Contextualising case study selection: Introducing a sampling framework

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Abstract: Sampling processes in case-based, qualitative research are often criticised for being arbitrary and leading to sampling biases. This may be attributed to the frequent use of the logic of convenience that many case-study researchers adopt. This paper aims to ease parts of such criticism on the rigor of case study selection through the presentation of a sampling framework that promotes contextualization and thoroughness of sampling decisions. This sampling framework entails four iterative steps, namely i) the conduct of pilot cases; ii) direct observation; iii) the long-documented purposeful sampling logic; and, iv) analysis of secondary data. In order to enhance understanding on these steps, the authors employ the sampling framework into an actual case study project. The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of case study sampling for theorizing from case study research.

INTRODUCTION

Business research (and especially international business research due to cross-cultural differences and local 'anomalies'; Craig and Douglas, 2001, p. 86), often necessitates the tailoring of methodological choices to the unique characteristics of the international and/or local contexts. Otherwise, research designs can lead to notable methodological fallacies (Yang, Wang and Su, 2006; Lenartowicz, Johnson and White, 2003). Indeed, Malhorta, Agarwal and Peterson (1996) highlight the difficulties that international business researchers encounter in explaining case study selection in sufficient detail, which makes interpretation of findings difficult and affects the replication of the study. In particular, the literature presents a number of criticisms with regards to rigor in qualitative (case-based) research (see Patton and Appelbaum, 2003; Milliken, 2001; Jonhston, Leach, Liu, 1999 and Coldwell, 1990 for a discussion on these accusations) and more specifically, on the sampling processes used within the qualitative paradigm.

Thus, qualitative research is long 'accused' that its sampling processes are often arbitrary, confusing and lack rigorous scientific techniques that justify the final selection of the sample (Malhotra, Agarwal & Peterson, 1996; Marshall, 1996; Morse, 1991; Trost, 1986). The fact that in many studies, the logic for case selection is not even provided but, instead, it is driven by the logic of statistical sampling, makes unreliable selection processes being held responsible for sampling biases (Siggelkow, 2007; Yang, Wang and Su, 2006). As a result, qualitative, case-based investigations are accused as being 'not so rigidly prescribed as in quantitative studies' (Coyne, 1997, p.623) and qualitative sampling processes resulting 'in poor quality data' that lack 'intellectual credibility' (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Such accusations have made qualitative sampling processes 'one of the principal areas of confusion' (Marshall, 1996, p. 522) characterized by lack of structure and principles (Morse, 1991).

All these accusations are particularly important because:

1) the *methodological aspect that constitutes an obvious manifestation of the difference between qualitative/quantitative paradigms is sampling strategy* [due to the fundamental differences between probability and non-probability sampling (Patton, 1990; Marshall, 1996).

Whereas in the quantitative paradigm, generalization imposes the logic of probability sampling, in qualitative inquiry the need for in-depth understanding leads to the selection of information-rich cases through the so called purposeful or theoretical sampling logic (Siggelkow, 2007; Pauwels and Matthyssens, 2004). As a result of this theoretically-based logic, sample selection in qualitative investigations is conventionally accused of lacking rules that will pinpoint these information-rich cases (Malhotra, Agarwal and Peterson, 1996). Therefore, research stakeholders and evaluators will not know why these are selected over others which qualify as poorer in terms of commensurate insights.

2) In addition to this criticism, Stake (1995), a leading authority in case-based research, stresses that *the selection of cases is the most unique aspect of case-based research* compared to its other dimensions such as data collection or analysis.

3) The contribution of case study research to theorizing can be significantly enhanced by the strategic selection of cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006) whereas *wrong selection logic can be detrimental for the validity of results* (e.g. see Flyvbjerg, 1998 on a case of urban planning).

4) '*Few authors defend their case choices'* (Siggelkow, 2007, p.20-21; Malhotra, Agarwal and Peterson, 1996) with subsequent effects on the reputation the qualitative paradigm enjoys among business researchers.

Therefore, such criticisms against sampling processes of qualitative methodologies are not peripheral issues of concern but rather challenges that reflect on the appreciation of qualitative case study investigations. Given that 'in qualitative research, sample selection

has a profound effect on the ultimate quality of the research' (Coyne, 1997, p.623), researchers utilizing qualitative modes of investigation must be thoroughly preoccupied with cementing sample selection processes. Even more importantly, they must acknowledge that sampling is not a single decision, but rather it is a process that incorporates an array of decisions that influence the overall design of the research.

The *purpose of this paper* is to present a sampling framework that approaches *systematically* the process of case sampling and facilitates *context-focused* selection of case studies. This framework employs an iterative approach to sampling through pilot cases, direct observation, purposeful sampling and analysis of secondary data. The sampling framework proposed in this paper is based on the simple notion that *context matters* and, where possible, should be given methodological consideration. It also supplements the logic of purposeful sampling and leads to thorough sample selection. Viewed in this light, this sampling framework defies the argument advanced by positivists that qualitative sampling lacks the rigor and detail of quantitative sampling. The use of this framework into a real case study investigation serves to facilitate the deeper explanation of the four iterative and interrelated steps to case study selection. The use of actual projects in order to pose and clearly illustrate methodological concerns has been utilized by previous researchers (e.g. see de Weerd-Nederhof, 2001 for such a use of a case-based project).

The paper is structured as follows. The *second section* of the paper offers a brief literature review on the notion of case study sampling and the importance of context for case study selection. The *third section* introduces the proposed sampling framework based on four iterative steps. The *fourth section* of the paper employs the proposed sampling framework into practice. In this section, the context of an actual case study project will be described and the logic for conducting the research through qualitative modes of inquiry will be explained. The paper concludes by highlighting the significance of contextually fitting means to select case studies for the investigation of under-explored research problems such as the one that is described hereafter. It also associates contextualisation and thoroughness in case study sampling with theorising from case study research.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES TO CASE STUDY SAMPLING: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

In the literature, we witness several types of case studies and subsequent sampling strategies that have been identified. For example, Stake (1995) distinguishes between intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies whereas Yin (2003) configures case studies across holistic/embedded and single/multiple-case designs. Another view suggests that cases are selected because they either predict similar results (literal replication) or contrasting results for predictable reasons (theoretical replication) with a certain percent of cases serving each purpose (Alam, 2005; Johnston, Leach and Liu, 1999). Moreover, authors (Silverman, 2000 and Stake, 1995) have distinguished between representative, purposive or theoretical and learning maximization sampling strategies (Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989). Last but not least, Patton's (1990) sixteen criteria for purposive sampling (e.g. extreme or deviant case, intensity, maximum variation, homogeneous, typical case, stratified purposeful etc.), became a ubiquitous sampling logic in qualitative and case-based research.

We do not aim to go beyond the scope of this paper and analyse these multiple traditions and categorizations that exist in the qualitative and case study realm. The important thing for this study is that this multiplicity has attendant implications for sampling processes and quite often, due to this plethora of research traditions, case selection becomes a daunting task. However, no matter how daunting the task may seem, all categories of case studies imply that case selection is a process during which the researcher must build an incremental understanding of the context he/she aims to explore. For example, how can one distinguish between holistic or embedded designs without a context-bound understanding of the cases he/she aims to explore? How can one choose among Patton's (1990) criteria without being aware of the contextual specificities that surround the phenomenon to be explored?

The ability of case study research to appreciate complexity and provide "thick description" (Yin, 2003) requires an understanding of the case study context and its idiosyncratic elements. Essentially case study research is context-bound methodology and therefore, a relevant need for case study researchers is to put case study sampling into context. Cappelli and Sherer (1991, p.56) define context as "the surroundings associated with the phenomena that help illuminate that (sic) phenomena, typically factors associated with the unit of analysis above those expressly under investigation". Context is incorporated in theoretical and methodological approaches through the process of "contextualization", which entails "linking observations to a set of relevant facts, events or points of view that make possible research and theory that form part a larger whole." (Rousseau and Fried, 2001, p. 22). Contextualization may occur in many stages of the research process including the one of selection of research sites for further investigation (Rousseau and Fried, 2001).

However, in order for a researcher to achieve contextualization in the selection of case studies, multiple sources of information may be required. This need for a context-sensitive implementation of sampling gives rise to two broad questions:

1. *What is the population and which cases within this population are best suited to explore our research questions?*

The aforementioned question becomes especially important when this population resides in contexts, where the relevant population is not distinct and thus, not easily discernable. For example, in some cases, the population of interest may be firms focusing on a niche segment of the market within a mainstream segment. Several studies in the field of multicultural marketing e.g. Cui and Choudhury (2003) or Chung and Wang (2006) have noted the intermingling of culturally diverse segments in one national market as a result of immigration or settled racial minorities. How can one safely map niche-focused firms and isolate them (in order to study them) from the bulk of all firms operating in the market? This is a necessary first step to proceed to fitting case selection within this sub-population for which empathy with the context is needed. Research has shown that such blurry market situations lend themselves to case-based investigations e.g. the literature in

networks as loci of resources and as a more 'appropriate' look on markets (Halinen and Tornroos, 2005). However, defining the relevant population in such studies is a challenging task due to the intermingling of cases and lack of clear boundaries for the scope of each unit's activity.

2. *Why some cases are chosen while others in the same population might have not even been considered despite their potential criticality for the issue under investigation?*

Flyvbjerg (2006) has shown that such misconceptions or sampling inadequacies about what constitutes e.g. a critical case could lead to misunderstandings of reality. However, the same author suggests that a universally accepted sampling frame that could safeguard the selection process does not exist. The 'universality' thesis for sampling processes may be true but at least each context calls for *contextual appropriateness* of case selection. That is, each case study research (due to its context-specific nature) shapes the sampling frame of the study, which is emergent and, in turn, dependent on investigated cases.

Thus, in any project, by devising a structured way to dictate a large part of the relevant cases or even accurately identify the entire population of interest, theoretical sampling can take place without any 'suspicions' for marginalising/ignoring critical cases. In this study, we claim that *contextual appropriateness* can be achieved through the combination of pilot studies, direct observation, a purposeful/theoretical sampling logic, and analysis of secondary data. Hereafter, we provide a brief analysis and then, we explain the respective application for each in an actual research project.

INTRODUCING A SAMPLING FRAMEWORK FOR CONTEXT-FOCUSED CASE STUDY SELECTION

STEP 1: Conducting Pilot Cases

In order to substantiate the research effort, one or two pilot case studies usually take place before the main, primary data collection phase of a research project. George and Bennett

(2005, p.75) label this type of case studies 'plausibility probes': preliminary case studies on relatively under-investigated areas to determine whether more intensive research is warranted and facilitate selection of future case study milieus. 'Plausibility probe' cases should not be approached loosely, as they are not intended to lower the standards of evidence and inference linked to case study research. Instead, they serve to support the process of case study design allowing for informed selection of case study sites. They also promote the development of the main interview guide or questionnaire and assess whether potential modifications must be made to the initial research design (Alam, 2005; Yin, 2003 and Perry, 1998). In this paper, we specifically argue that pilot cases constitute an invaluable, initial step towards the identification of the key investigated cases, and a first step for determining a population ('pool') of case studies of interest.

The rationale for the selection of the pilot cases varies. It can be for accessibility reasons, familiarity or even friendship with the respondent within an organisation or be a very relevant case to the overall design and purpose of study that will shed light to initial ambiguities. However, in contexts with blurry market conditions, conducting various pilot studies in a non-convenient logic across different industries/firms can help reduce levels of ambiguity. We will try to showcase the usefulness of pilot studies to sampling with a practical application that utilised four pilot studies.

STEP 2: Direct Observation

It is expected that a case study design will use triangulation i.e. multiple sources of evidence from a pool of sources such as interviews, documents, archival records, direct observation, participant observation and physical artifacts (Yin, 2003). This helps the findings to become more convincing and accurate so as to enhance internal validity and also to avoid common biases such as informant bias (Pauwels and Matthyssens, 2004). In particular, direct observation is suggested to enable triangulation of evidence and helps test for the consistency of primary findings (Patton, 1990 and Alam, 2005).

Thus, the literature may have acknowledged the usefulness of direct observation for triangulating findings but nevertheless, direct observation's potential for enabling the *case selection* process is not noted in the literature. In other words, direct observation is utilized at the post-fieldwork phase when all data have been gathered from pre-determined cases. However, it is not utilized at the pre-fieldwork phase in order to safely determine the relevant cases.

In turn, in order to determine the relevant cases, one must first accurately define the population. Thus, one must practically employ an a priori technique that does not allow room for 'flexible', 'subjective', 'arbitrary'-types of accusations against qualitative sampling processes. However, identifying the relevant population is often hard to pinpoint in a purely exploratory project where case studies are advantaged as a method. Exactly due to the project's exploratory nature, the boundaries between a relevant and a non-relevant firm may not be easily discernable. Therefore, the question that arises is:

- *Which is the population among which, most relevant cases will be chosen?*
and even more important methodologically:
- *What is the a priori selection framework that will accurately and reasonably dictate the population that reflects the problem under scrutiny?*

Given that '*qualitative researchers recognize that some informants are 'richer' than others'* (Marshall, 1996, p. 523) and the fact that '*the typical or average case is often not the richest in information*' (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229), the selection of sample is of utmost importance and any form of convenience sampling seems indeed arbitrary. As a result, qualitative researchers must address the problem of accurately identifying most relevant cases with a structured and rigorous way. The credibility of a systematic, structured approach to case selection (as opposed to a much-used flexible approach) is highlighted by key authors in the field (Patton, 1990) and here, we argue that direct observation can help establish such a credible selection framework.

In particular, direct observation can note down the firms which are clearly associated with the problem under scrutiny and can serve as rich sources of information/case studies. By directly observing the context in which potential cases operate, one can distinguish between cases which are associated with the research objective of the study and cases which are not affected/interested in the questions one poses. In other words, direct observation enhances contextualization by facilitating the investigation of events and configurations that weave the fabric in which the investigated phenomena/cases are embedded (cf. Rousseau and Yitzhak, 2001)

For example, if we want to explore the significance of immigrant communities on marketing activities of firms, how can one identify which organizations out of all in a country are actively interested in this consumer group and employ tailored marketing practices for these consumers? Even more specifically, in international, cross-cultural marketing research, scholars may often lack the skills or knowledge for carefully reading and understanding country data and locally-embedded idiosyncrasies. For example, Craig and Douglas (2001) have addressed the need for more caution on local anomalies and the need for sensitivity in achieving across-contexts applicability of findings. Despite such market complications and challenges, the population of cases to be investigated is often assumed or taken for granted by researchers.

However, a real-life observation in areas where purchasing by immigrant communities takes place can serve as a framework of action. In particular, it will help the researcher note down the products/brands that are placed in relevant retailing outlets and thus, note down the firms that are interested in this group of consumers. Out of these firms, purposeful sampling can select the case studies for investigation.

STEP 3: Purposeful Sampling

In quantitative research, random sampling is preferred. It is derived from statistical probability theory and allows confident generalizations from a sample to a larger population. In qualitative research though, since the aim is not statistical generalization

but in-depth (detailed) understanding of a phenomenon, the aim of sampling is to select information-rich cases that will illuminate generic research questions without an anchorage on structured instruments and statistical protocols (Patton, 1990). The main purpose is to follow a replication logic (Yin, 2003; Perry, 1998) i.e. each case either predicts similar results (literal replication) or contrasting results for predictable reasons (theoretical replication) with a certain percent of cases serving each purpose (Alam, 2005; Johnston, Leach and Liu, 1999). The criterion for the selection of the cases, therefore, is not representativeness but replication logic since random selection is neither necessary nor desirable as most researchers agree (Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989). In this respect, qualitative research is largely developed upon the usefulness of purposeful sampling.

Purposeful sampling refers to the selection of cases where the phenomena studied are most likely to occur and coincide with the theoretical background of the research and its research questions (Silverman, 2000 and Stake, 1995). Such cases possess characteristics that make them 'archetypal' cases for investigation given the objectives of the research. For example, the case of a typical B2B firm like TetraPak that uses massive, non-traditional channels of promotion such as TV is an ideal case to investigate why this is happening since this challenges conventional wisdom in the field of B2B promotion/advertising. This sampling logic thus, also refers to 'negative' cases which do not support theory for predictable reasons and challenge conventional wisdom.

In this discourse, authors have suggested e.g. learning maximization sampling strategies (Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989) but Patton's (1990) sixteen criteria for purposive sampling (e.g. extreme or deviant case, intensity, maximum variation, homogeneous, typical case, stratified purposeful etc.), have become the ubiquitous sampling logic in qualitative, case-based research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), maximum variation is the most useful strategy for purposeful sampling since it allows most thoroughly investigating the central themes that cut across a large part of participant variation. For small samples, a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. Maximum variation sampling

strategy turns that apparent weakness into a strength by applying the following logic: '*any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program*' (Patton, 1990, p.172). The need to contextualise is reinforced by the application of maximum variation sampling in case study research that favours adding ever-greater diversity in a settings as well as perspectives. Through our application, we will show how purposeful sampling and indeed maximum variation in particular, fits with the other steps and provides a more robust sampling framework.

STEP 4: Secondary Data

The use of secondary data in business research is strongly recommended (Yang, Wang and Su, 2006 and Heaton, 2004) since they provide the '…*foundation for empirical research*' (Albaum and Peterson, 1984, p.162). Second data and particularly archival data may provide 'empirical depth' (Welch, 2000, p. 198) into a case study project by generating new insights into the context in which the investigated phenomena are nested. Additionally, they enhance validity of primary data by serving as a triangulation method and put the researcher into the context of investigation early enough. Such a familiarization with the context, industry or cultures is essential due to the real-life, exploratory nature of case study research that presupposes an empathic relationship of the researcher with the context and the respondents. The focus of qualitative research on '*naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings so that we have a strong handle on what real life is like*' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.10) necessitates the use of any additional data that reflect this reality. Thus, in this paper, we argue that secondary data are an essential step towards the selection of the sample i.e. choosing the most relevant cases for exploration. Hereafter, through the explanation of a real-life project, we explain why.

PUTTING THE SAMPLING FRAMEWORK INTO PRACTICE: AN APPLICATION

In a number of countries, there is a large influx of foreign consumers, or tourists, from many countries and for a significant part of the year. As can be seen from the following table, for developed countries with mature markets such as France, Spain or Austria the annual influx of tourists collectively exceeds the population of these countries by large margins.

	Tourist Arrivals (millions of tourists)	Domestic population (millions of inhabitants)
France	79.08	60
Spain	58.45	40
Italy	41.05	58
Austria	20.26	8
Greece	14.78	11

Table 1: Foreign and domestic consumers in a country (2006 data[1], World Tourism Organization/World Tourism Barometer and National Statistical Service of Greece)

For this research project though, the most important thing is that it is not only firms in the tourist sector (e.g. hotels, tour operators, airline companies, travel agents etc.) that are thus affected. Clearly, tourists are also consumers of a whole range of goods and services that are not produced by the tourist industry. For example, tourists consume beers, soft drinks, ice creams, toothpastes and snack food. Thus, tourists are also consumers of packaged goods belonging to product categories that:

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[1] 2006 data are the latest, more accurate, available annual data with regards to international tourist arrivals by the time of this thesis' submission.

- are sold in the destination/market even if tourism was not developed at all in the country and also
- are sold in the tourists' usual habitat back home.

This market feature, while having challenging implications for fast-moving consumer goods firms (FMCG), is a reality the research community in business studies has not investigated before. Despite tourism's importance as one of the largest industries in the world, the fact that it affects numerous non-tourism-related firms in several countries is still unexplored. We currently do not know which are the FMCGs that are influenced and how these FMCG firms serve the additional consumer base as opposed to their 'stable', domestic customers. Therefore, the research objectives of this study are the following: *1) To explore the consequences of within country diversity as a result of inbound tourism for the commercial strategy of leading FMCG firms operating in tourist-receiving countries 2) To identify similarities/differences in the way FMCG firms serve both the local and tourist populations*

The examination of the aforementioned objectives required a research approach that would offer rich information rather than ensure representativeness/generalization of findings (Hyde, 2000). In other words, the authors attempted to gain insights into *how* and *why* FMCG firms serve the additional consumer base that is generated in the country. The project led to a theory-building process that portrayed the strategic alternatives of FMCG firms and the factors that informed their strategic decisions.

STEP 1: Specifying the Population: The Contribution of Pilot Cases

As described, the population is firms that market fast-moving consumer goods. This does not mean that other industries are not affected by the phenomenon of international tourism, but that including them in the study would add to the complexity of the research without commensurate benefits in terms of additional insights. In this effort to accurately

define the population, the selection of the unit of analysis to study a phenomenon or a set of phenomena is critical to explanatory power of especially case research (Westgren and Zering, 1998). Thus, we decided along with the insight taken from pilot studies that we should focus only on the FMCG industry. However, one can identify a diversified range of FMCG firms selling Alcoholic Drinks, Cigarettes, Cosmetics and Toiletries, Disposable Paper Products, Hot Drinks, Household Care, Over The Counter (OTC) Healthcare, Packaged Food, Pet Food and Care Products, Soft Drinks.

However, not all these categories fit into the conceptual framework that highlights the impact of tourism-induced diversity on the strategy of FMCG firms. Tourists do not usually consider a large number of FMCGs as a potential product for consumption (e.g. pet food and care or household care products). Therefore, out of the above FMCG sectors, we had to focus on those who are the most relevant for tourist consumption. Thus, four pilot studies took place before the identification of the primary cases and were proven very helpful for the specification of the population. The rationale for the selection of the pilot firms was the following: a fast moving consumer goods firm will sell its branded products not only directly to tourists through existing distribution channels (retailing outlets such as super markets and kiosks) but also will sell as a B2B firm to tourism-related establishments such as hotels and restaurants (as a raw material for further processing). More specifically, the product of a consumer goods company may reach the tourist, in two different ways: directly, as a well-defined packaged brand through an established distribution channel or indirectly, as a raw material processed and offered to the consumer by a tourist outlet (e.g. a restaurant) without bearing a defined brand identity.

In the pilot phase, both types of firms were included since we did not know what difference, if any, this distinction makes for the marketing decisions of the firm and to what extent each firms is affected by tourism. These pilot cases informed aspects of the case study selection process in numerous ways:

1. *Firms with an industrial nature (selling to tourism-related firms and not directly to tourists) were excluded as a potential part of our population*

This study does not deny the significance of tourism for such firms but a different conceptual framework was needed to capture the implications. Actually the effect may be even more significant and certainly the number of firms with an industry-based customer relationship with the tourism industry is huge. Firms that use tourism as a distinct distribution channel for their B2B products are hundreds and certainly provide a platform for further research. However, pilot studies made clear that, due to conceptual/construct differences, the focus should be on firms selling branded, packaged goods to tourists directly. Moreover, in the course of pilot interviews, the author realized that the FMCG, and not the consumer durables sector, is methodologically the most appropriate context for this study. This is because purchases of non-FMCG, durable or even semi-durable, consumer goods are unlikely to feature as major items of tourist expenditure. Thus, pilot studies informed the decision to focus on FMCG products.

2. *Pilot studies made obvious that tobacco firms must be excluded*

This is due to the high levels of brand loyalty that exist among consumers for this product. Such a fact creates inherent difficulties for Greek firms that would jeopardize the external validity of results. Such an understanding became possible only through the course of pilot interviews which made this understanding clear.

3. *Pilot interviews stressed the need for a maximum variation sampling logic*

Interviews conducted in pilot cases studies showed that diverse firms in terms of industry, competition and ownership structure should permeate the sampling process. The differences in marketing strategy these follow and the factors that influence firms across different product categories necessitate such a variation in sampling. This context-specific knowledge could not have been attained without the assistance from pilot studies.

STEP 2: Direct Observation as a Key Technique for Cementing the Population

The process through which specific cases were selected started by collecting secondary data information from tourist bulletins and websites. This was also the source of inspiration for the formulation of this research project. The authors often came across several advertisements of FMCG, non-tourism-related firms in tourism-related documents and started wondering why this was the case (e.g. a yoghurt seller advertising on tourist maps). A list of firms with such advertisements was coincidentally compiled but a more rigorous method was needed to extend it and rigidly back-up its logic. The fact that some firms appeared in such bulletins does not mean that they are the most relevant cases for investigation. Other firms who are at least equally affected by tourism might have not chosen this medium of promotion among foreign consumers. Therefore, a more structured way had to be employed that could safely pinpoint to the relevant organizations. The most structured way to accurately note down the population of firms that are affected by tourists was through *direct observation of retailing spots in two areas*: 1) in typical tourist-oriented areas of the country and 2) in non-tourism related areas.

By directly observing these retailing outlets, we managed to note down the differences between tourism-focused and non-tourist areas of the country. Hereafter, we explain why this was essential. The main elements of the process were:

  i.   *the chronological context of direct observation*
The following observations took place both during the tourist and the non-tourist seasons in Greece (July and January respectively[2]) in order to isolate the effect of intermingling of tourists and local population and safeguard that expected differences are noted down.

  ii.   *the geographical context of direct observation*

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[2] It must be noted at this stage that tourism in Greece presents extreme seasonality with more than 90% of tourism taking place between May-September every year (Greek National Statistical Service of Greece, 2006)

Three archetypal tourism destinations in the Greek mainland and islands were selected respectively (where mostly international tourists exist) and three, additional non-tourism-related, residential neighborhoods of Athens were visited. The three tourism destinations in the mainland and the islands were chosen based on the differences they present with regards to the kind of tourists they attract[3]. They were selected because one attracts more individual travelers; the other attracts mostly the institutionalized, packaged-type of travelers whereas the last one is large enough to accommodate all tastes and types of tourists. This is considered important because a significant part of the tourism literature acknowledges that there are different types of tourists who do not have the same attitude or purchasing behaviour (e.g. Wickens, 2002; Quan and Wang, 2004). As a result, FMCG offerings that can be found in each of the aforementioned areas can significantly differ in order to reflect this diversity of preferences.

iii.   *the retailing context of direct observation*

The retail structure in a country may vary so direct observation allowed us to specify the prime channels of distribution in tourism and non-tourism areas of the country. Three typical retailing channels that can be found in both tourism and not-tourism-related spots of Greece were documented and included: mini-markets, convenience stores and kiosks (super markets were excluded because they do not feature as retailing channels in tourist areas).

Several premises of these three types of outlets were, as mentioned, visited two times a year in all three areas. Brands that were found in these outlets during both seasons were documented and firms that sell them comprised the population of this study.

Table 2: The chronological, geographical and retailing context of direct observation

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[3] The three tourism areas were selected with the assistance of secondary data from tourism-related sources such as the extensive databases of the National Statistical Service and the Institute of Tourism Research and Forecasting in Greece

January & July		RETAILING CONTEXT		
		Kiosks	Convenience stores	Mini-markets
GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT	Areas of Domestic Population	4	4	4
	Areas of Individual Tourists	2	2	2
	Areas of Packaged Tourists	2	2	2
	Areas with a Mixed Portfolio of Tourists	2	2	2

Table 2 is built on the three different contexts and shows how many different retailing outlets, in which areas were observed twice a year. This method was a credible means to identify firms/brands that serve both locals and tourists alike and do not offer 'touristy' products exclusively or primarily focusing on tourists. A critical issue is that we chose firms, which sell brands that belong to product categories that can be found in virtually all markets where tourists come from. An example is an ice cream producer since ice cream is a product that belongs to a product category that can be found in virtually all countries where tourists come from. This method excludes products that are unique to the local market such as local spirits or traditional food products.

This is considered necessary because we weren't interested in unique local, traditional products which are standardized by default. After all, such products addressing to tourists

are mostly sold as souvenirs or gifts and do not aim to satisfy daily, routinised needs of people away from their home. However, the research idea was generated on the premise that tourists/foreign consumers keep having the same needs for food, beverage and cosmetics products abroad.

Moreover, this direct observation method was the only means through which we could exclude firms that are temporarily active in the market due to tourism. Such firms operate in the country either as sporadic, opportunistic importers of brands from countries that send tourists to Greece or as parallel importers. For such firms, too the issue of strategically positioning their products does not stand. Their only goal is to place their offerings in tourists' enclaves.

Therefore, through observing both tourism and non-tourism-related retailing outlets of the country, we managed to distill the population of interest and exclude:

- firms that sell products that do not reflect the properties of our conceptual framework (local spirits, local foods etc.)
- firms that are opportunistic players in the Greek market due to tourism (e.g. parallel importers)

The final outcome was the structured recording of all firms that address to both the purely domestic population during winter in the non-tourism-related areas of Athens and the tourist population during summer in prime tourist areas of the country. All firms of the population are major, established players in the FMCG sector and have a long-standing presence in their respective markets. The outcome of this direct observation technique was the definition of the population of firms that serve the domestic and visiting consumer populations. The population comprised of 157 FMCG firms:

- food firms that sell snacks, chocolates, chips, ice-creams etc.
- beverage firms that sell soft-drinks, beer, alcoholic drinks, milk, juices etc.
- fast-food chains

- cosmetics firms that sell shampoos, toothpastes, skin and sun lotions etc.

STEP 3: Purposeful Sampling – Towards the Identification of the 'Primary' Cases

This research must consider both local firms and the subsidiaries of multinational enterprises in Greece. This is necessary because ownership status is found to have a decisive effect on commercial strategies of firms (Theodosiou and Leonidou, 2003). The selected cases, therefore, were based on the purposive, maximum variation sampling logic (Patton, 1990) with an attempt to present the following characteristics:

i.   have a fairly equal representation of both domestic and foreign-affiliated firms in order to test the potential influence of several organizational factors as suggested in the international business literature e.g. firms' size (Whitelock and Pimblett, 1997; Culpan, 1989), its international business experience (Cadogan, Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2002; Cavusgil, Zou and Naidu, 1993), its orientation towards international operations (Zou and Cavusgil, 2002; Perlmutter, 1969) or the autonomy of the subsidiary for locally responsive strategies (Solberg, 2000; Ozsomer, Bodur and Cavusgil, 1991).

ii.   have a fairly equal representation of different sectors within the FMCG industry (food, drinks, cosmetics) in order to capture the effect, if any that different product categories have on strategic decisions of firms (Whitelock and Fastoso, 2007; Boddewyn, Soehl and Picard, 1986)

iii. have a competitive stance against each other since co-existing in the same industry/sub-sector. This allowed testing the potential effect of competition on firms' strategy-making (Rosen, 1990; Jain, 1989; Rose and Shoham, 2002). This criterion is very valuable for one more reason. It allowed a triangulation of responses by crosschecking them with competitors' views i.e. views as expressed by respondents co-existing in the same industry.

STEP 4: The Contribution of Secondary Data

Sources of secondary data for this thesis were mainly data with regards to the structure of the FMCG and tourism industries and greatly informed the theoretical and empirical parts of the research. Tourism-related sources included the extensive databases of the National Statistical Service and the Institute of Tourism Research and Forecasting in Greece who were very cooperative and supplied the researcher with all requested data. Moreover, the Hellenic Association of Travel and Tourist Agents and the Union of Greek Tourism Entrepreneurs, which represent the private bodies of the tourism industry in Greece, offered their help with data on the structure of their industry and the key players in the field. The researcher also consulted annual reports and descriptive data of the World Tourism Organization in the beginning of the effort so as to appreciate the scope of the expected contribution of the project and the generalizability of the outcome to different national contexts.

The FMCG industry is a well-established one in Greece; there is a wealth of secondary data information available to the researcher. Industry analyses by leading market research firms were used while the university database offered access to Euromonitor. Euromonitor provides what is generally regarded as accurate, complete and up-to-date data through its Global Market Information Database (GMID). GMID is an integrated on-line information system providing key business intelligence on countries, companies, markets and consumers that contains over a million demographic, economic and marketing statistics for 205 countries worldwide. The plethora of information, which even reaches the point of offering direct information for brands available in different markets, backed up the sampling logic and helped authors finalise the sample.

The largest 40 of the firms in the population were selected with the assistance of Euromonitor's sectoral analyses based on a maximum variation sampling logic (as analysed before) and were approached through telephone. After the necessary exchange of documents, drafts and clarifications, 23 out of the original 40 firms agreed to collaborate while the rest refused either for reasons of availability of time or due to the

official policy of the firm towards disclosing sensitive corporate data. Out of these 23 firms, 14 were eventually chosen based on the maximum variation sampling logic as described above. The classification of the final sample is the following (table 3):

Table 3: The sample

	Food Retailers	Packaged Food	Beverages	Cosmetics
Domestic firms	2	2	1	2
Foreign firms	2	2	2	1

The number was limited to 14 following guidance from the literature with regards to preferable sample size in qualitative, case-based research designs (following authors suggest the use of no more than 15 cases in a case-based, qualitative research) in order to prevent the analysis becoming unwieldy (de Ruyter and Scholl, 1998; Perry, 2001; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989). The final configuration of selected cases reflects theoretical concerns such as: 1) the consideration for theoretical saturation (Marshall, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) 2) the concern for a sample of maximum variation (Patton, 1990; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) that includes a balanced number of firms with different ownership status (foreign vs. local), in varied product categories (food, beverage, cosmetics) and competitive stance against each other.

Therefore, we saw that secondary data such as tourism-related sources (databases of the National Statistical Service and the Institute of Tourism Research and Forecasting) and industrial analyses by leading market research firms (Euromonitor) were used in order to:

i.   select the three archetypal tourism areas of the country that served as the context for direct observation and

ii.   select the 40 largest and most relevant (based on maximum variation) FMCG firms out of the population of 157 observed firms. These firms served as the

last step towards finalizing the sample of 14 firms that were used to explore the research question of the study.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Qualitative research is often seen as subjective and speculative (Silverman, 2000) and as a field with plethora of traditions that do not allow a clear-cut definition of its nature (Prasad, 2005). Such characteristics may be perceived by some as the paradigm's strength but on the other hand, they may be seen as hard criticisms that account for the limited number of qualitative studies that 'penetrate' major marketing and business journals (e.g. *Journal of International Business Studies or Journal of Marketing*).

As shown, one of the sub-disciplines of qualitative research that attracts much of this criticism is sampling due to the flexible and often convenience sampling logic many researchers adopt. However, this study attempted to showcase that qualitative research can employ a structured sampling methodology that, in this study, involves four iterative, interlinked steps:

- pilot studies towards specifying the population
- direct observation as a concrete means to accurately define the population
- purposeful justifications for the sampling criteria (i.e. maximum variation) that reflect literature-based theoretical concerns
- secondary data for i) narrowing down and finalizing the sample and ii) for the identification of the contextual background of the research.

However, conventional wisdom suggests that there are '*no universal methodological principles*' (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 231) by which one can identify the most critical or paradigmatic and overall, relevant cases for investigation. Our view though is that this is not a shortcoming of qualitative research but rather it is its strength. After all, case studies are usually not preoccupied with universality or generalization but what matters is the

practical, context-specific knowledge generated from them (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Thus, in order to reflect this importance of context, our effort has been to design *contextually fitting sampling principles* (rather than universally) i.e. a structured sampling framework that reflects the idiosyncrasies of each context. In our project, this was manifested in narrowing down our selection to 14 cases as a result of the four aforementioned steps.

In particular, we modestly believe that we contributed to the case-study methodological literature by stressing the value of pilot studies, direct observation and analysis of secondary data as invaluable steps towards rigorously identifying the most relevant cases for investigation. These processes complemented the ubiquitous 'purposeful sampling logic' and they altogether contributed to the validity of the research. At this point, we have to note that in spite of the apparent flexibility in purposeful sampling and its undeniable value, researchers must be aware of two particular types of sampling error that often arise in qualitative research (Patton, 1990):

- The first relates to *distortions caused by insufficient breadth* in sampling, which echoes our concerns with regards to ignoring/marginalising critical cases
- The second type of error relates to distortions *introduced by changes over time*, which echoes the need for an incremental and detailed understanding of the context in which potential cases reside.

Therefore, purposeful sampling alone is not always sufficient to tackle these threats and problems stemming from ignoring/marginalizing critical or paradigmatic cases may emerge. Through the application that was explained in this paper, we showcased why more steps are needed to complement the appealing logic of purposeful sampling and to address the potential problems that types of sampling error may bring.

Transferability of this contribution suggests that a combination of pilot studies, direct observation, purposeful sampling and analysis of secondary data may be of particular relevance for future researchers who might also want to consider them as tools for their sampling frames. For example, direct observation can, in many projects, serve as a

structured means to accurately define the population of interest (especially when this population is not immediately evident or distinct). Such a task is necessary given the blurry conditions engendered in contextually idiosyncratic markets; these conditions may make problematic the identification of relevant organizations as units of the population.

Our guiding principle for this *contextual appropriateness* was Miles and Huberman's (1994, p.5) suggestion that no study conforms exactly to a standardized methodological framework and each research project '… calls for the researcher to bend the methodology to the peculiarities of the setting'. Patton (1990) walks along the same line and proposes a "paradigm of choices" that seeks "methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality". This will allow for a "*situational responsiveness*" that strict adherence to one paradigm or another will not (p. 39).

We tried to apply these profound recommendations of leading authors in the realm of sampling processes by bending the sampling methodology to the peculiarities of our setting. In this respect, we devised our own strategy for cementing the final selection of the sample and we stress the need for the implementation of same contextually fitting practices by all case researchers. If some of these contextually fitting practices (e.g. the use of direct observation as a population-defining tool) are increasingly appropriate for many contexts then, we could claim that there may eventually be a path towards universally accepted sampling principles. For the time being, such a claim seems over-optimistic and thus, this work should be solely seen as a potential pathway and not as an effort to suggest largely applicable rules. Rather, our effort has been to convince about the additional plausibility of pilot studies, direct observation and secondary data as supplementary tools to the long-established and well-documented robustness of purposeful sampling. We posit that thoroughness and contextualisation in case study selection enhances the quality of case study evidence and highlights the contribution of case study research to the process of theorizing.

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