY IN QUALITATIVE CASE STUDIES: TRENDS
IN *INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT*, 1971-2006**

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Abstract

Business-to-business (B2B) marketing has a long tradition of using qualitative case studies. *Industrial Marketing Management*, for example, has actively encouraged the use of qualitative case study methods, resulting in many important theoretical advances in B2B marketing. However, debate still rages over the nature of “research quality” in qualitative case studies. Based on an analysis of 105 case-based articles appearing in the period 1971-2006 in *Industrial Marketing Management*, we analyze how authors address research quality. As a result of our analysis, we recommend that qualitative case researchers need to address explicitly epistemological stance and issues of research quality; methods, including sampling decisions, data collection tools, and analysis; and, finally, triangulation of data, methods, and researchers.

Keywords: Case study; Research quality in qualitative case studies; Qualitative research.

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1. Introduction

The use of rich qualitative case studies to build theory characterizes B2B marketing (Dubois and Araujo, 2004, 2007; Easton, 2000; Harrison and Easton, 2004). In the following, for readability we will simply use the terms “case studies” or “cases” to refer to qualitative case studies unless otherwise indicated in text. Although case studies can be wholly or partially quantitative, we limit our focus to cases that employ predominantly qualitative methods to gather primary data because those using predominantly quantitative data address research quality through standard tests for validity and reliability.

The value of case studies to B2B marketing theory is recognized in past calls for papers of all three specialist B2B marketing journals: *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, and *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*. However, the nature of “research quality” in case studies (Dubois and Araujo, 2004) and its associated practices, as demonstrated in our article, vary widely. For example, reviewers diverge on how to address research quality. Some reviewers are adamant that feedback is sought on interpretations from all informants, while others seem unconcerned when this is not explicitly stated in an article. Likewise, reviewers have different views on whether articles benefit from the use of direct quotes, with some reviewers seeking further examples and others suggesting such ones are inappropriate for managerial articles. As well, views are divergent on the value of single versus

multiple cases, use of terms such as “validity” and “reliability”, and considerations of “generalizability”. As regular reviewers ourselves, it is our experience that standards of presenting case study information differ very much, and often authors do not explicitly consider issues of research quality in their articles. Although debate about the role of case studies in the B2B marketing discipline occurs sporadically (e.g., Dubois and Araujo, 2007; Hillebrand, Kok, and Biemans, 2001), explicit consideration of how authors should improve research quality of case studies is rare, especially in comparison to the B2B management discipline where such issues are regularly debated (e.g., *Academy of Management Journal*, 2007, 50[1]; Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; Eisenhardt, 1989, 1991; Van Maanen, 1979).

It is, however, important to address research quality in case studies for at least six reasons. First, attention to research quality likely leads to better practices in the field (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Second, being sensitive to how research quality is addressed may result in richer insights and therefore better theory generation (Yin, 1994). Third, active debate over research quality is a sign of a healthy research community, and thus will improve the status of the case study method (Silverman, 2004a). Fourth, having explicit standards of research quality will increase the trustworthiness of case studies in the eyes of readers, thereby improving the status of the B2B marketing discipline, and potentially securing a higher impact of case study research (Lindgreen, 2008). Fifth, debates on research quality can alleviate concerns raised by other researchers over the value of qualitative research (including cases) in marketing (Levy, 2005). Sixth, and finally, having clear guidelines on how research quality can be addressed in case studies is essential for doctoral candidates in B2B marketing (Carson *et al.*, 2001; Perry, 1998).

In this article we argue that central to research quality are the following three practices: an explicit consideration of (1) the epistemological stance and issues of research quality; (2) the methods, including sampling decisions, data collection tools, and analysis; and (3) the triangulation of data, methods, and researchers, which can include some form of informant or collegial feedback or member checking.

Drawing on 105 identified qualitative case studies published in *Industrial Marketing Management* in the period 1971-2006, we contribute to literature in the following three areas. First, we identify how authors in B2B marketing have addressed—explicitly or implicitly—issues of research quality in case studies. Second, we describe some trends in how research quality has been addressed over time. Third, by comparing theory and practice, we suggest areas for further discussion. These contributions provide a timely consideration of the “state of the art” in B2B marketing case studies, and contribute to debates within the discipline. To this end, the remaining parts of the article are organized as follows. First, we provide details of our methods. Second, we present our findings, focusing on three key areas for case researchers to address. Third, a conclusion covering practical implications follows.

2. Methods

Data for this article are drawn from 105 case studies published in *Industrial Marketing Management* in the period 1971-2006. Besides space considerations, we choose *Industrial Marketing Management* because the journal is recognized as the leading journal in industrial marketing and is a top-10 journal by influence within the marketing discipline over a 30-year

period (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003). As such, *Industrial Marketing Management* is judged to provide preeminent examples of case research within the sub-discipline of B2B marketing. For the purposes of this article, case studies are defined as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ [bounded by time and place] or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61; see also Stake, 2005, p. 485).

Cases are identified in a number of ways. First, we conduct a keyword search (looking for the terms “case study” or “qualitative”) of articles published in *Industrial Marketing Management*. A typical example of this is: “Its practical application is demonstrated through a case study in industrial engineering and construction” (Mühlbacher, Dreher, and Gabriel-Ritter, 1994, p. 287). Second, the identified articles are carefully looked through in order to assess if they meet the case study definition provided above, and to see that case studies are, in fact, based primarily on qualitative data. We remove articles that are theoretical discussions of the case method or purely quantitative cases; one case study that has been printed twice in the journal is also removed. Third, we conduct a further search reading through the abstracts and, if necessary, the method sections of each published article to identify possible further case studies. As a result of the described process, we identify a total of 105 articles that focus on qualitative case studies. Although we report on some of these cases directly, space considerations preclude from providing a full list; however, we are happy to provide the database, which results from our research, should other researchers desire it. Figure 1 depicts a trend analysis of case study publication *versus* total number of articles and issues during the period 1971-2006. The final dataset contains examples of three types of case studies (Stake, 2005): intrinsic (highly

descriptive, non theory-driven cases), instrumental (theory-building cases), and multiple or collective case studies.

Insert Figure 1 in here

The analysis occurs in three phases. First, we analyze each published article on the basis of its explicit consideration of research quality. The criteria used in articles are drawn from literature on case research quality. Various paradigms appear in marketing literature; however, positivism and interpretivism can be identified as constituting two dominant methods of case study research in B2B marketing (Carson *et al.*, 2001). Positivist citations often include Eisenhardt (1989), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1998), and Yin (1994), whereas those favoring interpretivism often quote Lincoln and Guba (1985). Tables 1a and 1b compares how research quality, according to literature, is operationalized in positivism and interpretivism.

Insert Tables 1a and 1b here

Second, given that relatively few researchers explicitly address issues of research quality, we analyze each published case study for evidence of quality criteria being used. This process is done by both authors and involves a first stage of within-case analysis and a second stage of cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). The first stage consists of a careful reading of each individual article. Following this, both authors write memos on each article, identifying key issues and practices (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Second, both authors analyze the cases according to four time-periods (1971-1979, 1980-1989, 1990-1999, and 2000-2006). Although

these periods are relatively arbitrary, they are useful devices in breaking up the data into manageable chunks and also in identifying trends in how in practice issues of research quality have been dealt with in the 105 published articles. The process of cross-case analysis involves looking for patterns across time-periods, and enables the identification of exemplar cases, as well as problems and outcomes in relation to how authors address case research quality.

Third, the above steps are repeated on multiple case studies (publications of multiple case studies in *Industrial Marketing Management* increased dramatically from 1990). We analyze these articles separately because presenting information from several cases gives rise to particular problems (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; Easton, 2000). Our final interpretation is presented to colleagues in two seminars to gain further feedback, and two anonymous reviewers for this article; both the presentation and the discussion of our findings are revised to reflect this feedback.

Before proceeding to discussing our findings, we would like to make the following statements. Since examining how authors address research quality in articles published *Industrial Marketing Management* involves critically analyzing colleagues' work we must approach this examination with a degree of sensitivity. First, authors publishing case research in the 1970s and early 1980s had few guidelines to work from to address research quality. Second, it is possible that due to space considerations authors remove parts of their article that address research quality. For example, information that helped reviewers positively judge an article may have been removed prior to publication in order to reduce page space or improve readability. Third, we examine articles from a particular point of view—the impression an article leaves on readers when

reading it with research quality in mind; that is, we are not stating that an article is unimportant or poor quality *per se*. Fourth, we are also sensitive to the fact that authors must make choices in what they report, and that these choices will be determined by the aim of the article; an article focusing on building theory or exploring new practices may therefore focus on this contribution rather possibly at the expense of reported research quality. As a result, when we use the terms “research quality” or “case quality” we use these terms to refer to the extent authors address criteria such as those in Tables 1a and 1b. Finally, we should state our own philosophical stance, which is somewhere between positivism and interpretivism; and we have carried out research that follows each of these schools’ methods, but also research that combines methods from both schools.

3. Findings

We will discuss passages from articles; these passages are contained in Exhibit 1. Based on our analysis, we identify the following three themes.

Insert Exhibit 1 about here

4.1 Epistemological Stance and Issues of Research Quality

Researchers need to be explicit about their epistemological position (e.g., positivist or interpretivist) and in how they address research quality. Also, details need to be provided about the choices of the research design, and justification for such choices. In particular, significant

details must be included about sampling strategies since sample choices are central to case quality (Dubois and Araujo, 2007); such explicit consideration assists readers in judging the research quality. As Table 2 identifies, however, less than half (46.7%) of all articles published in *Industrial Marketing Management* explicitly justify their choice of method in terms of research questions, prior research, or direct appeals to literature. Fewer still address issues of research quality, including issues of validity (22.8%), reliability (16.2%), and generalizability (23.8%). In fact, so few authors consider issues of validity that we lump all considerations of validity (construct and internal) into one umbrella category “validity”. We choose to focus on external validity, as a separate issue, however, as more authors consider this (at the end of their articles). Furthermore, researchers often only provide limited detail on sampling decisions, data gained, analysis, and questions asked at interviews or time spent in field. Our analysis indicates, though, that reporting this detail has improved from 2000 but this could be a function of an increase in the number of published case studies.

Insert Table 2 about here

Typical examples of the limitations identified above from this period are contained in passages 1-7 and 9-12 in Exhibit 1; passage 8 provides the basis to discuss a counter example. Passages 1-3 represent the “methods” section of each article. All of these authors address important areas (influences on business negotiation, causes of new product failure, and key account management practices respectively) and identify key themes, but at no time do readers get a sense of the actual data gained, the experiences or views of any informants (assuming there were some), or any sense of triangulation (despite the claims of the author in passage 3 no case details are

forthcoming in an appendix—one only gets a sense that the case is an old French firm). In these instances, it is virtually impossible to form a judgment of research quality. As a result, readers are asked to simply trust the authors (this is especially so since readers never gain any access to raw data—see section 4.2).

Passage 7 is also taken from a case that suffers from similar problems. The first part of the passage contains the entire information about the method. Readers might immediately and legitimately ask: “How large was the original sample from which these 22 cases were drawn?” “What was the success rate *versus* failure rate for these firms?” “Was this rate any different to what they had experienced prior to the use of NETWORK?” and “What did the firms involved report about NETWORK and its benefits?” Readers may also wonder why information was presented in such a passive summary form, wonder why so little rich information was gained from this data set, and suspect that information might have been taken out of context.

In contrast, passages 4 and 8 come from cases providing information that assist with judgments of research quality. Passage 4 details the informant (although provides little information about this individual), the firm, the focus of the interview, the method of analysis (including a reference to a previous article detailing how to analyze information of this nature), and includes a follow-up interview to check to accuracy of findings. However, much is also left out—little information is given about the case firm, the industry, or even the geographic location of the sampled case (which is useful when readers want to assess the generalizability and transferability of the case findings); also, no detail on interview questions or coding is really provided, and we gain no information on the result of the follow-up interview. Therefore, when coupled with a

lack of informant quotes, as well as triangulation, it is difficult to assess the overall research quality.

Passage 8 provides the following information: a direct link between the research questions and choice of method, a defined unit of analysis, samples from a defined population (Australian firms employing between 300-500 people; firms that have experienced two years of decline followed by two years of success in absolute and relative terms), detail on the environment in which these firms compete (highly dynamic), clear descriptions of data sources and the time frame which the data encompasses, information on three sources, and detail on analysis and coding. From a research quality point of view the article only lacks information about the interviews conducted and the questions asked.

Although passages 1-3 are taken from cases published prior to 2000, analysis (see Figure 2) indicates that although the trend is improving only a handful of authors in recent years (2000 onwards) consider issues of research quality explicitly in their articles published in *Industrial Marketing Management*. Of those articles that do address quality issues explicitly, preference is given to descriptions of the interviewing and coding process (41%), which assists with judging reliability, and, to a lesser extent, the use of multiple coders (18.1%).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Passages 9-10 are taken from articles with many positive aspects from the point of view of research quality, including justification for the use of case methodology, background detail on

the case(s), and some method detail. Yet, both passages, in the context of the total article, present some problems on quality grounds. In regards to passage 9, readers have little insight into the amount and quality of materials sampled. Although this form of reporting the use of secondary information is replicated in many cases, in this particular context, little insight is gained into what type of firms were studied (reference is made to small and some large European firms that do business with UK suppliers).

Passage 10 has similar problems and is typical of many recently published cases; some method details are given, but not enough to aid judgments of research quality. For example, although it is stated that an interview guide was used, it is not provided in an appendix. Despite some broad categories of issues focused on, we gain no insight into the actual questions asked, how follow-up interviews were conducted, and whether the initial findings were checked with informants. As well, the last sentence is all the information we ever gain on how the data was analyzed (and although transcription is useful it hardly counts as a form of analysis). In fact, descriptions of coding in most cases consists of references to grounded theory procedures such as open, axial, and selective coding (see Strauss and Corbin, 1998) rather than clear descriptions of codes and analysis procedures.

This lack of description of procedures makes replication, as well as judgments of research quality difficult (although not impossible), thus undermining perceptions of a particular case's research quality.

4.2 Methods, including Sampling Decisions, Data Collection Tools, and Analysis

The problems identified in Section 4.1 are compounded when authors present little or no direct access to data in the form of informant passages or secondary data. Instead, data is often presented in summary form, with (in rare cases) some small snippets of text from informants or secondary sources used as a narrative device. Passages 1-7 and 9-12 in Exhibit 1 reflect this issue in various ways; passages 5 and 8 are reflective of a counter example.

Passages 5-8 are worth comparing on this point. Passage 5, which dates from 1972, examines the research process behind breakthrough products by drawing on the experiences of seven cases. The first part of the passage provides supportive evidence for the overall point that projections for breakthrough product success are often simplistic. The second part provides evidence from secondary sources that reinforce the point that desk research can be a useful source to justify investing in breakthrough product development. However, this direct quote from an informant is the only one used in the entire article, while the secondary source is one of just four reported. Such limited reporting of data can give rise to impressions of anecdotalism (Silverman, 2004a), although obviously tradeoffs are necessary when presenting multiple case studies.

In contrast, passage 6 represents part of an article aiming to demonstrate the value of different research methods for predicting potential demand. This passage contains information to suggest that demand projection is very difficult because buyers are uncertain of the value of the product offered. However, the passage, which is representative of the article, effectively asks us to trust the authors on this point because there is no direct evidence from the informants or any provision

of information as to how the researchers ascertained this particular finding. Passage 7 comes from a case with similar problems.

One outcome of providing only limited access to data—especially when little detail on method is also forthcoming—is that readers could perceive that data has been “forced” to fit theory. It must be emphasized that we are not saying that such authors force data to fit their preconceived theories; what we are saying, however, is that readers could reasonably draw such a conclusion based on how such articles are structured, and on the lack of information to make a judgment to contrary. Passage 7 is an example of how this perception can arise. The author structures the article in the following way: a long introduction followed by a literature review that develops a new model or advocates a new approach; this is followed by a brief statement on method and then by a short findings section (relative to the length of the article) without any raw data to allow readers to judge how the author came to the conclusions. As identified in passage 7, the findings are presented in summary form and support the author’s original contentions; and overall judgments of research quality is difficult. Many of cases (e.g., Brennan and Turnbull, 1999; Ford and McDowell, 1999; Håkansson, Havila, and Pederson, 1999; Loeser, 1999; Möller and Rajala, 1999) are structured similarly and suffer from the same problem.

In contrast, other articles are structured as to allow readers to form an independent judgment of the authors’ claims. For example, passage 8 is one of several examples where the author regularly moves between interpretation and raw findings (in fact, one quote is often provided for each important theme that is derived), allowing readers to judge whether the author’s interpretation is valid or reasonable. Contrary to passages 6-7, passage 8 starts with a short

description of the firm's attitude to business development. It should be noted, though, that the author does not tell readers what the attitude actually is, but provides them with the informant's statement and then an interpretation, which is a reasonable view of the firm's strategic outlook, especially when coupled with sample detail information about the case and industry environment. Passage 8 thus allows readers to do several things. First, readers can interpret the data directly, thus allowing for replication and validity. Second, they can make up their own mind about the firm's strategic stance rather than having to trust the author. Third, they can form a total judgment about the validity of the findings.

Presenting data from multiple case studies poses particular problems because trade-offs must be made in terms of richness and generalizability across the cases (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). Authors publishing multiple case studies in *Industrial Marketing Management* have adopted three practices (or mixes of each) to data presentation: cross-case tables (e.g., Matthyssens and Faes, 1985), presenting summaries of each single case and then discussing key themes (e.g., Sarin and Kapur, 1990), and using snippets from a range of cases to support propositions or key themes (e.g., Alam, 2006; Beverland, 2005; Holden, 1991; Mason, Doyle, and Wong, 2006).

By themselves, each practice can present problems. Using the first practice, reliance on cross-case tables means that readers have access only to summaries of data thus making judgments of quality difficult; in fact, this method comes closest to treating case information as quantitative frequencies. As well, any richness associated with the individual case is lost.

The second practice gets unwieldy as the number of cases increases, thereby decreasing readability. Although such an approach goes some way to retaining the richness of each individual case, problems can arise because in summarizing information from multiple cases it is often the direct quotes that are lost. For example, the article from which passage 2 is taken provides summary information about new product failure from three cases and then synthesizes the key themes across the cases. However, readers do not gain access to raw data and information, and, despite the increased sample size, judgment of research quality remains difficult.

The third practice tries to balance the requirements for richness and generalizability across cases, as well as theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin, 1994), but can give rise to claims of anecdotalism because readers only get presented with select snippets of case materials that appear to support the author's contentions. As well, such an approach also comes close to replicating quantitative research in that multiples quotes can be used as "proof" of an author's contention. For example, in the article from which passage 7 comes from the entire sample of 22 cases are summarized and presented as proof for the superiority of an early e-procurement model. Yet, in doing so, not only are readers left without any raw data to form their own judgments about, but also the author provides no real interpretation of the data (in fact, readers may wonder why a survey design was not used in this instance); instead the author presents the summarized information as hard evidence (when, in fact, the process of summarizing has involved authorial choices).

4.3 Triangulation of Data, Methods, and Researchers

Although triangulation is important to ensure research quality (Yin, 1994), relatively few authors discuss triangulation or use it effectively. Confusion seems to exist on what triangulation involves in practice. Too many researchers rely on the existence *per se* of multiple sets of data or researchers to represent triangulation (Silverman, 2004a, 2004b). Although many authors report the use of multiple data collection methods (cf. Table 2) that usually involve authors drawing on primary and secondary data, in practice these authors often use different sources of data to “flesh out” details of a case. Likewise, in relation to the uses of multiple methods it is rare for authors to discuss how much information was accessed, what it covered, how it related to other data from other methods, and how this information was recorded and coded. As well, authors rarely identify how multiple coders operated or dealt with disagreements (or whether disagreements existed). Finally, triangulation can also be achieved via informant feedback. Yet, evidence for member checking among reported cases in *Industrial Marketing Management* is rare and, when done, the results of such a process are not reported.

Passages 11 and 12 come from articles typical of those giving some explicit consideration of quality; the authors may even state they engaged in triangulation although it is not clear from the reported findings how they did. Passage 11 explicitly tells the reader that validity has been addressed (although no raw data or rich quotes are provided). Additionally, although the authors note that triangulation was achieved through informant checking, there is little evidence of using multiple data sources in the article. Passage 12 suffers from similar problems. This practice (using multiple datasets) can lead to researchers avoiding recognizing the limitations in one dataset, and move quickly to another in order to cover up gaps in the initial data collection

(Silverman, 2004b). Although there may be positive reasons for gathering multiple forms of data, triangulation represents a way of conducting a research project rather than just a series of *post-hoc* checks (Silverman, 2004b). For example, B2B case researchers sometimes specify that secondary data were used to enhance information obtained in interviews as a means of dealing with validity. Yet, this does not in itself represent triangulation although it may enhance the comprehensiveness of data collected and ensure against recall bias (Yin, 1994).

Triangulation involves trying to get a fix on what actually happened (Silverman, 2004b). For example, in a study of implementing market orientation in business markets the authors suggest that the tone of internal communications changed through three stages of implementation (Beverland and Lindgreen, 2007). To demonstrate this, the authors sought evidence from marketing managers, internal stakeholders, as well as viewed examples of speeches made at previous industry conferences, and internal marketing documents to identify the changing nature of “tone” over time. Such a practice goes beyond drawing on multiple sources to find new information to identifying a broad range of examples and experiences associated with the tone of communication, thereby reinforcing the authors’ views that the tone of internal communications is reflective of different levels of cultural acceptance of market orientation.

We suggest authors of cases in B2B marketing need to follow Silverman’s (2004a) advice that triangulation is a mode of inquiry and not simply an afterthought (in the same way that quantitative researchers design their studies with quality considerations in mind from the beginning). As well, authors should specify in detail how much data they gained, the sources and

number of each, and then draw on these multiple sources through their findings section to demonstrate triangulation in practice, allowing readers to make judgments on research quality.

4. Conclusions

Our findings have a number of implications for B2B marketing case researchers, reviewers, and for the *Industrial Marketing Management* review process. First, the three themes presented above indicate that case researchers need to pay far greater attention to issues of method, research design, and quality (especially given the importance attributed to case research in *Industrial Marketing Management*, and the greater incidences of published cases since 2000). Specifically, researchers need to be far more explicit about their bias (paradigmatic choices), sampling decisions (believed to be the most critical issue for case research; Dubois and Araujo 2004, 2007), technical method details, and quality procedures. As well as giving explicit attention to these issues, researchers need to be more aware of how quality is demonstrated in the writing-up of findings. Specifically, readers need to get some first-hand access to raw data, need to see triangulation being used, and negative case examples being dealt with. These issues need to be addressed regardless of the epistemological preferences of authors (although the execution of quality criteria will differ).

Second, reviewers need to become more aware of issues of research quality, be more demanding of authors, and show greater sensitivity in reviewing cases. In regard to issues of quality, reviewers need to have an understanding of different case research paradigms and the implications of each for how authors address research quality. In this regard, the review form for

Industrial Marketing Management should be adjusted to allow reviewers to give ratings on these issues for (qualitative) case research (currently, this feedback is only given to quantitative articles). As well, this requires reviewers to hold authors to account in one sense, but also to be more sensitive to different approaches. For example, more positivistic-minded reviewers may prefer multiple case studies to a rich single case. However, multiple case studies are not the gold standard of case research and give rise to just as many problems than rich single cases. Likewise, Silverman (2004a) notes that interview data is often treated as the “gold standard” in case research. Yet, good cases can be developed from different sources of data. As well, triangulation requires the use and presentation of multiple sources. Again, reviewers need to demand to see multiple sources of evidence if they were gained and be prepared to accept them.

Third, editors and reviewers need to be sensitive to issues of article length (subject to concerns over contribution-length ratio). Until greater attention is paid by all case researchers to issues of method and quality (i.e., at which point widespread understanding of different standards will allow authors to give less explicit attention to these issues in articles), authors will need more space to attend to the issues outlined here.

Given concerns raised over perceptions of forcing or anecdotalism we suggest two important changes to how articles are structured. First, the great value of any case study lies in the rich context and findings (Easton, 2000)—or the story—and thus the majority of the article should be devoted to this information. Thus, as long as authors clearly ground their choice of method in an extant literature, reviewers should demand authors of case study give the greatest weight to their

findings, discussion, and method (in that order), and downplay the role of a lengthy literature review.

Second, questions must be raised about whether there is an effective upper sample size for multiple cases. The analysis above identified that authors struggle to retain the context of each individual case when presenting multiple case studies. Importantly, attempts to present such information can decrease readability, raise a range of issues around quality (forcing and anecdotalism), and, once a certain sample size is reached, read more like a quantitative paper. There are many benefits to be had from multiple case studies, but at a certain sample size readers are entitled to ask why a survey was not used (cf. Silverman, 2004a), given that for large sample sizes readers either need to trust authors that themes are consistent across all cases (often unlikely), or authors need to reduce information about each case into a bit-sized summary form in order to reduce word count—at which point the benefits from case research are being lost.

The trend analysis in our article can be read as either a cause for despair or a cause for optimism. We prefer the latter and hope that the article, as well as others within this issue, stimulates established and emerging case researchers to give greater attention to the issues raised here. In this way, rich qualitative cases will continue to remain a valuable tool for B2B marketing researchers.

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Table 1a: Positivist Research Quality Criteria for Case Studies

Design test	Theoretical explanation of the concept	Operationalized through
<i>Construct validity</i>	To secure that correct operational measures have been established for the concepts that are being studied	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Triangulation through multiple sources of data or interviews 2. Provision of a chain of evidence using cross-case tables or quotes from informants 3. Interviewees review the draft case and give feedback
<i>Internal validity</i>	To make sure that a causal relationship—certain conditions lead to other conditions—has been established. Internal validity is a concern of explanatory or causal cases studies but not for exploratory or descriptive cases that do not attempt to make causal statements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pattern matching through cross-case analysis 2. Search for negative cases, ruling out or accounting for alternative explanations 3. Time series analysis
<i>External validity</i>	To prove that the domain, to which a case study’s findings belong, can be generalized	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specification of the population of interest 2. Replication logic in multiple case studies
<i>Reliability</i>	To demonstrate that a case study’s findings can be replicated if the case study procedures are followed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A standardized interview protocol 2. Constructs well defined and grounded in extant literature 3. Audit trail by providing access to data

Table 1b: Interpretivist Research Quality Criteria for Case Studies

Design test	Theoretical explanation of the concept	Operationalized through
<i>Confirmability</i>	The extent to which interpretations are the result of the informants and the phenomenon as opposed to researcher bias	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multiple perspectives on phenomenon of study 2. Multiple coders and interpretations 3. Interpretations presented to colleagues and informants / population members 4. Use of “grand tour” questions to allow informant control 5. Trust between informant and researcher
<i>Credibility</i>	The extent to which the findings appear to be acceptable representations of the data	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Triangulation (data, informants, and methods) 2. Review of emergent findings by colleagues and informants
<i>Transferability</i>	The extent to which findings from one case study in one context will apply to case studies in other contexts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Theoretical sampling 2. Relating findings back to wider industry and market context to identify boundary conditions 3. Presenting findings to population members or informants in other similar populations
<i>Dependability</i>	The extent to which a case study’s findings are unique to time and place; the stability or consistency of the explanations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multiple entries to site of interest 2. Informants asked to reflect on current and past practices

Source: Lincoln and Guba (1985), reference suppressed, reference suppressed, and Yin (1994).

Table 2: The Nature of Case Studies and Research Quality Published in *Industrial Marketing Management*, 1971-2006

Nature of case studies	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Number of cases:</i>		
Single	54	51.4
Multiple	51	48.6
<i>Explicit justification of case method:</i>		
Yes	49	46.7
No	56	53.3
<i>Methods:</i>		
More than one	65	61.9
Secondary analysis	18	17.1
Observation	14	13.3
Interviews	8	7.6
<i>Reliability explicitly addressed:</i>		
Yes	17	16.2
No	88	83.8
<i>Interview and coding process described:</i>		
Yes	43	41
No	62	59
<i>Number of coders:</i>		
Single	86	89.9
Multiple	19	18.1
<i>Validity explicitly addressed:</i>		
Yes	24	22.8
No	81	77.2
<i>External validity (generalizability) explicitly considered:</i>		
Yes	25	23.8
No	80	76.2

Exhibit 1: Sample Passages from Published Case Studies in *Industrial Marketing*

Management, 1971-2006

Passage 1: “The process of negotiation, from two in-depth case studies involving Swedish firms and firms in India and Nigeria, are compared with the process involving two Swedish firms. Case I dealt with the negotiation process between Defibrator, a Swedish supplier of Pulp Mill and the Hindustan Paper Corporation (HPC) of India. Case II dealt with the negotiation process between two Swedish firms ASSI (Statensskogs Industrier), the buyer, and Sunds AB, the supplier. In Case III, the seller was Power, supplier of electric power system, and the buyer was a state enterprise, Tender Board (TB) in Nigeria” (Ghauri, 1988, p. 49).

Passage 2: “This article is based on longitudinal observations of 5 to 15 years of five new product cases dealing with small companies” (Sarin and Kapur, 1990, p. 301).

Passage 3: “The case details and summary tables in the appendix help to illustrate a certain number of phenomena relative to the key accountization process” (Pardo, Salle, and Spencer, 1995, p. 127).

Passage 4: “The decision system analysis of this article was initiated by performing an in-depth interview with the person(s) involved in the buying process. The researcher then obtained a detailed description of the basic sequence of behaviors exhibited in procurement. The behaviors were “transcribed and then broken down into a sequence of short phases, each phase corresponding to a single task relevant statement.” [Reference] These statements were assembled in flowchart form to summarize the whole process and to reveal any extraneous factors that may have affected the procurement process. A follow-up interview was conducted to insure the accuracy of the findings. The subject of this study is the purchasing process of creosote distribution poles” (Wilson, 1984, p. 195).

Passage 5: “... a seasoned resin technologist cynically suggested that no further interviews were needed, but that merely a plot be made of pentaerythritol consumption over the last few years and an “absolutely straight line be drawn right through to 1970 or 1975, according to which is desired.”... 1. Chemical Age, April 1961: When dyeing problems are solved polypropylene will find wide textile usage, quoting ICI spokesman” (Kratschmar, 1972, p. 271).¹

Passage 6: “These two investigations carried out within a week quickly established that: 1. The physicist’s estimates of outsiders’ usage of CMS equipment were too high; 2. That the type of service offered to potential users would be more costly than originally conceived. This was because a need was uncovered for advisory services for potential users...” (Cowell and Blois, 1977, p. 332).

Passage 7: “The following 22 success stories are drawn from a larger sample of contest case studies conducted by WTCA headquarters among NETWORK users during 1988-1990. In total, they illustrate well the marketing uses and advantages of NETWORK for prize-winning small firms on a variety of industrial sectors. *Alcoholic beverages.* A trading company posted an item in offers to sell offering “Alcoholic beverages—all types and brands.” They received more than 40 responses from all over the world. According to WTCA’s last information, more than half of those had resulted in firm contacts. *Antifreeze.* Petroil Industries found Taroko Enterprises through NETWORK. This led to a sale by Petroil of 9,000 gallons of antifreeze, a \$57,000 transaction” (Holden, 1991, p. 165).

Passage 8: “...the attitude to business development can be assessed from the following statement: “The continuing development of sales of casting to Japan, the United States, and Germany will be dependent upon future movements in exchange rates. At levels around US\$0.80, little additional business will be achieved from these countries; however any drop to around US\$0.75 will result in some significant orders.” This view indicates a cost, price-taker, product oriented approach, rather than a market, demand-oriented approach of the successful

¹ Please note all passages from published articles have been transcribed *verbatim*, and include any grammatical and typographical errors in the original.

businesses” (Harker, 1998, p. 323).

Passage 9: “Secondary information in the form of company reports, product brochures and marketing literature was collected. These informed the researchers with background information on the companies, their size, activities, and involvement with larger customers. Company and industry web sites were visited before conducting interviews to establish how the companies viewed and presented themselves” (Johnsen and Ford, 2006, p. 1008).

Passage 10: “To aid in data collection and ensure consistent interviewing procedures, we drafted an interview guideline rooted in our intention to explore key issues and problems of supplier involvement in NPD (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The interviews lasted 30-60 min with the first part focusing on supplier involvement on the organizational level and the second part on the project level. The interviewer used follow-up questions to further explore constructs, patterns, interrelations, and particular situations of the firm, its collaboration with suppliers or the NPD project. Data recording involved transcriptions based on the interview guideline components” (Wagner and Hoegl, 2006, p. 938).

Passage 11: “In terms of addressing the study’s validity, the issue of access is again central. Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz (1998) for instance argue that validity results from gaining full access to the knowledge and meaning of the respondents. More rigorous tests of validity were addressed through the use of multiple sources of evidence and data triangulation—particularly in relation to subjective and controversial issues...” (Salonen, Gabrielson, and Al-Obadi, 2006, p. 745).

Passage 12: “However, some of the actors involved in the two projects have also been interviewed. When this was not possible we have used reports written by these actors as well as internal project documents and memos from meetings with these actors to include their perspectives as well. Despite this, a limitation of our study is the predominant focus on the focal actor Alpha” (Windhahl and Lakemond, 2006, p. 810).

Figure 1:

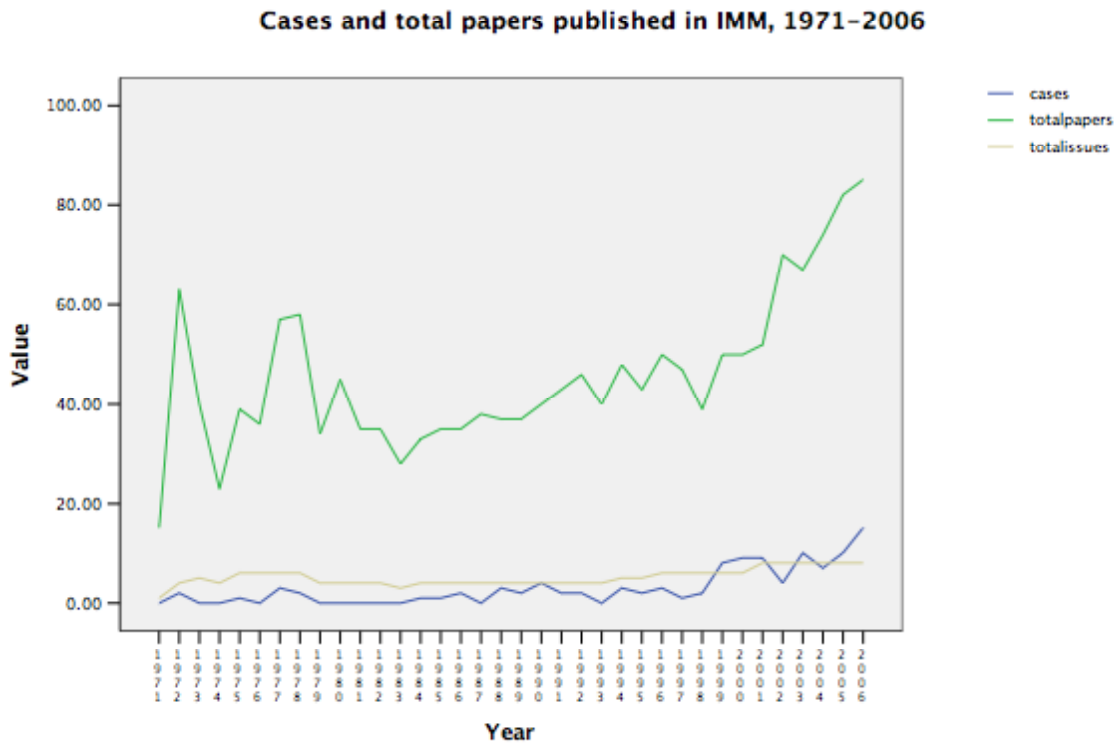


Figure 2: Trend Analysis for Explicit Use of Research Quality in *Industrial Marketing Management*, 1971-2006

