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The Qualitative Case Research in International Entrepreneurship: A State of the Art and Analysis

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The Qualitative Case Research in International Entrepreneurship: A State of the Art and Analysis

Abstract

Purpose

This paper examines how qualitative case research (QCR) has been conducted in the field of international entrepreneurship (IE) in terms of onto-epistemology and methodology. QCR can serve as an umbrella approach for contextualizing and capturing the complexity of IE opportunities, events, conditions and relationships, and to illuminate and enrich the understanding of related IE processes.

Design/methodology/approach

A thorough literature review was conducted of IE journal articles published between 1989 and mid-2017. This paper identified and analyzed 292 journal articles in terms of theoretical purpose and research design.

Findings

The findings suggest that the “positivistic” QCR is the customary convention of QCR in IE. “Exploratory” and “theory building” are the two most commonly pursued objectives. There have also been atypical practices and increased methodological rigor in recent years. Alternative paradigmatic QCRs that depart from positivistic assumptions are in an early stage of development in IE.

Originality/Value

To the best of the authors’ knowledge, this is the first research examining QCR

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2
3 onto-epistemology and methodology approaches in IE, providing a useful state of the art that
4
5 has been hitherto lacking in the literature. Based on this paper's findings, the authors suggest
6
7 that the IE field would benefit from greater methodological transparency in the reporting and
8
9 writing of QCR. Also, the breadth of knowledge and legitimacy of the IE area would be
10
11 enhanced through more studies involving unconventional (beyond positivistic) QCR.
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13

14
15 **Keywords.** International entrepreneurship, Qualitative case research, State of the art,
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17 Onto-epistemology, Methodology
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22 **Paper type:** Literature review
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26 27 **Introduction**

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29 The interlinked globalized market, declining political barriers, and the advancement of
30
31 information and communication technologies have generated numerous product-market
32
33 opportunities for entrepreneurs and their firms in the cross-border context. Given this
34
35 dynamic environment, in the last two decades there has been a dramatic increase in attention
36
37 being given to the emerging and diverse field of IE (De Clercq *et al.*, 2012; Mort and
38
39 Weerawardena, 2006). IE concentrates on phenomena that cut across the disciplines of
40
41 marketing, international business, entrepreneurship and management, and engages a
42
43 community of diverse stakeholders, viz. academics, managers, consultants and policy-makers.
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47 Alongside other disciplines, international marketing research has advanced enquiries in
48
49 the IE field in relation to foreign market entry pace, internationalization intensity and
50
51 diversity, international market selection and entry mode, among others (e.g. Aspelund *et al.*,
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53 2007; Jørgensen, 2014; Knight, 2000; O'Cass and Weerawardena, 2009). The multi-faceted
54
55 nature of IE is a mixed blessing as it can also generate conceptual and methodological
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3 fragmentation in the field (Neergaard and Uihøi, 2007). Indeed, IE has been frequently
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5 understood and written in terms of theories that discuss the substantive domain of the IE
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7 phenomenon. There have been several IE literature reviews published during the last 15 years
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9 (e.g. Angelsberger *et al.*, 2017; Coviello and Jones, 2004; Jones *et al.*, 2011; Keupp and
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11 Gassmann, 2009; Mainela *et al.*, 2014; Melén Hånell *et al.*, 2013; Peiris *et al.*, 2012; Rialp *et*
12
13 *al.*, 2015; Schwens *et al.*, 2018; Terjesen *et al.*, 2016) in which this study surprisingly found
14
15 only one effort to systematically summarize and assess prior IE methodological issues in
16
17 either marketing or other disciplines. This was the Coviello and Jones (2004) contribution that,
18
19 nonetheless, has become relatively dated.
20
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22 Therefore, a current shift toward a methodological discussion in the field of IE is needed,
23
24 not only to complete the picture of what has happened in the field, but also to develop a
25
26 commonly understood vocabulary, a rigorous methodological toolkit (Coviello and Jones,
27
28 2004, p. 497-498), and, most importantly, a collective system of knowledge production
29
30 (Suddaby, 2014). In addition, such a review and analysis facilitate the identification of
31
32 methodological novel practices that enhance diversity and breadth in approaches to theorizing
33
34 a new field (Welch *et al.*, 2011, p. 757). Therefore, in order for the IE field to further expand,
35
36 one must take stock of and reflect on its methodological approaches and advances. The
37
38 examination and evaluation of methodological issues in IE is the focus of enquiry in this
39
40 study.
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43 This review is especially interested in *qualitative case research (QCR)* and how it has
44
45 been conducted to advance knowledge in the field of IE. This paper discusses the ways that
46
47 QCR has been used (i.e. research practice) in relation to methodological writings and draws
48
49 from Platt (1996) and Piekkari *et al.*, (2009) who consider and problematize QCR as
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51 disciplinary convention, namely a collective and socially-embedded product of a scientific
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53 community that emerges from the formation of consensus among scientists within a
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3 discipline.

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5 This paper concentrates on QCR because it is “an increasingly popular and relevant
6 research strategy” (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 30) and a qualitative methodology of
7 choice for IE scholars. Despite its popularity, QCR has not been discussed in IE especially
8 when compared with other established disciplines such as marketing (Piekkari *et al.*, 2010) or
9 international business (Welch *et al.*, 2011; Piekkari *et al.*, 2009), possibly because of the
10 potency of quantitative approaches in IE (see Styles and Seymour, 2006). QCR could enjoy its
11 advantage of the flexibility and holistic and processual account into the international
12 entrepreneurial behavior of firms (Coviello *et al.*, 2011; Reuber *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, QCR
13 can identify and unveil the actors, behaviors and dynamics behind the opportunity theme,
14 namely, its identification, enactment and exploitation, which appear to be high on the agenda
15 of IE academics and practitioners (Angelsberger *et al.*, 2017; Mainela *et al.*, 2014; Terjesen *et*
16 *al.*, 2016). In order to keep pace with this growing demand for enhancing the QCR, it is
17 important to provide an understanding of the state of the art and illuminate the usefulness,
18 versatility and paradigmatic pluralism of this methodological approach.
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35 The current literature review identified and analyzed methodological practices of 292 IE
36 QCR articles employing content analysis that considers the text content, context and
37 arguments of authors. This approach has been used substantially in prior IE review studies
38 (e.g. Coviello and Jones, 2004; Keupp and Gassmann, 2009; Mainela *et al.*, 2014; Peiris *et al.*,
39 2012; Schwens *et al.*, 2018). The current paper addresses the question of *how QCRs have*
40 *been conducted in the field of IE*. To explore the question, the authors draw on Bluhm *et al.*
41 (2011), Piekkari *et al.* (2010) and Welch *et al.* (2011), and investigate key aspects of the QCR
42 methodology, including the theoretical purpose of qualitative IE case study, the research
43 design of the case, and associated paradigmatic quality criteria.
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54 Other than being a useful review that has not existed until now, this study contributes to
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3 the IE literature by identifying the disciplinary convention in QCR in the form of “qualitative
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5 positivism” inspired by the legacies of Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2014). The current paper
6
7 suggests that the development of IE can benefit from not only greater consistency of QCRs
8
9 that embrace the positivist stance but also open-mindedness to alternative philosophical
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11 stances (viz. interpretivism or critical realism) that emerged from its findings.
12

13
14 This paper is structured as follows. Initially, it begins with an investigation of the
15
16 onto-epistemological approaches of QCR, and, next, it discusses the methodology of
17
18 reviewing and analyzing published IE case studies. The practices found in the sample of 292
19
20 IE case studies are then described and examined, employing relevant methodology literature.
21
22 The authors conclude by arguing in favor of paradigm consistency and pluralism of QCR in
23
24 IE.
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29 **Qualitative Case Research Under Different Theoretical Traditions**

30
31 The term “case study” defies a generally accepted definition stemming from the fact that
32
33 cases are tied to different disciplinary perspectives and theoretical traditions (Patton, 2015).
34
35 Despite differences in viewpoints, scholars consider cases to be meaningful units or set of
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37 units that investigate a phenomenon in its context using a variety of sources of evidence with
38
39 the purpose of confronting theory with reality (Piekkari *et al.*, 2009).
40

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42 Researchers make various implicit or explicit assumptions about the nature of reality
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44 (ontology) and the construction of knowledge (epistemology) (Tsoukas and Chia, 2011),
45
46 resulting in a variety of definitions and approaches of QCR. This paper outlines how
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48 philosophical underpinnings are reflected in key aspects of QCR including theoretical purpose,
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50 research design and quality criteria.
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55 *“Positivist” approaches to case research: the legacy of Eisenhardt and Yin*
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3 Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2014) adhere to “qualitative positivistic”¹ assumptions about
4 the nature of reality and the production of knowledge through QCR. Their
5 onto-epistemological assumptions lean toward an objective reality that can be understood and
6 explained by establishing regularities rather than the reasons behind them. The positivist view
7 is the most common in empirical studies of marketing and management research (e.g.
8 Piekkari *et al.*, 2010).

9
10
11 In particular, Eisenhardt’s work unpacks the usefulness of “theory building” QCR for
12 inducing new theory from empirical data and generating theoretical propositions upon which
13 large-scale quantitative testing can be based. Generalization differentiates Eisenhardt’s
14 approach from other qualitative traditions that avoid context-free accounts and universal
15 claims in favor of thick descriptions (Eisenhardt, 1989). The assumption that research mirrors
16 objective reality is also embedded in the work of Yin (2014), who similarly endorses
17 “exploratory” and “descriptive” QCR for emerging or new research areas but also
18 “explanatory” QCR for deductively testing propositions and revising/extending existing
19 theories. Both Eisenhardt and Yin detail a step-by-step process of designing QCR that starts
20 with a priori specifications of concepts or constructs and includes the sampling decisions,
21 units of analysis, data collection and analysis techniques for developing credible evidence.
22 The power of QCR in this school of thought lies on replication logic and the search for
23 general patterns (pattern matching) and descriptive constructs rather than idiosyncratic
24 insights gained from particular settings. Data collection relies on the combination of
25 interviews with archival sources or observation echoing Yin’s (2014) advice of triangulating
26 multiple sources of evidence in order to develop a converging line of inquiry and unite with a
27 single explanation of investigated phenomena. Data are analyzed according to the conceptual

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¹ The term “qualitative positivism” is discussed by Prasad and Prasad (2002, p.6) and refers to the “use of non-quantitative methods within traditional positivistic assumptions about the nature of social or organizational reality and the production of knowledge.” The term “positivist” in this article is used to denote “qualitative positivism” as per Prasad and Prasad (2002).

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3 underpinnings of the study and employing content analysis, thematic analysis or pattern
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5 matching techniques. Rigor in QCR is ensured by deploying criteria inspired by the positivist
6
7 tradition, namely construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability, but
8
9 following different procedures to meet them (Welch and Piekkari, 2017).
10

11 12 13 *Alternative approaches to QCR: beyond Eisenhardt and Yin*

14
15 Recently, marketing, entrepreneurship and international business literatures have
16
17 witnessed a remarkable onto-epistemological discussion regarding how core research puzzles
18
19 and methodologies are formed under post-positivist philosophical traditions, including
20
21 interpretivist/constructivist approaches and (critical) realism (see e.g. Ramoglou and Tsang,
22
23 2016, Suddaby *et al.*, 2015, Welch *et al.*, 2011).
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26
27 Differing from the positivist tradition, *interpretivism* suggests that “only the physical
28
29 reality is ‘real’ and knowledge of that reality, which entails the actions of others, is subjective,
30
31 [and] derived from two sources: empirical experience and imagination” (Packard, 2017, p.
32
33 540). Knowledge is believed to be constructed rather than discovered, and value-free
34
35 empirical accounts are neither sought nor desirable. Viewed in this light, the focus of QCR is
36
37 neither theory building nor testing, but rather the utilization of the interpretive power to
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39 develop an understanding of personal experiences and interpretations of the social meanings
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41 attached by participants in their settings. In comparison to de-contextualizing and
42
43 generalization, QCR appreciates the uniqueness, complexity, embeddedness and interaction
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45 with contexts.
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49 As far as the research design is concerned, cases are selected not only for their revelatory
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51 potential but also for information richness and accessibility that would allow deep scrutiny of
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53 investigated phenomena. Interpretivists highlight the emergent nature of case research and the
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55 dynamic or micro-level view of the unit of analysis (e.g. individual) that changes during the
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3 course of the study. An emphasis of the “voice” of different participants and the reflexive
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5 approach enables researchers to develop an in-depth understanding and interpret the social
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7 meaning of investigated phenomena (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2017).
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9 Data collection and analysis are highly disciplined processes “whose central artifact, a
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11 hierarchical ‘data structure’ is presented as a key output of the research, usually in the form of
12
13 a horizontal tree-shaped figure” (Langley and Abdallah, 2011, p. 215) (e.g., Corley and Gioia,
14
15 2004, p. 184). Instead of the terms of validity and reliability, the quality of QCR is assessed in
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17 terms of “trustworthiness” of the data related to the involvement of multiple researchers in the
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19 research process, member-checking and combination of emic and etic perspectives in data
20
21 analysis and reporting.
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24 Another emerging approach to QCR is associated with *critical realism* that contends to the
25
26 existence of an underlying independent reality that can be understood only through our
27
28 descriptions and interpretations (Tsang and Kwan, 1999). This philosophical stance adheres to
29
30 a hybrid, stratified ontology claiming that the investigation of social phenomena is both causal
31
32 (matching a positivist view) and interpretive (matching a constructivist/interpretive view). In
33
34 light of critical realism, causality does not mean merely a search for event regularities because
35
36 scholars “need to go beyond the events to understand the nature of objects, and cause-effect
37
38 relationships do not consistently produce regularities in an open system” (Welch *et al.*, 2011,
39
40 p. 17).
41
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44 As far as research design is concerned, selection of cases is “constructed” and driven by
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46 sets of ideas (or theories) about the social world, the institutions and the social contexts acting
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48 as external powers, and the researchers’ presumptions and propositions that make up the acts
49
50 of explanation and interpretation (Emmel, 2013). Explanatory accounts encompass actors’
51
52 intentionality and therefore in-depth interviews form the key data source in critical realist
53
54 cases. According to Pawson (1996), interviews and other sources of evidence are used both to
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3 appreciate the interpretations of the experts (informants) and analyze the dynamics of social
4 contexts, constraints and resources within which those informants act. The hybrid ontology of
5 critical realism is reflected in the quality criteria of QCR, which draw both from positivism
6 and interpretivism (Wynn and Williams, 2012). Triangulation is used to support causal
7 analysis based on a variety of data sources and types, analytical methods, investigators, and
8 theories (Modell, 2009).
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18 **Methodology**

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20 The methodology in this paper included the assessment of international peer-reviewed
21 journals as they are considered to be a validated source of knowledge (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2005).
22 The current review identified 292 IE QCR papers following a thorough search for IE case
23 studies between 1989 and mid-2017 (30 June 2017). The time scope of this analysis
24 commenced with the landmark study of McDougall (1989), which empirically differentiates
25 between international and domestic new ventures. The present study adopted a three-phase
26 methodology: initially the authors exhaustively collected published IE empirical studies, then
27 identified the studies employing QCR methods, and finally undertook a qualitative content
28 analysis classifying QCR papers based on their theoretical purpose and research design. All
29 articles were double-coded, checked on their consistency, and differences arisen were
30 resolved through discussion.
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44 Specifically, in the first phase of this review, IE empirical studies that involved primary
45 data collection and analysis through four sources were identified. IE was defined as the
46 entrepreneurial behavior or opportunity recognition activity for value creation across national
47 borders. This definition captures the essential aspects of the conceptualization of McDougall
48 and Oviatt (2000), and Oviatt and McDougall (2005). Initially, this review undertook a
49 thorough and manual search for IE empirical studies between 1989 and 2013 in the published
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3 article pool listed in five recent key IE literature reviews (Coviello and Jones, 2004; Jones *et*
4 *al.*, 2011; Keupp and Gassmann, 2009; Mainela *et al.*, 2014; Peiris *et al.*, 2012).² To avoid
5
6 the possibility of missing studies between 2010 and mid-2017, the authors further employed
7
8 the Boolean search that consists of key words presented in Jones *et al.* (2011) in searching
9
10 databases such as *EBSCO*, *Proquest*, and *ScienceDirect*. These key words cover international
11
12 entrepreneurial behavior, international comparisons of entrepreneurial behaviors and
13
14 opportunity discoveries across borders. In order to be fully comprehensive, a further item by
15
16 item manual search was conducted for IE empirical studies between 2010 and mid-2017 in
17
18 outlets in marketing, entrepreneurship and small business, international business, IE,
19
20 management, and other journals, which have hosted special issues in IE or often published
21
22 IE-related articles (see Table 1 for a full listing of these journals). The search results were
23
24 additionally compared with two IE article lists provided in the virtual community of global IE
25
26 researchers (www.ie-scholars.net) to ensure the inclusion of all listed case studies: “Key
27
28 Articles in the Development of International Entrepreneurship” and “IE Articles 2010-2012
29
30 (prepared by Nicole Coviello in October 2013)”.

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35 ***[Table 1 near here]***

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37 In accordance with the practice of Jones *et al.* (2011), the searches were not confined to
38
39 only top-quality business journals. This decision was dictated by the objective of this study
40
41 and the status of IE studies. It is very likely that some interesting methodological ideas and
42
43 practices are published in “lower level” journals before they are widely accepted by
44
45 mainstream outlets. As IE research is still at an emergent stage of development, this inclusion
46
47 facilitates extensions that improve IE knowledge (Jones *et al.*, 2011). After eliminating
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52 ² These five major studies were selected because of two reasons. First, they followed a rigorous methodology as to
53
54 the performed literature reviews. Second, in line with this paper’s definition, they conceived IE as either
55
56 innovative, proactive and risk-seeking behavior (Coviello and Jones, 2004; Jones *et al.*, 2011; Keupp and
57
58 Gassmann, 2009) or opportunity identification activities (Mainela *et al.*, 2014; Peiris *et al.*, 2012) in the
59
60 international context.

possible replications of the aforementioned procedures, 1,015 IE empirical studies were identified. This result is very comprehensive when compared with 714, 323 and 291 entries of Schwens *et al.* (2018), Jones *et al.* (2011) and Peiris *et al.* (2012), respectively, despite the slight differences in the focal periods.

In the second phase of this review, these empirical studies were classified into categories. Following Nakata and Huang (2005), the articles were classified as “quantitative” (60%, 611 entries) if they predominantly relied on large-scale data collection and analysis; “qualitative” (35%, 356), if the examination collected data using methods like case studies, ethnography or in-depth interviews, and analyzed these data using methods like content analysis; and, “mixed-method” (5%, 48), if the study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, and both methods played substantial roles in the study. At this stage, case articles were also identified. During this process, the review encountered the difficulty of deciding what to regard as a case study. Initially the author claims were used as a guide; however, some articles conflated the terms “case” and “example”. Some articles even proved to be practitioner papers or teaching cases, and so, these articles were excluded from the analysis (see Welch *et al.*, 2011). The definition of QCR proposed by Piekkari *et al.* (2009) was taken into consideration because it highlights its role in theory confrontation and has been widely used in IE. Following this approach, 292 qualitative IE case studies were finally identified³, which primarily appear in principal journals (67%) within the key disciplines presented in Table 1. The category of “others” covers the IE QCRs in the lower-level journals within these disciplines as well as the ones in other fields such as area studies (n=15), technology & information management (n=6), economics (n=4), innovation (n=4), strategy (n=3), social science (n=2), organization studies (n=2), and human geography (n=1). These studies either touched upon the substantive domain of IE (e.g. study of IE phenomena such as high-tech

³ Due to space constraints, the full list of references can be made available upon request.

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2
3 ventures for innovation) or utilized IE concepts and theories to address relevant research
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5 problems (e.g. entrepreneurial opportunity as a lens of studying field-specific issues). For
6
7 instance, Hennis (2012) examined the impact of transnational entrepreneurship on the change
8
9 of production structures in different geographical locations.
10

11 The case method turns out to be the most common research design in the IE qualitative
12
13 enquiry as QCR accounts for 29% of total IE empirical studies from 1989 to 2017. Coviello
14
15 and Jones (2004) found that less than a quarter of the 55 articles they reviewed employed
16
17 qualitative techniques, out of which only five case studies existed. More recently, Keupp and
18
19 Gassmann (2009) found that there were only 35 qualitative studies out of 149 empirical
20
21 papers they reviewed, yet their review included only “high-quality” journals. Overall, it
22
23 appears that the steady growth of QCR publications reflects the increasing attractiveness of
24
25 QCR to IE researchers as shown in Table 1.
26
27

28 The third phase of this review sought to classify the IE articles previously identified as
29
30 qualitative case studies. A qualitative content analysis was conducted as it went beyond the
31
32 enumeration of categories to classify and interpret text, paying attention to the content and
33
34 author arguments. This approach is characterized by an emergent flexibility as it allowed
35
36 authors to follow cycles of coding and go through stages of the analysis more than once
37
38 (Schreier, 2012). It has been substantially used in the aforementioned review studies in the IE
39
40 field.
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43 The coding of published articles was theory-driven but also flexible and exploratory,
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45 allowing key categories and concepts to emerge from the data (see Schreier, 2012). This
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47 review commenced with, but then supplemented, the coding frame that was based on insights
48
49 drawn from the extant methodological literature on QCR. Each article included in the review
50
51 was content-analyzed to assess the theoretical purpose and research design of QCR as well as
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53 whether and how these aspects of QCR were followed throughout the examined article. In this
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3 examination, 21 categories formed the columns of a coding spreadsheet, with a row for each
4 article. Besides the ones shown in Table 2, these categories also included the research topic,
5 research objective, theoretical purpose, philosophical stance along with others. The theoretical
6 purpose was determined according to the guidelines set by the relevant QCR literature
7 (Bonoma, 1985; Welch *et al.*, 2011; Yin, 2014), which are outlined in the previous section.
8
9 There were certain difficulties in classifying the theoretical purpose of some of the articles.
10
11 Occasionally this occurred because the theoretical purpose was not stated explicitly or was
12 even misstated. The philosophical stance that refers to the onto-epistemology of the QCR was
13 identified through an overall consideration of the paradigmatic claim of author(s), the
14 theoretical purpose of the paper, the methodological authorities consulted, the sampling logic,
15 the emphasis on context, and the rhetoric of writing (Welch *et al.*, 2011; Welch *et al.*, 2013).
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29 Findings

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31 Because the ways to view reality and assessment criteria for QCRs under different
32 philosophical orientations tend to vary (Welch and Piekkari, 2017), the findings and
33 evaluations are presented by differentiating positivistic from alternative QCRs. In each cohort,
34 the presentation is guided by the focus of this review in terms of the theoretical purpose of
35 QCR, research design, and quality evaluation.
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41 The disciplinary convention of QCRs (n=284) in IE is found in a positivistic stance,
42 which probably also is a result of the prevalence of positivism in marketing, international
43 business and other business-related disciplines (e.g. Piekkari *et al.*, 2009; Piekkari *et al.*, 2010;
44 Welch *et al.*, 2011). Eight post-positivist studies representing interpretivist, constructionist
45 and critical realist approaches were also identified.
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55 *IE case studies with positivistic approach*
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3 *Theoretical purpose.* In general, positivistic IE case studies serving exploratory (n=134)
4 and theory-building (n=66) purposes (as per Yin and Eisenhardt) have occupied a dominant
5 position. This finding reflects the relative adolescence of the IE field and the attempt to
6 improve the understanding of IE phenomena through theory development. Some “descriptive”
7 studies (n=12) following the insights of Yin (2014) were also identified.
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11 “Exploratory” is the most common term mentioned in IE QCRs despite it being used
12 very loosely, and typically in two forms. One form tends to have more deductive elements
13 (e.g. Spence and Crick, 2006) relying on relevant literature to identify possible general
14 directions and then conducting the case study to explore associated research questions. The
15 other form seems to be more inductive, using QCR to tentatively gain some insights into the
16 investigated phenomenon (e.g. Apfelthaler, 2000). An exemplar reason for the employment of
17 “exploratory” case studies associated with a gap-spotting approach (Sandberg and Alvesson,
18 2011) is “because there is a lacuna in the literature regarding the activities of international
19 entrepreneurial firms viewed through the lens of the international market presence aspect”
20 (Dimitratos *et al.*, 2010, p. 592).
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23
24 With regard to the IE theory-building QCRs, Eisenhardt’s (1989) method seemingly is
25 widely accepted by an absolute majority of reviewed articles, which could be partially
26 manifested by the citations in their methodologies. As Kirkwood and Walton (2010, p. 205)
27 noted, “[w]e use Eisenhardt’s (1989) method and process for building theory from cases that
28 is ‘highly iterative’ and ‘tightly linked to data’”. It is also interesting that a significant
29 majority of theory-building case studies (n=50) ended their analysis processes with
30 propositions or conceptual framework, again in line with Eisenhardt’s (1989) theorizing
31 tradition. Notwithstanding the popularity of the data-grounded approach (e.g. Bruton *et al.*,
32 2009), the current research found five recent QCRs employing abductive (e.g. Rocha *et al.*,
33 2012) and multi-grounded theorizing (e.g. Sigfusson and Harris, 2012) approaches. In both
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3 approaches, existing theoretical contributions were incorporated into studies either prior to or
4
5 after exploring data signaling iteration between evidence and theory. Although
6
7 theory-building QCRs are logically inductive, this review revealed that most of these studies
8
9 have not justified their stance and presented themselves deductively. One exception refers to
10
11 Schotter and Abdelzaher (2013, p. 83), who noted that "... for presentation purposes only, we
12
13 adopted the convention set by the post-positivist research paradigm, to present literature up
14
15 front, followed by a description of the methodology followed by the findings". A further
16
17 exploration provided evidence with a completely inductive presentation of theory-building
18
19 case study (Prashantham and Dhanaraj, 2010). In their work, which coherently reflects
20
21 Eisenhardt's recommendations, the methodology was presented following an introduction,
22
23 and then a combination of case and literature analysis led to the development of propositions.
24
25 In addition, twelve "descriptive" QCRs have been encountered. Consistent with Yin's
26
27 portrayal of this category, these "descriptive" cases primarily performed illustrations of the IE
28
29 process in different contexts rather than elaborated on theoretical concepts (e.g. Bell and
30
31 Loane, 2010).
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36 More interestingly, there were some atypical practices in IE QCRs, including "theory
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38 testing" (n=29), "theory refinement or extension" (n=33) as well as "explanatory" studies
39
40 (n=10). Regarding "theory-testing" IE QCRs, this review made several interesting findings.
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42 First, when addressing its research aim, no article explicitly employed the term "test" rather
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44 than more "neutral" terms such as "investigate", "shed light on" or "understand". Second,
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46 some studies described their research objectives vaguely or broadly, reflecting the difficulty
47
48 that authors encountered in discussing how to relate theory to case empirical evidence. Third,
49
50 in order to justify their approaches, a majority of these studies claimed that they were
51
52 tentative in nature inspired by the positivist tradition that favors statistical generalization. For
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54 instance, Gabriellsson (2005, p. 218) noted that "[t]his result is, however, a preliminary nature
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3 and will require further verification”. In addition, the current review did not observe any
4
5 in-depth discussion that went beyond statistical generalization to embrace analytical inference
6
7 and contextualized explanation regarding this approach in the reviewed IE QCRs. An example
8
9 that highlights the importance of theory-testing QCR is provided by Chandra *et al.* (2009).
10
11 This study initially used qualitative data from eight cases to examine the effect of search
12
13 activities, networks and entrepreneurial orientation on the processes of international
14
15 opportunity recognition through testing three preset research propositions, which were
16
17 confirmed/disconfirmed in light of the case evidence.
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20 This review’s analysis has also identified “theory refinement” and “theory extension”
21
22 approaches in IE QCRs. These explicate the suitability of QCR for later stages of theory
23
24 development beyond exploration. This type of case study is employed to challenge, extend
25
26 and refine theory (e.g. Perks and Hughes, 2008). QCRs with a “theory extension” purpose
27
28 sought to extend theories or concepts from other fields into studying IE phenomena. Two
29
30 successful examples refer to Kontinen and Ojala (2011b, p. 135) and Sainio *et al.* (2011, p.
31
32 562). The former study articulated that “...we aim to extend existing social capital theories to
33
34 a new context, namely the internationalization of family SMEs”, while the latter suggested
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36 that “[i]n order to increase our understanding of the applicability and usefulness of the
37
38 business model concept on IE, a case-study approach was chosen”. Apart from the
39
40 construction of IE theories, the current study’s findings revealed that validated borrowing
41
42 seems to offer another approach to provide solid basis to further theoretical advancement of
43
44 the IE field.
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47
48 QCRs regarding theoretical purposes that were least frequently encountered included
49
50 “explanatory” research. The lack of “explanatory” QCRs in IE may be attributed to the
51
52 insufficiently documented explanation-building process. Some authors (e.g. Freeman and
53
54 Cavusgil, 2007, p. 8) attempted to alleviate this challenge through indicating that “[t]he
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3 method we adopt herein entails a qualitative, primarily explanatory research perspective.
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5 However, elements of both exploratory and descriptive research are apparent in the cases
6
7 because of the holistic nature of the research questions”.

8
9 In addition, Figure 1 presents the trend of these atypical theoretical purposes from 1993
10 to 2017. The variety of atypical theoretical purposes reaches its climax during 2009–2012.
11
12 Evidently, 79% “theory testing” (23 out of 29), 88% “theory refinement or extension” (29 out
13 of 33), 80% “abductive” (4 out of 5), and 70% “explanatory” (7 out of 10) QCRs have appeared
14
15 within the last 8.5-year period of this review. These findings suggest an increase in theoretical
16
17 purpose diversity of IE positivistic QCRs in the past 10 years, illustrating that case scholars
18
19 within this school of thought gradually decouple “qualitative” and “exploratory” research, and
20
21 pursue theory refinement, elaboration or testing. Theory elaboration, often viewed as a form
22
23 of abductive reasoning, utilizes existing theory to examine empirical realities and identify
24
25 whether theory falls short so that it can be elaborated (Fisher and Aguinis, 2017). The
26
27 theoretical purpose diversity of QCR in IE may be attributed to the diffusion of an alternative
28
29 rhetoric within the qualitative positivistic repertoire, which is a part of a wider, ongoing
30
31 dialogue over the role of theory in academic research (Suddaby, 2014).
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37 ***[Figure 1 here]***

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39 Overall, this study’s analysis suggested a substantial lack of clarity in the published
40
41 positivistic IE cases regarding their theoretical purpose due to four reasons. First, a few
42
43 articles either mentioned little about theoretical purposes or provided no cues through using
44
45 neutral terms such as “to investigate” when addressing their research aims. Even more
46
47 confusing was the fact that some authors have offered generic arguments and not provided the
48
49 most pertinent justifications for choosing QCRs in response to their theoretical purposes,
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51 while discursively and simultaneously presenting several others (e.g. to answer “how” and
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53 “why” questions, to deal with complexity, to conceptualize the phenomenon, to provide rich
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3 information and to capture the context).

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5 Second, the theoretical purposes were misstated in some studies, and what these works
6
7 actually performed did not follow what they claimed previously. For instance, one study
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9 reports in its methodology section, “[t]his research adopts a qualitative case study design,
10
11 deemed appropriate for theory development in international entrepreneurship...” (theory
12
13 building); while it states when analyzing its findings “...as expected, the data provided
14
15 support for the base-line Proposition 1...” (theory testing). Third, the review found
16
17 inconsistencies regarding theoretical purposes in various parts of some articles. A typical
18
19 example was that of a study that used a positivist language “...to test the effects of
20
21 entrepreneurship and networking relationship on the internationalization pattern of SMEs...”
22
23 (a strong cue of theory testing) in its abstract, while eventually it indicated “...constructing a
24
25 theoretical descriptive framework about the studied phenomenon based on the multi-case (two
26
27 or more cases) qualitative study” in its methodology. Fourth, a mixture of different
28
29 philosophical stances was observed in few studies. For example, a study sought to understand
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31 and actually investigated “...how managers perceive and construct time in a subjective
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33 sense...” (interpretivist stance) and simultaneously it also indicated “...the intention of our
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35 study was to build theory...”, which adhered to a deductive pattern matching logic
36
37 (Eisenhardt’s positivist stance) in its analysis. In short, all these practices decrease the clarity
38
39 of theoretical purposes of QCRs and may impede, confuse, or even mislead the reader to
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41 approach the real objectives of case studies in the IE field.
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46 *Research design.* The content analysis findings for research design are presented in Table
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48 2. This evidence reveals the general approaches adopted by IE positivistic QCRs, specifically
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50 those referring to the sampling strategy, unit of analysis, data collection method,
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52 method/process of analysis, and presentation of findings.
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55 ***[Table 2 here]***
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3 First, as to the sampling strategy, purposeful sampling, namely the selection of
4 information-rich cases for in-depth study, was more frequently used to describe case selection
5 (n=94; 33%). Criterion sampling (n=70; 25%) and theoretical sampling (n=50; 18%) were
6 more commonly used along with other approaches such as convenience sampling,
7 identification of unique cases, judgmental sampling and representative sampling. As shown in
8 Figure 2, these atypical practices in terms of sampling strategies have rapidly increased since
9 2001, but most frequently appeared in the period 2009–2012. It was interesting to observe two
10 polarized trends in terms of sample justification, namely unique cases that emphasized
11 contextual richness and convenience sampling that relied on accessibility, availability at a
12 given time or geographical proximity of investigated cases.

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24 It was also observed that 22 studies did not mention this issue. Purposeful sampling was
25 mainly "... for the purpose of this research..." (Freeman *et al.*, 2012, p. 94), while criterion
26 sampling was usually applied to selecting the appropriate study object following its definition,
27 e.g. born globals (Andersson and Wictor, 2003). In order to respond to the theory
28 development in IE, literal and theoretical replication logic advocated by Eisenhardt (1989)
29 was also followed by some studies. For example, Pettersen and Tobiassen (2012, p. 123)
30 noted that "we select two similar business cases and one dissimilar to explore similar and
31 contrasting results".

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42 ***[Figure 2 here]***

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44 This review found very limited evidence incorporating prior empirical evidence to guide
45 case selection. There are a few exceptions including Rasmussen *et al.* (2001) and Gabrielsson
46 (2005); for example, Rasmussen *et al.*'s (2001) case study followed a survey in order to
47 understand in detail identified born global firms. This approach was advantageous since it
48 uncovered the idiosyncrasies of the investigated cases and allowed for method triangulation
49 by incorporating nuances of the pilot study in discussing the case study evidence.

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3 Second, as to the unit of analysis, this investigation revealed that firm-level (n=198) and
4 individual-level (n=24) analysis studies dominated IE positivistic QCRs, accounting for 78%
5 of identified studies. This manifests that entrepreneurial firms and entrepreneurs in the
6 international context have attracted the majority of research attention. There are several other
7 studies focusing on state, region, industry, community, cluster, project, subsidiary, or even
8 dual levels of analysis. However, these units of analysis seem to be static in nature. Also, 23
9 studies did not specify their choices on this issue.

10
11 This review has additionally identified several more dynamic units of analysis including
12 the network- (n=13), opportunity- (n=6), and process-level (n=3) analysis in IE positivistic
13 QCRs. As exhibited in Figure 3, nearly 85% of these dynamic units of analysis appeared after
14 2005, when the concept of IE was reformulated as opportunity identification and exploitation
15 (Oviatt and McDougall, 2005). For instance, in order to explore the network dynamics of
16 international new ventures, Coviello (2006, p. 718) indicated that “the unit of analysis was the
17 network from the perspective of the INV (international new venture)”. In a related vein,
18 Kontinen and Ojala (2011a, p. 498) also noted that “the unit of analysis for this study was the
19 recognition of the opportunity...” to capture the dynamism of opportunity recognition. The
20 process involving many interactions was also adopted as the basic unit of study. Voudouris *et*
21 *al.* (2011) and Varis *et al.* (2005) chose the learning and partnering process of firms,
22 respectively, as the unit of analysis to provide a holistic view of IE phenomena.

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44 **[Figure 3 here]**

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46 Third, as to data collection methods, sole interviews (n=39; 14%) or their combination
47 (n=162; 57%) with secondary data sources (such as internal reports, media, company websites
48 and archival data) were the most usual methods for collecting qualitative data for positivistic
49 QCRs in IE. This is in line with prior evidence in the other business research fields (e.g.
50 Piekkari *et al.*, 2010). In total, 72 studies (25%) additionally employed other methods in
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3 collecting qualitative data, and most of them (74%; n=53) appeared in the past six years. Only
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5 11 studies did not report anything on this issue.

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7 A further examination revealed the employment of less frequently presented methods
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9 including participant observation (× 38), email communication (shown × 11 times),
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11 questionnaires (× 10), and focus group (× 4). A good example with diverse data methods is
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13 Chelekis and Mudambi (2010), which investigated the activities of multinational corporations
14
15 in the direct sales industry regarding micro-entrepreneurship in the Brazilian Amazon.
16
17 Through an ethnographic case study, one author “spent two months living and working in two
18
19 upland communities... observing their (entrepreneurs’) sales calls and delivery visits, and
20
21 talking to them regularly about their work”. Following this, the authors conducted a focus
22
23 group that “... provided the opportunity to observe the discussion and interaction between
24
25 participants focused on specific research questions”. Subsequently, the researchers developed
26
27 a questionnaire from the observation and used a focus group in a small-scale survey
28
29 supplemented by interviews with multinational corporation managers (Chelekis and Mudambi,
30
31 2010, p. 416). In their study, the authors employed multiple data collection methods that were
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33 tightly synthesized and complemented to offer in-depth and contextually rich information for
34
35 the purpose of theory development.
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40 Fourth, as to the methods/processes of analysis, this review suggests that within and
41
42 across-case (n=76; 27%) and pattern matching (n=72; 25%) analysis represented the related
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44 strategies claimed by over half of IE QCRs. Less frequent methods included critical event
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46 analysis (n=15; 5%) and abductive or inductive and deductive approach (n=7; 2%). A majority
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48 (82%; n=18) appeared in the last six years of the review. It is noteworthy that 70 (25%)
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50 studies did not report their methods or process of analysis. In the remaining 44 positivistic
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52 QCRs, the employment of coding, content or thematic analysis was intensively mentioned
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54 without detailed descriptions.
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3 It is expected that the analysis methods, such as within and across-case and pattern
4 matching analysis, were widely employed, confirming the dominance of positivist case
5 studies in IE. These approaches were obviously important and well-established to facilitate
6 theorizing (Eisenhardt, 1989). We encountered a few studies following abductive reasoning
7 (e.g. Rocha *et al.*, 2012) and combining deductive and inductive procedures, which were
8 suitable for theory refinement, as discussed earlier. Only fifteen studies claimed that they used
9 the critical incident technique. Such a technique was discussed as a "...qualitative interview
10 procedure that facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences (events, incidents,
11 processes or issues) identified by respondent, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in
12 terms of perceived effects" (Chell, 1998, p. 56). It is favored to "...investigate causality as it
13 actually happens in a particular setting" (Evers *et al.*, 2012, p. 53). Turcan's (2012) work is a
14 good example with a detailed illustration of how the critical incident technique was conducted.
15 In comparison to conventional manual analysis, the current review identified 39 QCR studies
16 that employed several software packages to facilitate qualitative data analysis, involving
17 NVIVO (e.g. Makhmadshoev *et al.*, 2015), NUDIST (e.g. Voudouris *et al.*, 2011), ATLAS
18 (e.g. Mahdjour and Eischer, 2014), NETDRAW (e.g. Henn, 2012), Leximancer (e.g.
19 Middleton *et al.*, 2011), and MAXQDA (e.g. Thai and Chong, 2013).

20
21
22 Fifth, as to the presentation of findings, this was organized by main themes (n=163). This
23 is prevalent in IE QCRs, consistent with a considerable number of studies with exploratory or
24 theory-building purposes in this field. In total, 28 and 51 QCRs presented their findings by
25 proposition testing and advancement of propositions or frameworks (refinement processes of
26 propositions or frameworks), respectively. Diachronic analysis, namely the study of change in
27 a phenomenon over time, was only chosen by seven studies for the presentation of their
28 findings, and these all appeared after 2009 with one exception.

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31 The novel presentation approach of diachronic analysis was used to offer the evolution

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3 process of IE phenomena and provide historical context, which was usually followed by a
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5 synchronic analysis at one point of time. These examinations were mainly in the form of
6
7 historical event analysis as the progressive accumulation of these events is critical in
8
9 understanding path dependency. Behaviors or actions that occur during and immediately
10
11 following these historical events tend to be significant (e.g. Nasra and Dacin, 2010).
12

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14 *Evaluative criteria and quality assessment of IE positivistic QCRs.* To facilitate the logic
15
16 of replication and generalization, evaluative criteria for positivist QCRs pose a request for
17
18 robustness. A vigorous positivistic QCR demonstrates itself in the concern of construct
19
20 validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Gibbert *et al.*, 2008). Following the
21
22 insights of Yin (2014), this review has examined a few key aspects of methodological vigor in
23
24 terms of the number of cases, methods of verification, comparison with existing literature, and
25
26 overall transparency.
27

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29 In relation to positivist QCRs, a multiple-case design is preferred to a single-case
30
31 approach as emergent patterns will be confirmed or tested by multiple cases and eventually
32
33 increase external validity (Welch and Piekkari, 2017). In this review, out of 284 IE QCRs, 147
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35 featured between four and ten cases. A typical justification for the selection of multiple cases
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37 is that “the selection of seven SMEs falls within Eisenhardt’s (1989) suggestion for the
38
39 appropriate number of cases, which is between four and ten, because it is enough for
40
41 analytical generalization without creating an unwieldy volume of data” (Galkina and Chetty,
42
43 2015, p. 657).
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46 In addition, it was observed that the majority of IE positivistic QCRs (n=261) claimed to
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48 use one or more methods to verify their findings. Ranked in order of the presented frequency,
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50 these were multiple sources of evidence (× 200), multiple informants (× 125), collection and
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52 re-collection (× 65), multiple interviewers and analysts (× 56), and feedback from
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54 interviewees on case transcripts or findings (× 54). From a positivist view, all these methods
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3 were helpful in reducing certain subjective biases from interviewers or interviewees, through
4
5 which researchers could enhance the reliability and construct validity of their QCR findings.
6
7 A typical example performing diverse methods of verification is Kalinic *et al.* (2014), which
8
9 focused on rapid internationalization of traditional small firms. To achieve triangulation, they
10
11 collected data from three different sources including interviews, archival data and
12
13 observations. To control interviewee bias in each enterprise, they interviewed the entrepreneur
14
15 and at least one other manager who was most involved in the internationalization process. To
16
17 reduce observer bias, all interviews were conducted by two investigators. Further, to clarify
18
19 conflicting results and conduct verification, at least one informant from each firm was
20
21 contacted for a follow-up interview.
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24
25 This review also examined whether IE QCRs compared their findings against extant
26
27 literature as suggested by Eisenhardt (1989, p. 545) because “tying the emergent theory to
28
29 existing literature enhances the internal validity, generalizability, and theoretical level of the
30
31 theory building from case study research”. The current review identified that a majority of IE
32
33 QCRs (n=220) followed this practice and made such comparisons or linked their findings
34
35 with literature. The approach further corroborated the internal validity of these studies.
36

37
38 Research transparency captures an additional dimension of research quality (Gibbert *et*
39
40 *al.*, 2008), which indicates how well research methods and analysis are reported. Overall, the
41
42 current analysis suggests that the methodological transparency in positivistic IE QCRs was
43
44 not satisfactory. A majority of reviewed positivistic QCRs cannot be considered to be well
45
46 presented and reported regarding their research methods and analysis. This finding is similar
47
48 with Bluhm *et al.*'s (2011) qualitative review in management.
49

50
51 Out of 284 positivistic IE articles examined in the present study, only 84 (29%)
52
53 contained sufficient information and complete descriptions of research design, data coding
54
55 and analysis techniques as well as criteria used to ensure the quality of QCR evidence. This
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3 suggests the overall vagueness in the methodological reporting of IE positivist QCRs. It is
4
5 noteworthy that nearly half (n=38; 45%) of the studies with good methodological reporting
6
7 practices emerged within the past five years. It shows that an increased number of IE
8
9 qualitative case researchers have started acting on this critical methodological issue.
10

11 12 13 *IE case studies with alternative paradigmatic approaches*

14
15 This review identified only eight alternative QCRs that represent the stances of
16
17 interpretivism (n=1), social constructionism (n=2) and critical realism (n=5), respectively.
18
19 There are two possible reasons accountable for the near absence of case studies linked to other
20
21 philosophical stances. First, when compared with qualitative positivism, alternative
22
23 paradigmatic approaches are more recent additions to the methodological literature (Welch *et*
24
25 *al.*, 2011). Second, the publishing of QCR based on other onto-epistemologies tends to be
26
27 difficult given the prevalence of concepts regarding decontextualization of theorizing and
28
29 generalization emphasized by positivistic case study advocators.
30
31

32
33 *Theoretical purpose.* Embracing the stance of interpretivism, Carrier (1999, p. 33)
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35 articulated its research purpose as "...to reveal idiosyncratic perceptions of the
36
37 owner-managers rather than to obtain confirmation or denial of a set of training needs
38
39 previously identified by researchers in the field". It served the theoretical purpose of
40
41 "exploratory" to understand the needs of international training and development perceived by
42
43 Canadian small business owner-managers. Slightly different from the position of interpretivist
44
45 QCR, social constructionist IE QCRs "...emphasize the social self but focus on the interactive
46
47 (rather than cognitive) aspects of social or international being and becoming" (Fletcher, 2004,
48
49 p. 296). With the theoretical purpose of "exploratory", both IE QCRs under this paradigm
50
51 (Fletcher, 2004; Lehto, 2015) examine opportunity construction through international buyer-
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53 seller interactions and joint cross-border co-ordinations between entrepreneurs and external
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3 players, respectively. “Exploration” is not associated with the first steps of a study leading to
4
5 hypotheses-testing research, instead it is “reclaimed and reinterpreted as a means of gaining
6
7 in-depth understanding of local, emic meanings and remaining open to alternative
8
9 perspectives” (Welch *et al.*, 2013, p. 256).

10
11 In addition, four out of five critical realist QCRs (e.g. Andersen & Rask, 2014) took
12
13 advantage of the “explanatory” potential of QCRs by developing contextualized explanations
14
15 of investigated phenomena. Interestingly, there was one realist QCR (Oxtorp, 2014) with the
16
17 aim of theory building, which developed propositions for the implications of specific contexts
18
19 such as organizational processes, rules and structures to dynamic managerial capability.

20
21
22 *Research design.* A majority (n=5) of alternative IE QCRs adopted purposeful sampling.
23
24 This finding is similar to that of their positivistic counterparts. Two critical realist case studies
25
26 employed convenience sampling and one study did not specify its sampling strategy. The
27
28 employment of convenience sampling for critical realists may be attributed to the difficulty of
29
30 accessing data over time since longitudinal design is essential to understand the contextual
31
32 dynamics or complexity. For instance, through an industrial PhD project, Oxtorp (2014, p.
33
34 402) approached “the opportunity to spend much of her time at the firm’s premises, studying
35
36 the organization, taking part in meetings, talking to employees and the management, etc.”.
37
38 With regard to the unit of analysis, all three interpretivist/constructionist cases adopted
39
40 individual-level analysis, which fits their paradigmatic focus. Their critical realist
41
42 counterparts are diverse on this aspect, which include two firm-level studies, one
43
44 opportunity-level study, one process-level study, and one that did not specify its unit of
45
46 analysis. For instance, taking more dynamic “opportunity” as their unit of analysis, Mainela
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48 and Puhakka (2011, p. 20) suggested that “[a]ccording to our study, essential for
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50 understanding the international new venture emergence process is setting the opportunity in
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52 the focus”.

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3 It is found that all IE-interpretive QCRs, including interpretivist and constructionist
4 stances, used face-to face interviews as the sole method for data collection, while critical
5 realist QCRs employed at least two means to collect data including email communication and
6 observation. To some extent, this evidence echoes their ontological and epistemological
7 differences concerning reality. IE-interpretive QCRs tend to appreciate the strength of
8 in-depth interviews to understand idiosyncratic perceptions of informants and related
9 interactions in international opportunity enactment.
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18 Apart from one study without relevant information of analysis process, this research
19 found that narrative (n=4) and content (n=3) analysis represented the main analysis strategies
20 for interpretative and critical realist QCRs, respectively. In a constructionist case study, Lehto
21 (2015) argued that narratives in the forms of story/experience-telling enacted holistic
22 descriptions of relevant events, actors and the context, and the meaning attached to the
23 associations between them was not fixed but socially constructed. In comparison, content
24 analysis employed by critical realists was primarily used to reduce and interpret data (e.g.
25 Kontinen and Ojala, 2012). The presentation of QCR findings was organized by main themes
26 (n=6) and diachronic analysis (n=2). The employment of diachronic analysis by two critical
27 realist case studies mainly facilitated the understanding of the chronology of the events (e.g.
28 Mainela *et al.*, 2011).
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41 *Evaluative criteria and quality assessment of IE alternative QCRs.* Different knowledge
42 claims stemming from varied paradigmatic beliefs require heterogenous evaluative criteria
43 (Johnson *et al.*, 2006; Welch and Piekkari, 2017). However, QCR authors have not operated
44 consistently within a particular philosophical stance. In relation to
45 interpretivist/constructionist QCR, no study specified the researchers' personal involvement
46 or co-production of findings with participants as a source of interpretive insight; no study
47 discussed reflexivity to consider the role of investigators' identity on the research; and, no
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3 study reported the researchers' and participants' different accounts that allowed multiple
4 voices to speak (e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Nevertheless, two out of three studies used
5 thick descriptions to explore focal issues in the contexts and to make sense of "what is told
6 about focal actors, events, situations and emotions" (Lehto, 2015, p. 285).
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11 This review also explored research quality criteria of IE QCR that endorsed critical
12 realism. First, it was discovered that the selection of cases was driven by both theoretical
13 considerations and contexts in IE QCRs. As well as a discussion of theoretical frameworks or
14 components that guide case selection, all realist QCRs in this review explicitly addressed the
15 importance of context. For instance, Kontinen and Ojala (2012, p. 502) acknowledged that
16 "...in an entrepreneurial process, there are several components interacting simultaneously,
17 and the phenomenon is connected to the organizational context". To understand dynamic
18 contexts sufficiently, four out of five studies adopted a longitudinal design. Second, this
19 research found that these QCRs intentionally combined theoretical frameworks with
20 contextual elements to provide idiosyncratic explanations to focal generative mechanisms. A
21 typical example is Mainela *et al.* (2011), whose study identified a repertoire of behaviors
22 embedded in various networks of the INV, which drew from literature and generated three
23 types of processes in terms of internationalization-, opportunity- and technology-centered
24 processes. Third, all the IE-realist QCRs employed multiple sources of evidence that included
25 interviews and additional evidence to achieve triangulation. Importantly, four out of five
26 studies received the interpretation or comments of informants on their findings. However,
27 only one critical realist QCR (Andersen and Rask, 2014, p. 370) claimed the employment of
28 retroduction logic that underpinned their analysis as a process "to trace specific conditions
29 that either lead or have led to a given event". Surprisingly, there was no IE QCR that involved
30 empirical corroboration to demonstrate the workability and superiority of proposed generative
31 mechanism (Wynn and Williams, 2012). Collectively, the analyses above suggest that quality
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3 criteria are contingent on philosophical assumptions rendering the notion of “good” QCR
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5 polysemous. In practice, case scholars have not fully exploited the toolkit of contingent
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7 criteriology (Johnson *et al.*, 2006), which may sensitize them to particular quality challenges
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9 that their research should address. The awareness that may result from such reviews can help
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11 case authors to match their philosophical assumptions to particular forms of inquiry and
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13 evaluation.
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16 17 18 **Conclusions**

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20 IE as a research field deals with actors, phenomena and behaviors that are dynamic,
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22 processual and complex in nature (Reuber *et al.*, 2018). Following Platt’s view (1996) that
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24 methodologies cannot be understood in a vacuum, this study sought to assess the QCR
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26 methodology in the IE field, which is based on the evidence collected from 292 papers
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28 published between 1989 and mid-2017. This systematic review reveals that the qualitative
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30 positivistic case study with conventional practices constitutes the disciplinary norm in this
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32 area, although there is still great room for improvement in their paradigmatic consistency and
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34 methodological rigor. An increasing number of atypical practices were observed within the
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36 positivistic QCR cohort since 2005, which may respond to the refocusing of the IE research
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38 toward opportunity (Oviatt and McDougall, 2005) and the subsequent extension of its
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40 research area boundaries. A scant number of alterative QCRs that depart from positivistic
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42 assumptions suggest their early stage of development. They also signal an unexpected
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44 divergence between practice and methodological writings manifested in the unwillingness of
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46 scholars to give up the disciplinary convention and/or ensure consistency in their research
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48 designs.
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52 The study makes three important contributions to IE research (see Whetten, 1989). First,
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54 it is only one of two available reviews (Coviello and Jones, 2004 being the other one) that
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3 examines methodological advancements in the IE field. Not only that but also it serves as the
4 first attempt to approach them via an angle of philosophical orientation. Apart from its
5 comparative comprehensiveness, for the first time in the area of IE this review specializes in
6 assessing QCR method that achieves good methodological fit with the nascent stage of the
7 field (Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Melén Hånell *et al.*, 2013). Through an examination
8 of the paradigmatic stances and research practices, this review contributes to the state of the
9 art understanding of QCRs, facilitation of quality knowledge creation, and identification of
10 possible directions for further advancement of QCRs in the IE.
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20 Second, this review contributes to the improvement of QCR quality in IE in a timely
21 period when discussions about the future of the field are surging forward (Terjesen *et al.*,
22 2016; Verbeke and Ciravegna, 2018). According to this study's analysis, IE QCRs that adopt
23 positivistic orientation should pay special attention to articulation of the theoretical purpose,
24 promotion of consistent and robust research design and operationalization, and enhancement
25 of overall transparency. This solution could respond to the long-standing critiques related to
26 the methodological rigor, contingent criteriology and standards of qualitative research (Harley
27 and Faems, 2017). It is recommended that IE QCRs that adopt alternative paradigmatic
28 assumptions consider research quality through contingent criteriology (Johnson *et al.*, 2006)
29 and transparency (Cuervo-Cazurra *et al.*, 2016), which highlight longitudinal design,
30 reflexivity, and an inclusion of etic and emic perspectives. Given the contextual nature of IE
31 actors, behaviors, opportunities and processes (Cornelissen, 2017; Reuber *et al.*, 2017), an
32 inclusion of interpretivism and critical realism is further important.
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48 Third, the present study contributes to the identification of the variety and breadth of
49 research practices in the dominant positivistic QCRs. As well as the prevalent practices, it was
50 noted that the employment of atypical practices by positivistic QCRs from theoretical
51 purposes to the presentation of findings has increased during the past ten years. These atypical
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3 practices are either those that are well documented but seldom used (e.g. theory-testing
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5 purpose) or the improvement of conventional practices (an involvement of additional data
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7 source beyond interview and secondary data). A careful selection of these atypical practices
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9 aligned with the philosophical stance could help address the complexity (e.g. duality of unit of
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11 analysis) and dynamism (e.g. process as unit of analysis) of IE phenomena and broaden the IE
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13 research horizon. Given the predominance of positivistic QCR, the incorporation into the IE
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15 study of such atypical positivistic practices to a greater extent would be a pragmatic way
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17 forward to advance the field methodologically and theoretically.

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20 Overall, IE scholars are encouraged to consider their particular philosophical position in
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22 undertaking QCRs. Despite the value of the positivistic QCR, researchers should not ignore
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24 the potential of alternative paradigmatic traditions. To avoid over-institutionalization of
25
26 positivistic conventions in research, this review makes a plea for increased pluralism in case
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28 study methodology to provide a fuller account of IE phenomena and increase legitimacy of
29
30 the field (see Piekkari and Welch, 2011). This research further posits that with greater
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32 positivistic consistency and adoption of alternative non-positivistic approaches, editors and
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34 gatekeepers of high-quality journals may be able to gradually welcome and accept QCR to a
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36 higher extent, which would in turn add to the legitimacy of the IE field.
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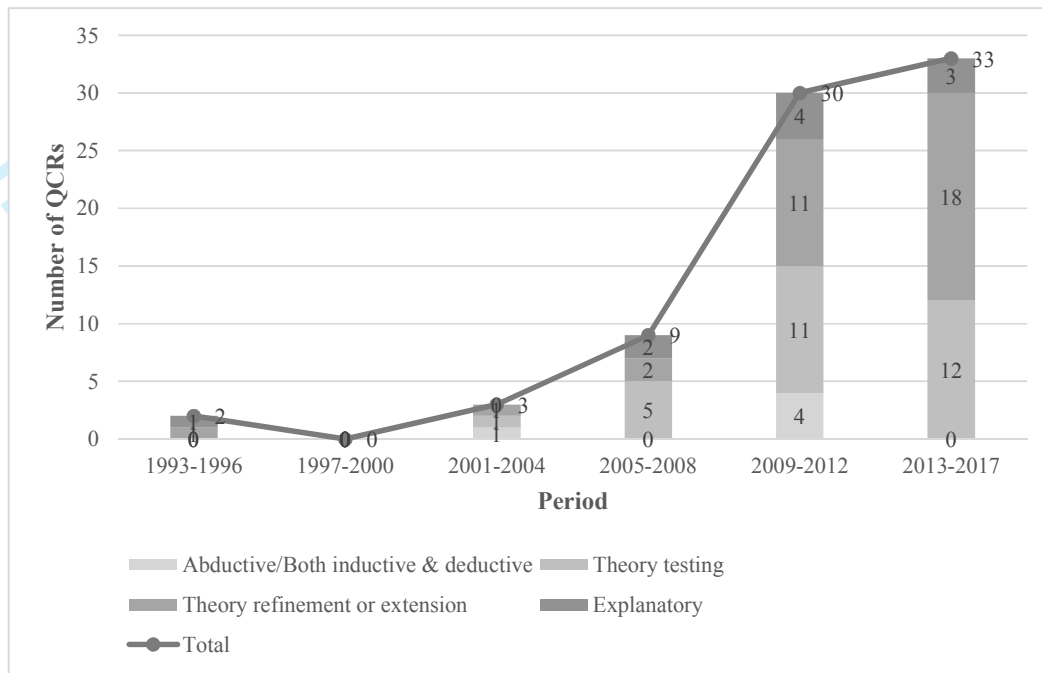


Figure 1: Atypical Theoretical Purposes of Positivistic IE QCRs between 1993-2017

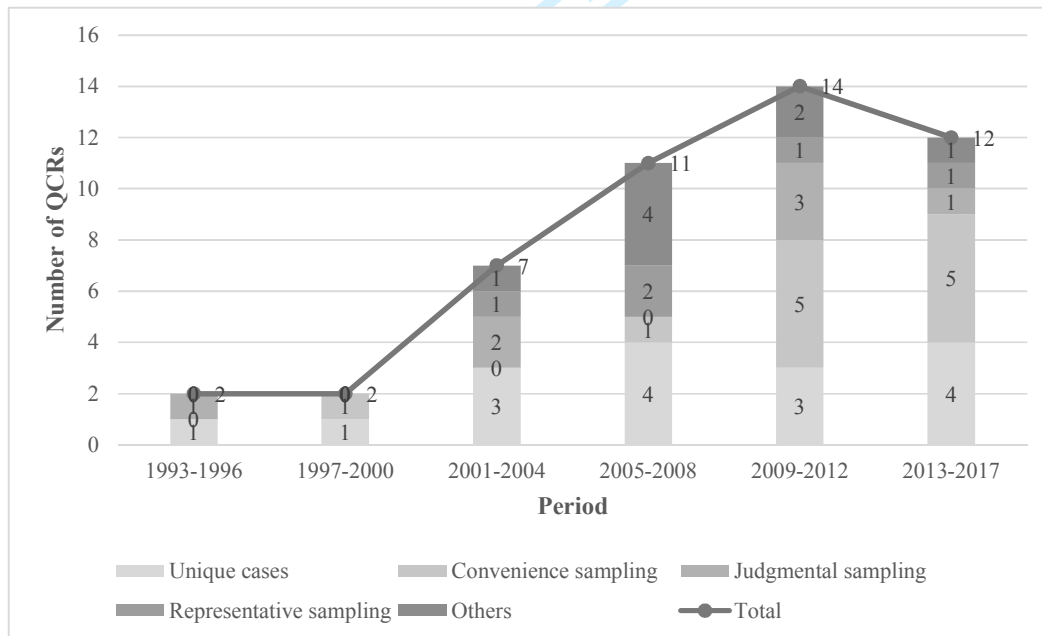


Figure 2: Atypical Sampling Strategies of Positivistic IE QCRs between 1993-2017

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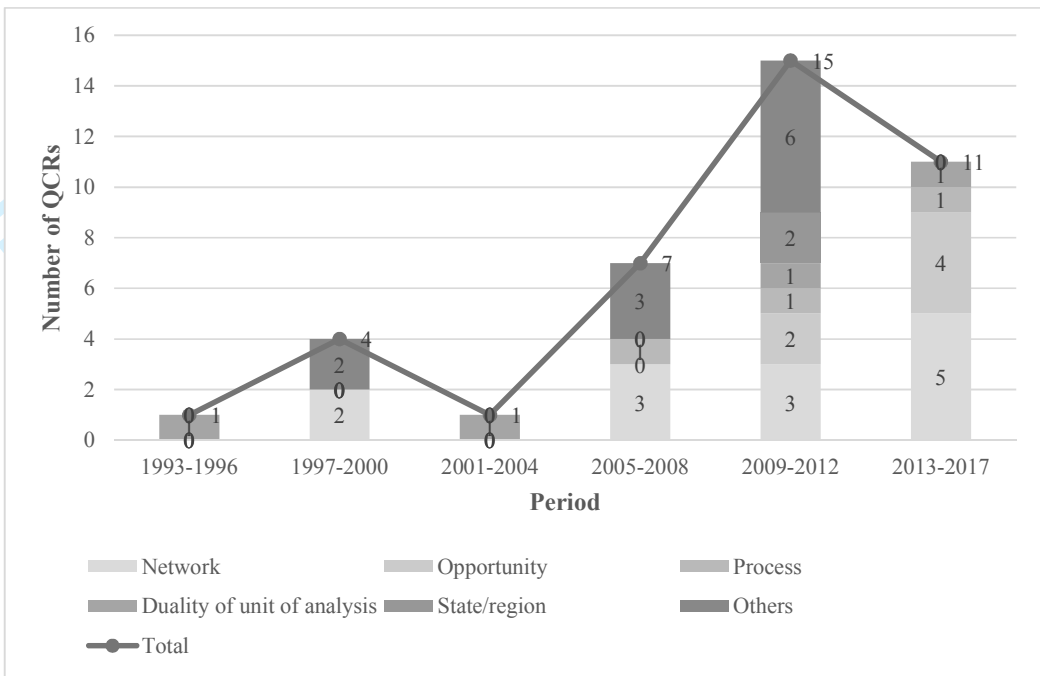


Figure 3: Atypical Units of Analysis of Positivistic IE QCRs between 1993-2017

Table 1: International Entrepreneurship (IE) Qualitative Case Research Articles by Journal Source and Year

Period	Entrepreneurship								International Business					Marketing					Management				Others	Total
	JBV	ETP	SEJ	SBE	ISBJ	JSBM	ERD	JIEN	JIBS	JWB	IBR	MIR	JIM	JOIM	IMM	IMR	JMM	EJM	AMJ	JMS	LRP	EMJ		
1989-1990																								
1991-1992																								
1993-1994	2																							2
1995-1996	1	1																						2
1997-1998					2					1	1			1									1	6
1999-2000				1		2				1				3									1	8
2001-2002	2			1		1					1	1											2	8
2003-2004	2			1	2		1	5				1		1					1		1		6	21
2005-2006								8	1	2	1			1		2							5	20
2007-2008							1	3		5	4			3	1					1	1		5	24
2009-2010		1	1					6	1	1	1	2			1	4	1			1	1	1	13	34
2011-2012		1			1	1	2	10		1	8	1		3	1	4			1				28	62
2013-2014					1		2	10		2	6	4	1		3	3							13	45
2015-2016					1	2		15		3	4	2				1		1					20	49
2017(till 30/06/17)								2			4		1			1							3	11
Total	7	3	1	3	7	6	6	59	2	11	31	11	5	12	6	15	1	1	1	2	2	3	97	292
% of all articles	2.4	1.0	0.3	1.0	2.4	2.1	2.1	20.2	0.7	3.8	10.6	3.8	1.7	4.1	2.1	5.1	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.7	0.7	1.0	33.2	100

Note: JBV= Journal of Business Venturing; ETP= Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice; SEJ= Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal; SBE= Small Business Economics; ISBJ= International Small Business Journal; JSBM= Journal of Small Business Management; ERD= Entrepreneurship and Regional Development; JIEN= Journal of International Entrepreneurship; JIBS= Journal of International Business Studies; JWB= Journal of World Business; IBR= International Business Review; MIR= Management International Review; JIM= Journal of International Management; JOIM= Journal of International Marketing; IMM= Industrial Marketing Management; IMR= International Marketing Review; JMM= Journal of Marketing Management; EJM= European Journal of Marketing; AMJ= Academy of Management Journal; JMS= Journal of Management Studies; LRP= Long Range Planning; EMJ= European Management Journal.

Table 2: Content Analysis Evidence of QCR Design in IE

Primary sampling strategy	No. of papers	Unit of analysis	No. of papers	Data collection method	No. of papers
Purposeful sampling	99 (5)	Firm level	200 (2)	Interview only	42 (3)
Criterion sampling	70	Individual level	27 (3)	Interview & secondary data sources (e.g. internal documents, archives, websites, & media et al.)	164 (2)
Theoretical sampling	50	Network	13	Involved additionally other sources	75 (3)
Unique cases	16	Opportunity	7 (1)	Do not specify	11
Convenience sampling	14 (2)	Process	4 (1)		
Judgmental sampling	7	Duality of unit of analysis	4		
Representative sampling	5	State/region	2		
others	8	Others	11		
Do not specify	23 (1)	Do not specify	24 (1)		
Total	292		292		292

Method/process of analysis	No. of papers	Presentation of findings	No. of papers	Methods of verification	Frequency
(1) <i>Primary method/process of analysis</i>		Main theme analysis	169 (6)	Multiple sources of evidence	205 (5)
Within/cross-case analysis	76	Proposition Testing	28	Multiple informants	130 (5)
Pattern matching	72	Analysis advancing propositions or framework	51	Multiple interviewers & analysts	57 (1)
Critical incident analysis	15	Diachronic Analysis	9 (2)	Collect & re-collect	66 (1)
Abductive/both inductive & deductive approach	7	Do not specify	35	Interviewees' feedbacks	57 (3)
Others	51 (7)			Do not specify	30
Do not specify	71 (1)				
Total	292		292		

(2) <i>Analysis facilitated by software</i>	39				
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Note: descriptive statistics for alternative QCRs in brackets