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Rethinking Qualitative Scholarship in Emerging Markets: Researching, Theorizing and Reporting

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1. Introduction

Qualitative research "starts from and returns to words, talk, and texts as meaningful representations of concepts" (Gephart 2004: 455) drawing attention on the point of view of those being studied. It pertains to naturalistic inquiry where researchers immerse physically and psychologically in the setting of the study, engage in direct contact with participants, and produce intimate, open-ended and local accounts of the field. Its sensitivity to context makes qualitative research attractive and meaningful to Emerging Market (EM) scholars who acknowledge the distinct contextual setting of specific regions labeled as EMs.

The growing acceptance of the importance of qualitative research in illuminating and interpreting the complexity of EMs (institutional, cultural, national and organizational) has not been unproblematic. To illustrate, EM research has been criticized for lagging theories offering meaningful, local explanations of EM phenomena as it has heavily relied on "existing questions, theories, constructs and methods developed in the Western context" (Jia, You & Du, 2011: 174). According to Whetten (1989), context has been unintentionally or intentionally ignored in EM research for two reasons: 1) the difficulties to identify and capture context and 2) the widespread belief that context free knowledge has greater scientific merit than contextualized knowledge. While other modes of inquiry control for context (through

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control variables that set context as constant), qualitative inquiry views context as an inherent part of researching, theorizing and reporting. Despite the potential of qualitative research to unpack context, existing practices have been scarce and short on producing context-emic explanations or proposing new theories in EMs (Jia et al., 2011). Indeed, many of the practices that we have adopted, and accepted as rigorous standards, are decontextualizing, or even robbing qualitative research of its explanatory potential. Furthermore, qualitative scholars disserve the phenomena of their study by utilizing standardized research tools to draw data from EMs without considering "how and where contextualization of research methods is necessary and desirable" (Tsui, 2006: 10).

This tension between scientific explanation and context in EM scholarship is further reinforced by different philosophical traditions that allow for various understandings of contexts, i.e. researchers closer to positivism distance themselves from context, as opposed to those who seek strong contextualization and explanation through alternative paradigmatic perspectives (Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki & Paavilainen-Mantymaki, 2011). Yet, this paradigmatic diversity encourages a wide variety of ways to account for context, in the aspects of high-complexity settings or polycontextuality (Pratt, 2008; Siggelkow, 2007; Shapiro, Von Glinow & Xiao, 2007). As suggested by Welch et al. (2011), philosophical and methodological pluralism may be desirable and critical in advancing multiple conceptions of context and understandings of phenomena. For instance, post-positivist traditions allow for 'inside out' (vs. 'outside in') qualitative research in EMs. This approach is able to particularize and capture the uniqueness of investigated phenomena through indigenous and engaged scholarship interacting with local scholars, collaborators and managers (Van de Ven & Jing, 2012).

The purpose of this editorial is to inform the current debates on qualitative research in EMs. We suggest that qualitative research in EMs spans beyond context comparisons to include the study of unique phenomena that can set the building blocks for new or refined context-bound theories, indigenous theories and contextualized explanations. We unpack the opportunities and challenges of qualitative research in EMs leading to the modification of existing method tools and creation of new instruments. This Special Issue (SI) explores and appreciates paradigmatic diversity of qualitative

research in EMs. It also problematizes the monolithic understanding of EMs and appreciates their diversity in terms of geographical location, population characteristics, cultural idiosyncrasies, institutional environments and governance structures. This diversity invites context-sensitive thinking of EM phenomena and poses the dilemma of contextualization vs. generalization of empirical evidence.

The editorial is organized into four distinct but interrelated sections. In the second section, we discuss qualitative research in EMs concentrating on challenges and recommendations for researching, theorizing and reporting in two aspects: context and methodology. In the light of this discussion, the third section provides an overview of all articles included in the SI. We conclude with the way forward for qualitative (context-sensitive) research in EMs.

2. Context and Methodology in Qualitative Scholarship in EMs: Researching, Theorizing and Reporting

As a means of furthering the dialogue on qualitative research in EMs, we use this section to discuss key challenges and opportunities on accounting for context and contextualizing qualitative methodology in EMs. Our emphasis on context and methodology is the outcome of an iterative process that combined nuances drawn from the relevant methodological literature, lessons learned from our own research journeys in EMs (as researchers and co-editors of this SI) as well as the experiences of the authors as reported in the accepted articles.

Insert table 1 about here

2.1 Context

Qualitative research embraces context (who, when and where) to explain and theoretically contribute to EM phenomena (what, how and why). The word 'context' (originating from the Latin contextus) means "to join together", "to knit together" or "to make a connection" (Michailova, 2011: 131; Rousseau & Fried, 2001). Context consists of multiple facets, and layers that influence the existence, direction and

strength of developed theories (Johns, 2006). The meaningful appreciation of context in a research project contributes to contextualization, i.e., the process of linking observations to a set of relevant facts, events, or points of view (Rousseau & Fried, 2001).

The need to contextualize EM research has become a growing concern of key academic outlets, including Management and Organization Review. Relevant theoretical and methodological articles dedicated to context(ualization) challenge the current status quo of EM research, which has largely treated context in a singular, homogeneous, static and deterministic sense (Shapiro et al., 2007; Whetten, 2009). As a result, much of EM research has been described as adopting 'context-free' practices. There are several ways of thinking about context in qualitative research in EMs, including the role of context in the research design and as a natural part of fieldwork (researching); its implications for making sense of data and contemplating the field to generate theory (theorizing); and its importance in writing up evidence and crafting the story of the field (reporting).

Facing the key role of context in **researching**, EM scholars encounter vast challenges in conceptualizing context and using context to inform the research questions of the study. Context conceptualization is pivotal as it renders the focal phenomenon meaningful. In other words, the focal phenomenon cannot be understood, interpreted appropriately, and described in relevant fashion unless the researcher looks beyond the phenomenon itself to other configurations or surrounding factors that produce and shape the phenomenon (Lu, Saka-Helmhout & Piekkari, 2019). It follows that different conceptualizations of context invoke disparate interpretations of investigated EM phenomena and generate various research questions. Identifying the dynamics between the context and research question of the study is therefore a challenging task (Cuervo-Cazurra, Andersson, Brannen, Nielsen & Reuber, 2016; Win & Kofinas, 2019). This task has been largely envisaged through a gap spotting approach that adds to the literature without identifying and challenging assumptions underlying existing theories (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011).

We suggest that problematization (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) and contextualization can work hand in hand to identify the connections between context and research

questions and lead to the development of interesting and influential theories. Problematization scrutinizes and reconsiders the underlying assumptions of dominant theories and the prevalent ways of the application of existing theories to explain focal phenomena. It invites EM researchers to consider whether theoretical assumptions developed in a specific context are transferable to other contexts. Such an approach questions a presupposition in EM research associated with the capacity of general theoretical frameworks to advance understanding of particular EM phenomena. Based on the above, problematizing becomes more meaningful if we devote efforts to contextualization in our studies.

While context frames the focal phenomenon and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation, its complexity and dynamism poses a further challenge for EM research in the aspect of contextualization. Shapiro, Von Glinow and Xiao (2007, p.130) discuss the challenge of polycontextuality in EMs, which refers to qualitative different contexts embedded within one another. For instance, national contexts comprise of material and ideational contexts that form a country's institutions (see Child, 2000; Weber, 1964). Appreciating context diversity, dynamism and multiplicity (polycontextual research) entails drawing insights from multiple voices, talk-in-interaction, and verbal and non-verbal sources of data that can elucidate EM phenomena based on local, cognitive, emotional and even spiritual references – most of which cannot be easily observed or historically studied. This offers opportunities for language-sensitive scholarship in EM that utilises language as a means to understand context (Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki & Piekkari, 2014) (see also section 2.2). We also propose indigenous and engaged scholarship for developing local theories and explaining local phenomena by involving local academic partners, participants and researchers from non EM contexts (Van de Ven & Jing, 2012). Hence, problematization and contextualization are central to research question development and the contextual delineation of a study clarifying what is and what is not explained.

From a **theorizing** perspective, the interface of context and theory constitutes an ongoing and widely discussed challenge for EM scholars (see Meyer, 2015; Welch et al., 2011; Whetten, 2009). Improving context sensitivity invites onto-epistemological awareness and a critical stance towards philosophical traditions that confine qualitative research into an initial and exploratory phase of inquiry, by overlooking its

potential in generating explanations. The rich context that is the essence of qualitative research is ultimately regarded as a hindrance in theorizing on its weakness in generalization. The tension between scientific explanation and context is a concern for any research, but is particularly visible in EM scholarship due to context heterogeneity and multiplicity, which facilitates contextualization rather than generalization. As noted by Welch et al. (2011: 744) "explaining" and "contextualizing" are regarded as being fundamentally opposed.

However, in this SI, the philosophical stance of critical realism escapes the explanation-contextualization trade-off (Couper, 2019). It combines explanation and context for causal explanations by analyzing objects in relation to their constitutive structures, i.e. "as parts of wider structure and in terms of their causal powers" (Sayer 1992: 116). Proponents of this philosophical position suggest that explanations are context-bound, i.e. "making sense of events requires that we contextualize them in some way" (Sayer, 1992 p. 60). Therefore, explanations are not abstract from time and space but are contingent and limited, formed via the specification of causal mechanisms and the contextual conditions under which they operate. Whetten (2009: 34) also points to the importance of "conditional explanations" arguing for "context-constraint" or "context-dependent" theory whether or not contextual assumptions are made explicit. He addresses context sensitivity by advocating for "theories in context" or contextualizing theory, and "theories of context" or theorizing contexts (Whetten, 2009: 36).

While there is no single accepted template for writing up qualitative research, it is common ground that **reporting** context is inherent in any qualitative study. Following Weick (1989), theory cannot be improved unless we transparently report our research design and theorizing practices. Still, this begets a further challenge, i.e. how do we report context in our writings? A common practice of qualitative scholars to sensitize context is to include a separate subsection placed either within or right before a method section. This subsection (written from an emic or etic perspective) describes and justifies the context from a sampling perspective (Cuervo-Cazzura et al., 2017; Fletcher, Zhao, Plakoyiannaki & Buck, 2018) and reports the specifics of the research setting such as industry sector, culture, spatial and temporal details. This approach

explicates context but does not guarantee the incorporation of context in interpretation and explanation. A narrative mode of representation gives way to context, which is embedded in storylines, plots and scenarios emerging from the field (Barone, 2007; Petland 1999). Johns (2006: 391) suggests that "a story describes who, what, when, where and why to the reader thus putting recounted events in their proper context". The discussion section is usually appropriate for discussing context as theoretical contributions inviting critical reflections over the boundary conditions of both the theoretical arguments and the empirical evidence.

2.2. Methodology

Qualitative research methods have long been discussed on the diversity of underlying philosophical positions, multiple research paradigms, nonstandard research designs, and variable quality of writing (Pratt, 2008; 2009; Siggelkow, 2007; Suddaby, 2006). Despite its sociological and anthropological tradition of inquiry, qualitative research is inspired by different philosophical orientations (Welch et al., 2011). For instance, qualitative positivists hold the view that the external world itself determines absolutely the one and only correct view that can be independent of the process or circumstances of viewing (Kirk & Miller, 1986). They naturally employ 'positivist' quality criteria, such as construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Yin, 2009, 2014). Conversely, interpretive qualitative scholars emphasize that subjects ascribe meaning to their own behavior and researchers are part of the world they study (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). They therefore embrace 'naturalistic' quality criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Symon & Cassell, 2012). The pluralism of philosophical and methodological foundations is desirable and critical in developing insights of phenomena in EMs, which are mostly full of complex and idiosyncratic settings.

As we expected, the seven articles in our SI have covered multiple philosophical foundations, including positivist, interpretivist, pragmatist and critical realist. The diversity of methodology has shown increasing interests on EM research from different philosophical groups of qualitative scholars. In spite of the philosophical pluralism, both the existing literature and our selected articles inform that the methodology in EM research can be discussed in three aspects: how to conduct qualitative research method in EMs (researching), how to theorize from all sorts of

data collected (theorizing), and how to report the research process with a consideration of reliability and validity (reporting). In these three aspects, we only discuss the approaches and tactics specific to EMs, which are great complementary to the twelve transparency criteria offered by Aguinis and Solarino (2019).

In **researching**, EM qualitative scholars face challenges from the selection of sites or respondents, and data collection. Convenience sampling, which is criticized and not recommended (Yin, 2009), is sometimes unavoidable when conducting qualitative research in EMs because of the difficulties in gaining access to case sites and respondents (Eckhardt, 2004). Personal relationship is a powerful strategy to gain the access (Xin & Pearce, 1996), especially for some emerging countries which are deeply characterized by relationships, such as, China. Compared with local companies, foreign-invested firms have been evident to be more receptive to cooperate with researchers as a result of transferring corporate culture in cooperating with academics (Tan & Nojonen, 2011; Lu, Saka-Helmhout & Piekkari, 2019). Even though local firms are not keen to be the subject of research, an attractive topic to potential respondents creates the opportunity for interviews and encourages trust-based sharing (Liu Tsui-Auch, Yang, Wang, Chen & Wang, 2019). Relatively, non-government related organizations and people are more open to researchers and are willing to provide required data (Liu et al., 2019).

In data collection, qualitative scholars rely quite extensively on interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In EMs, there is a general tendency for people to be anxious in interview settings, and nervous to disclose their thoughts and opinions (Stening & Zhang, 2007). Social hierarchy and the avoidance of inter-personal disharmony also make the selected respondents not authentically to provide their thinking (Boddy, 2007; Eckhardt, 2004). Three issues emerge in conducting interviews in EMs: language used in the interview, qualifications of the interviewers, and interview tactics. Even though some of the respondents are fluent in English, the use of their own language has been strongly suggested to facilitate insightful and rich conversations (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004). When using a foreign language, it is highly possible to lose nuances which matter deeply in qualitative research (Holden & Michailova, 2014). EM qualitative scholars therefore should be wary of interviewing non-English native respondents solely in English (Couper, 2019).

Due to the context specifics in EMs, at least one researcher working in insider/outsider teams is recommended (Greenfield, 1997). This helps to ensure contextually relevant data collection design and analysis, as well as an outsider's input that might uncover unrecognizable insights that are embedded in local context (Ratner, 1997). Some studies have proved to benefit from the researcher's ability to speak local language without a foreign accent and in-depth knowledge in local context (Liu et al., 2019; Outila, Piekkari & Mihailova, 2019; Win & Kofinas, 2019). These advantages make the research focus on "contextual" consistency rather than "verbal" [literal] consistency (Xian, 2008: 235). However, it does not necessarily mean that the researchers should be a native speaker. Non-native speakers can also collect qualified data if they master the local language and are familiar with local context (Michailova, 2004; Xian, 2008). Sometimes, a non-native speaker who is a master of local language and culture has the advantages of collecting data in EMs (Couper, 2019). Being perceived as a 'naïve' foreign researcher (Stening & Zhang, 2007), a non-native speaker can benefit from elaborate explanations of local respondents on their stories, values and opinions (Couper, 2019).

Numerous interview tactics are recommended to ensure the trustworthiness of data collected in EMs. Informal conversations and interactions are efficient data collection approaches, which are complementary to formal interviews (Liu et al., 2019; Win & Kofinas, 2019). It has been evident that local respondents are more relaxed and willing to share deeper insights for topics discussed in informal interviews (Couper, 2019). In EMs, people tend to trust people of the same kinship and distrust strangers outside from their social circle (Fukuyama, 1996). This becomes a natural challenge for EM scholars to conduct interviews. Researchers can build the trust from reflecting their roles in the research setting, employing a local interview assistant, and not recording and taking notes in the interviews (Win & Kofinas, 2019). Longitudinal data collection is also powerful in building trust and ensuring trustworthiness (Hota, Mitra & Qureshi, 2019). During the interview, it is possible that there is no equivalent concept in the local language. An effective solution is to convey the desired meaning by using additional words (Hofstede, 1980).

In **theorizing**, EM scholars have two challenges in analyzing the data: the translation of collected data, and the exclusion of alternative explanations. Translating qualitative data from local language to English requires sensitivity to linguistic and cultural differences (Xian, 2008). The translation in EM research requires a deep understanding of local context (Chidlow et al., 2014) and therefore a native speaker in the research team is mostly helpful in analyzing the data (Sardana, Bamiatzi & Zhu, 2019). However, if all the researchers are familiar with local language, there is no need to translate to English for the data analysis purpose (Outila, Piekkari & Mihailova, 2019; Couper, 2019). In this context, the translation may only needed in reporting the quotes in the paper. In excluding alternative explanations in analyzing the data, EM scholars have to understand the local context in order to identify contextualized explanations (Easton, 2010). As noted in the previous section, it is necessary to incorporate the context in describing, understanding, and theorizing about phenomenon within it (Tsui, 2006). However, it is not easy to have the in-depth knowledge on the context, especially for foreign researchers. Local experts, either from practice or academia, are therefore helpful in exploring causal relationships (Couper, 2019). Alternative explanations can be effectively excluded with the discussions and involvements of these local experts.

In **reporting**, EM scholars have to show the validity and reliability of the research in drafting the methodology section. Due to the specifics of EM qualitative research, this section would be too long if every detail of the research process is emphasized. EM scholars should be aware of the focus in their reporting, for instance, transparency and context. The lack of transparency and openness in EMs requires scholars to pay attention to the data quality and its interpretation (Tan & Nojonen, 2011). Unit triangulation, which is to compare the responses from two different groups of respondents, is recommended to increase the validity (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 2004). Multiple data sources are advised to present a better picture of the emerging management topics studied for trustworthiness, such as company reports, internal documents, industry yearbooks and government reports (Yin, 2009). As the nature of EM research, emphasizing how the context is incorporated in interpreting the data is critical in improving the contextual validity (Tan & Nojonen, 2011). However, this incorporation brings another important issue for EM scholars: generalization. Findings from qualitative research has been too context specific to extend them to

other contexts (Tsui, 2004). EM scholars should be very cautious in articulating the generalization of their research findings. They can argue that the valid findings from EM qualitative research are valuable to complete the global management knowledge, rather than emphasizing the generalizability (White, 2002; Meyer, 2006).

3. Overview of the Special Issue

We received a vast number of submissions indicating the increasing interests in qualitative research in EMs and recognizing Management and Organization Review as the relevant and impactful forum for such discussion. Out of this set of submissions, we accepted seven articles for publication in the SI. In total, these seven articles not only exhibit a range of methodologies including case study research, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), and qualitative interviews, but also a range of geographical contexts, namely China, India, Myanmar, and Russia. Collectively, these articles serve to discuss and unpack qualitative research in EMs by considering issues around researching, theorizing and reporting context and methodology. They discuss the challenges and opportunities in conducting qualitative research in EMs as well as when, how, why this methodology is appropriate for advancing EM knowledge.

In "Adaptation of Compensation Practice in China: The Role of Sub-National Institutions", Wei Lu, Ayse Saka-Helmhout, and Rebecca Piekkari seek to understand the interface of firm-level conditions and sub-national institutions on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in China. They seek to investigate how Finnish Multinational Corporations (MNCs) adapt compensation practices and show how QCA of ten Finnish subsidiaries operating in China can yield interesting insights into this interface. The authors unpack context complexity and multiplicity in China by teasing out the impact of the sub-national level and discuss the challenges of researching and theorizing in EMs. Their findings suggest that MNC subsidiaries adapt compensation practices in regions with weak and strong institutional pressures. In particular, in regions with strong institutional pressures, the sub-national factors are sufficient to explain adaptation of compensation practices. On the other hand, MNC decentralization is critical for adoption of such practices in weak institutional regions. By doing so, the authors inform the relevant debates on international HRM literature and showcase the relevance of the compelling method of QCA for capturing the

impact of host institutional and organizational conditions on the adaptation of compensation practices.

Using a comparative case study design of social entrepreneurs in China and India, Deepak Sardana, Vassiliki Bamiatzi, and Ying Zhu's article "Decoding the Process of Social Value Creation by Chinese and Indian Social Entrepreneurs: Contributory Factors and Contextual Embeddedness" adds to our understanding of social entrepreneurship by offering a process framework of contextualized social value creation. The social entrepreneur is treated as an individual case while the unit of analysis is the process deployed by social entrepreneurs to create social value in China and India. The authors blend inductive and deductive logics of analysis to identify the distinct features of the value creation process adopted in two EMs, i.e. China and India. They contribute to the literature of social entrepreneurship by showing how social entrepreneurs in China and India embed themselves in the local context and enact its structures to define social objectives.

In "Institutional Bridging for SME High-distance Internationalization to China: A Contextualized Explanation", Carole Couper focus on the efforts of Delta, a British SME, to expand to the high-distance market of China. In particular, she combines SME internationalization and institutional theories to explain how and why SMEs are able to internationalize across high institutional distance settings. The philosophical foundation of critical realism forms the basis for contextualized explanation in Couper's research. Under the critical realist lens, Couper conceptualizes context as a set of national, institutional and firm-level forces that are dissimilar in the UK and China. Her deep knowledge of context and Chinese language were key resources deployed for uncovering causal mechanisms of institutional bridging and for searching for alternative explanations. The author unearths three causal mechanisms, i.e. cross-institutional dissonance mitigation; multi-level strategic embedding and cross-institutional consonance retuning that enabled Delta's institutional bridging in China.

In "Reflecting and Integrating the Contextual Influences of Ambiguities and Institutional Power in Organizational Research Design: A Case of Myanmar", Sandar Win and Alexander Kofinas discuss their experiences of conducting organizational

research in the under-investigated context of Myanmar. The authors consider their research journey that lasted eight years (2008-2016) and discuss refinements in the research questions and paradigmatic positions of their study that emerged from context complexity and ambiguity. The article offers a vivid account of ontological shifts from positivism, to interpretivism and finally to Dewey's version of pragmatism. This journey of paradigmatic discovery is envisaged through in-depth analytical reflection, which takes the form of reflection-on-action (retrospective contemplation of an undertaken action) and reflection-in-action (thinking while carrying out an activity). Win and Kofinas contribute to the SI an important narrative of EM research as a dynamic process with paradigmatic transitions and shifts in the researchers' assumptions about reality and truth. Being transparent and reflective of these transitions improves theorizing practices and outputs.

In "A Discursive Void in a Cross-Language Study on Russia: Strategies for Negotiating Shared Meaning", Virpi Outila, Rebecca Piekkari, and Irina Mihailova uncover various strategies used by researchers and the research participants to address the discursive void, with negotiating shared meaning about employee empowerment in Russia as an example. In their study, four approaches are used by the researchers to emphasize the discursive void: taking on the dual role of researcher-translator, engaging in contextual approach to translation, consulting external interpreters, and using iteration and flexibility in the course of the research process. On the other hand, proverbs are employed by research participants to highlight the discursive voids and become a valuable methodological tool for sensemaking and theorizing about context-specific phenomena in international business research. They contribute to qualitative cross-language research in EMs by exploring the strategies used by both researchers and research participants.

In "Adopting Bricolage to Overcome Resource Constraints: The Case of Social Enterprises in Rural India" Pradeep Kumar Hota, Sumit Mitra, and Israr Qureshi employ an inductive multiple case study design to identify a unique bricolage approach for achieving the dual objectives of social enterprises. The article draws data from two cases (Alpha and Beta) operating in India and provides a thorough discussion of case selection as a dynamic and context-driven activity. Context has a prominent role in the finding section as the authors report on the multiple context-

related challenges, notably sociocultural, policy, and market faced by Alpha and Beta. This article contributes to the SI an understanding of social entrepreneurial bricolage in the unique context of institutionally challenging environment of EMs where, tensions are generated among institutional, political, community, and religious contexts

In "The Color of Faults Depends on the Lens: MNCs' Legitimacy Repair in Response to Framing by Local Governments in China", Xiaoxiao Liu, Lai Si Tsui-Auch, Jun Jie Yang, Xueli Wang, Aihua Chen, and Kai Wang focus on how to repair legitimacy after media coverage of negative incidents for MNCs. With a qualitative study on two negative incidents across two regions of Walmart China, they have found that local environment's unfavorability towards MNCs affects the different ways in framing the negative incidents. Various outcomes of different repair approaches of MNCs are identified in this study. The authors contribute to research on MNCs' legitimacy management under institutional complexity, with a specific emphasis on the specifics of Chinese context for legitimacy maintenances. They also shed a light on advancing the institutional approach to legitimacy repair in emerging markets and knowledge on conducting qualitative research in China.

4. The Way Forward

Despite the power of qualitative research to account for EM contexts, this potential has not been fully exploited. Contextualization calls for more qualitative research to capture phenomena, explore comprehensive insights and develop context-specific theories (Tsui, 2006). But it also requires us to rethink the sorts of qualitative research that we do, and the ways in which we evaluate what is 'good' qualitative research (Piekkari & Welch, 2017). We echo Tsui (2007: 1353) and view this SI as an opportunity for "serious engagement in deep contextualization, novel questioning and innovative theorizing". While we do not aim at drawing normative conclusions from the body of submissions to this SI, our vantage point as editors allow us to put forward a few ideas on the future of qualitative research in EMs.

Various methodological approaches can be used to better illuminate EM phenomena in a context-sensitive manner. Visual methodologies (e.g. observation, videography, photo elicitation, visual metaphors) and multi-modality (emphasis on visual, verbal

and gestural modes of communication and representation to create meaning) are largely under-utilized in EM research. These modes of inquiry allow for context-sensitive thinking of EM phenomena as they facilitate the study of polycontextuality or multiple contexts including tacit cultural assumptions, cognitions and beliefs as well as emotional and linguistic contexts. It follows that context-sensitive research in EMs requires supplementing conventional tools of data gathering with visual approaches that enhance contextualized knowledge of the indigenous, investigated culture (Shapiro et al., 2007).

Comparative research designs, comparative case studies and/or QCA that intentionally contrast situations varying in meaning can unearth important contextual dimensions. Explicit comparisons have been under-utilized in case study research and more broadly qualitative research. They are driven by different paradigmatic traditions that invite different views of context. Overall, comparisons offer contextual nuances by showing "how similar processes lead to different outcomes"; "how different influences lead to similar outcomes"; "how distinct phenomena relate to similar pressures or trends" (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017: 15). This has the potential to extend our contextualized research findings to other contexts. Even though each EM is distinct, it is not necessarily mean that they do not have any similarity. This notion of potential generalization does not mean that comparative research designs are lack of causality. For instance, QCA assesses complex causation involving different combinations of causal conditions capable of generating the same outcome. QCA appreciates case heterogeneity with regard to their different causally relevant conditions and contexts by comparing cases as configurations.

Despite, diversity in qualitative methodologies, our theorizing practices have been criticized for narrowing "the remit of qualitative research in general by channeling the theoretical contribution of qualitative studies in the direction of factor-analytic propositional or variance models" (Cornelissen, 2017: 368). Concerns have been voiced that formulated propositions in qualitative research are narrow in scope, loosely connected to each other often capturing trivial cause-effect relationships. Qualitative scholars increasingly debate the boilerplate and seek for alternative approaches to theorizing that enable them to capture the complexity of contemporary phenomena. Pleas for diversity in theorizing are topical and relevant to EM

scholarship. They advance the potential of theorizing alternatives including narrative theorizing and thick description (Conrelissen, 2017; Delbridge and Fiss 2013). Both narrative theorizing and thick description allow for reclaiming the role of context(s) in qualitative research EMs by placing phenomena in the context(s), which give them meaning. Rich context is no longer a hindrance to theorizing and explanation. Instead, the power of narrative theorizing lies on producing process models that capture generative mechanisms in context and time, moving explanations from the general (away from context) to the idiographic level.

Evidently, EMs include a great number of countries, such as, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Egypt and Poland. However, most qualitative research on EMs center on large countries, for instance, China, India and Russia. Even though our SI has represented how to do qualitative research in Myanmar, the investigation in other EMs is far less than enough. We admit that qualitative research in most of the other EMs may not be easy to conduct. As Win and Kofinas (2019) articulate, in Myanmar, some interviewees are not "comfortable answering questions and reluctant to share any information". These challenges make the qualitative research in these areas more valuable and meaningful. As in some studies, the involvement of local researchers is powerful in conducting qualitative research in the EMs. Initiating local collaborations can be an approach to facilitate qualitative research in these EMs, and may also improve the researching ability of local researchers. Their involvement in the management research will be a great complement to our community.

Accordingly, qualitative research plays an important role in informing practitioner insights. While true in any context, the potential for qualitative research to yield practical implications is especially useful in EMs, since the subtleties of these contexts are sometimes lost on managers from other contexts (say, the West) who seek to engage with these markets. Qualitative work in EMs can provide useful validation of the general applicability of certain ideas by highlighting that a given phenomenon holds in EMs too – as in the case of Prashantham and Birkinshaw's (2008) early work on corporation-startup partnering – and highlight how associated practices can (and should) be adapted, as seen in Prashantham and Yip's (2017) discussion of how Western multinationals effectively engage with startups in EMs. As another example of the latter (the need for adaptation), Whitler (2019) draws on her

extensive qualitative data to usefully shed light on how Western marketers must adapt their approach in EMs like China. Of course, the publishing norms in practitioner outlets vary from those of standard academic journals, but our simple point is that rigorous qualitative research in EMs can also yield practitioner-oriented writings that complement more traditional theory-enhancing work.

We hope that this editorial accompanied by the insights offered by the seven peer-reviewed articles hosted in this SI, will pave the way forward for qualitative research in EMs. Research in EMs is a dynamic and open field that requires theoretical attention and contextualized knowledge – qualitative research moves the field forward and serves its theoretical grounding. We encourage meaningful works to continue investigating this exciting and promising field and contributing to existing management theories and practices, with an attention to context and methodology.

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Table 1: Context & Methodology in Qualitative Scholarship in EMs

Key Dimensions	Challenges in Qualitative Research	Challenges in Qualitative Research in EMs	Recommendations for Qualitative Research in EMs
Context	- Identification and justification of research context; - Delineation of the phenomenon in the context; - Context specificity vs. context sensitivity; - Monolithic view of research context	**Researching**: 1) Context to inform research questions 2) Conceptualization of context: contextual diversity & polycontextuality **Theorizing**: 1) Tension between contextualization and explanation 2) Different theorizing outputs **Reporting**: 1) Contextual transparency 2) Effective communication of context	**Researching**: 1) Describing/ Justifying research context of the study; Problematization as an approach to articulate research questions 2) Use indigenous researchers for engaging in EM contexts; Cultural Brokerage; Unpacking the potential of language to understand context **Theorizing**: 1) Onto-epistemological awareness, i.e. understanding of how different paradigmatic worldviews influence accounting for context 2) Theory of contexts and theories in contexts **Reporting**: 1) Contextual information critical for readers to understand the context selection and justification; 2) Emic/etic reporting; Narrative reporting.
Methodology	-Selection of sites/respondents -Data Collection -Data analysis -Quality Criteria; validity and reliability	**Researching:** 1) Difficulties in gaining data access 2) Language used in the interview 3) Qualifications of the interviewers 4) Interview tactics	**Researching:** 1) Convenience sampling; Personal relationships; The dichotomy between foreign-invested firms and local companies; Attractiveness of the research topic; Non-government related organizations and people 2) Use of the local language 3) Researcher working in insider/outsider teams; Ability to speak local language without a foreign accent and with in-depth knowledge in local context; Non-native speakers who master the local language and are familiar with local context 4) Informal conversations and interactions; Trust building through reflecting their roles in the research setting,

			employing a local interview assistant, and not recording and taking notes in the interviews; Longitudinal data collection; Additional words in explaining concepts which do not have their equivalent counterparts in the local language
		Theorizing: 1) Translation of collected data 2) Exclusion of alternative explanations	**Theorizing:** 1) Deep understanding of local context (a native speaker); No need to translate for data analysis purpose if all the researchers are familiar with the local language 2) Understand the local context to identify contextualized explanations; Local experts from practice or academia
		Reporting: 1) Transparency 2) Contextual issues	**Reporting:** 1) Unit triangulation; Multiple data sources 2) Contextual validity; Challenges in generalization