Why do students dislike research methods modules and what to do about it?

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Barbara Czarnecka, London South Bank University, czarnecb@lsbu.ac.uk

Maria Rita Massaro, University of Westminster, R.Massaro@westminster.ac.uk

<a>Abstract

This chapter discusses the challenges that lecturers face when teaching research methods to marketing students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (on taught courses), and proposes and discusses some solutions. We first briefly discuss literature published on the topic of teaching research methods, and then provide practical recommendations based on findings from the literature and on our own experience. The chapter concludes with recommendations of useful and user-friendly textbooks that could be used in teaching research methods to marketing students. This eclectic collection of ideas and recommendations is intended for those who are relatively new to teaching research methods, but we hope that those more experienced instructors will also find aspects of it useful.

Key words: research methods, marketing, teaching, teaching approaches

<a>Introduction

University students at all levels and across a range of disciplines, including marketing and consumer behaviour, are increasingly required to understand and interpret research, as well as produce it. Marketing research has been rated by employers as one of the most important area that students should have conceptual knowledge of (Di Gregorio, Maggioni, Mauri & Mazzucchelli, 2019; Wilton, 2008; Vriens, Brokaw, Rademaker, & Verhulst, 2019). Despite the acknowledged importance of proficiency in marketing research, anecdotal and research evidence indicates that research methods is not an easy subject to teach and not an easy subject to learn (Stern & Tseng, 2002). Ideally, deans, course directors and lecturers would avoid teaching research methods or having it on their curriculum to avoid dealing with student dissatisfaction and complaints. However, we do live in a world that calls for data to be used as an evidence base, making research methods skills and knowledge paramount to working in marketing, if not to conduct primary research, then for at least evaluating the quality of commissioned research and correctly interpreting the results.

Teaching research methods is like trying to answer the 'chicken or egg' question: should we teach methods of research first or should we teach methods of data analysis first? Based on our interactions with researchers and educators, we have learnt that there are three perspectives on teaching research methods. Some researchers maintain that one cannot learn research methods without first learning how to analyse data. Others propose that learning research methods first is a prerequisite to learning data analysis. Yet others argue that the best solution is to learn both simultaneously, and then to practice and learn again. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this chapter to argue which perspective is more effective, we are of the opinion

that research methods are best learnt by doing and practical instruction. In this chapter we discuss a number of topics which we believe could be useful for designing, preparing and delivering applied marketing research modules, namely: 1) existing literature on teaching research methods; 2) common challenges in teaching research methods; 3) the importance of teaching students how to analyse and evaluate existing research evidence; 4) big data and its importance in marketing research; 5) selected quantitative and qualitative research methods that could make teaching methods more accessible to students. We also discuss the importance of report writing and issues of ethics and responsibility in marketing research. Finally, we recommend a number of important readings that could constitute part of research methods courses for students of marketing. This chapter aims to serve as a general guide to those who teach or plan to teach research methods to undergraduate and postgraduate marketing students and is not meant to be exhaustive. It should be used alongside other 'standard' research methods textbooks.

<a>What researchers say about teaching marketing research: existing literature on teaching research methods

Much has been written about teaching research methods in social sciences in general (Cvancara, 2017; Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016) and to marketing students specifically (Lassk & Mulki, 2018; Stern & Tseng, 2002). The importance of research skills to marketing specialists has never been more significant than now, when marketers are encouraged to make decisions that are informed by data and evidence (Thyroff, 2019; Vriens & Vidden, 2019). Researchers (e.g., Di Gregorio et al., 2019; Vriens, Brokaw, Rademaker, & Verhulst, 2019) have studied what research skills employers find essential in graduates and found gaps between employers' expectations and graduates' abilities. This is partly due to how research methods is taught as a subject and partly due to the negative perceptions of research methods that students hold. However, teaching research methods has been described by many who study the pedagogies of this area as one of the most challenging tasks. In this section, we do not intend to provide a detailed literature review, but instead highlight selected solutions that we have come across in the literature on the subject.

Many point out the specific challenges that teaching research methods faces. Research methods courses (modules) are said to be the most intellectually demanding and delivering them is challenging, because methodological expertise is very fragmented and research methods content is evolving constantly (Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016). Most chapters or journal articles that propose solutions to overcome those challenges suggest that employing 'engaging' tasks (e.g. FitzPatrick, Davey, & van Oostrom, 2010; Wilson, Neeley, & Niedzwiecki, 2009) or experiential learning (learning by doing and subsequent reflection) (Thyroff, 2019) are the keys to effective teaching, but what does it really mean? Groessler (2017) provides an excellent overview of specific approaches and specific ideas that may be used to teach research methods. We recommend that paper for all who search for ideas to incorporate them into their research methods modules.

To make research methods teaching engaging, Graham and Schuwerk (2017) proposed the use of *Undercover Boss* (a television series in which bosses go undercover to experience the employees' perspective) to illustrate the concepts, tools and process of qualitative research. Lassk and Mulki (2018) recommended the flipped classroom approach, in which team-based

learning is applied, an approach recommended by many pedagogists (Chad, 2012). This student-centred approach, where small group exercises around a case study are given before the lecture and peer-to-peer interaction is encouraged, is also highly effective (Barraket, 2005).

To solve the problem of the fragmented methodological expertise of lecturers, team teaching is often proposed as an effective solution (Buckley, 1999). Team teaching involves a group of lecturers working purposefully, regularly and cooperatively, to help a group of students learn. The advantage of this approach is that the members of the teaching team are each expert on a specific research method. On the other hand, team teaching requires cooperation and coordination, and usually takes more time to implement.

In the following sections, we share our own suggestions (some tried and tested, others being ideas that we would like to implement in our teaching in the future) that helped us in supporting students to learn, understand and apply research methods to marketing problems.

<a>Common challenges in teaching research methods

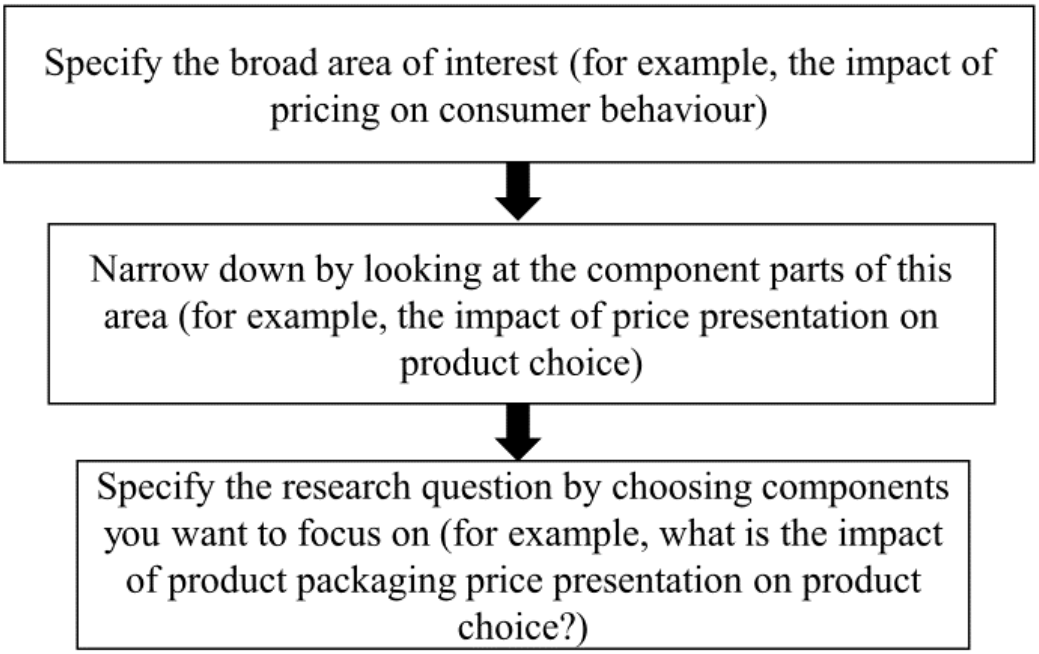
<b>Focusing too much on finding a 'gap'

Our experience suggests that lecturers often start teaching students how to formulate a good research question by encouraging them to 'find a gap' in knowledge through analysis of existing literature. Whilst this approach may be appropriate for doctoral level research in some cases, we argue that this is not a helpful approach in teaching students how to employ research methods to answer practical questions. Instead of focusing on 'finding the gap', students should be driven to come up with questions that help solve problems that marketers can encounter in practice. At undergraduate and postgraduate levels, this first step of research (i.e. coming up with a topic) should not focus on finding a gap and 'filling' the gap. The focus should be on learning how to answer questions and find solutions to problems by using data and doing research. Following on from this, it is important to demonstrate to students how to develop and state feasible and specific research question. Hence, it is crucial that lecturers make students (and often themselves!) aware of the difference between academic and applied research. The classic academic approach to research involves 'finding a gap in knowledge and filling it', while the effective managerial approach to research involves identifying a management/marketing problem and gathering information to solve it. Our experience demonstrates that teaching research methods from the perspective of finding solutions to problems is more effective with undergraduate and postgraduate students, than following the 'find the gap' perspective. It is indeed also more useful to students who will be in roles that focus on solving practical challenges, rather than building knowledge to fill gaps.

For undergraduate and postgraduate students who face working on a dissertation or a capstone project, it is often a challenge to specify a focused research question. A majority of students develop research questions that are too broad and find it difficult to narrow them down. Many sources offer advice on how to develop focused research questions (e.g. GMU, 2020). Based on those excellent resources and our own experience, we found that following the funnel approach (Figure 1) to developing research questions is helpful to students. Usually, students start with a very broad topic, for example, the role of pricing in consumer decision-making. They should be encouraged to unpack what those two variables consist of and what the variations of them are. For example, pricing may cover countless variations, including types of

pricing, price presentation, and pricing of different product categories; and consumer decision-making consists of several stages each offering opportunities for investigation. Once the unpacking is done, students may start focusing their research question so that it is narrow enough and feasible to address in a given timescale. This funnel approach will work only if students devote their attention to reading published research studies (journal articles, market research reports, government research reports). We found that the biggest challenge in this process is overcoming students' reluctance to read recommended research papers and research reports. To help with this, lectures should carefully select research reports (be it in the form of journal articles or other research reports) that are approachable/easy to understand and gradually introduce more complex reports.

Figure 1: Funnel approach to developing research questions.



<b>Teaching without providing examples

Another common mistake is to teach research methods 'dry', that is without framing it as part of a practical/applied problem. It is hard to believe, but many professors still do not teach or explain why a method is used, or how a particular method or set of data can help to answer a practical question or solve a pragmatic problem. The best solution is to support learning with practical examples that are worked through patiently. For example, if the lecture focuses on questionnaire design, a good method is to use an existing customer satisfaction survey or a survey that was used to collect data for market segmentation. Online survey platforms offer examples and templates of a wide variety of questionnaires - for example, Qualtrics offers a free account that comes with a number of questionnaire templates that could

be used for teaching questionnaire design (Qualtrics, n.d.). Another approach is to use existing databases (see Table 2 for examples of secondary data sources) which often provide access to questionnaires that were used to collect the data. For example, the European Commission's website is a good source of surveys used to examine consumers' attitudes in Europe (National questionnaires, n.d.).

<b>Challenges of teaching quantitative research methods

Quantitative methods are usually viewed by students as more difficult than qualitative research methods because they include working with numbers. But that does not have to be the case. One way that pedagogists suggest this challenge can be addressed is to first choose a topic that students will find interesting, and a method that is easy to teach and understand. For example, quantitative content analysis of social media posts and images to count the number of certain words or appeals used in posts, images or users' comments, may be a good way to introduce students to simple quantitative methods. Another quantitative method that may be very enjoyable for students to participate in, and for lecturers to implement in a classroom setting is an experiment. Our experience shows that simple experiments (testing effectiveness of two different designs of advertisements, or testing packaging concepts) can be easily implemented to show students fundamental principles of experimental design. The Economics Network, a website run by the University of Bristol and supported by a number of British universities, can serve as a good source of ideas for running experiments in a classroom (The Economics Network, 2020).

<a>Teaching to systematically review literature: the importance of teaching students how to analyse and evaluate existing research evidence

Our combined experience of teaching research methods and supervising research projects (e.g. capstone projects and dissertations) at various levels (undergraduate, postgraduate taught and doctoral) suggests that teaching students how to review existing evidence in the form of literature on a particular topic is not often given enough attention. Students are often asked to review literature, but little guidance (beyond the general 'be more critical') is given on how to do it. We recommend that the principles of systematic narrative literature review should be stressed. Systematic narrative reviews provide a complete summary of the current literature relevant to a research question or a practical problem, and can be of significant use to marketing professionals. In many marketing roles, students will have to decide what existing evidence to review to analyse a practical problem they are facing, and they must understand the importance of systematic review of current literature, research reports or documents, in order to answer a particular question. Whilst there is no known framework specific to marketing that can guide the process of systematic review, lecturers can borrow from other fields and simplify frameworks such as PRISMA-P (e.g., Udall, de Groot, de Jong, & Shankar, 2020). Below we provide a simple framework that can be applied to systematically review literature, internal documents or research reports (Table 1). This framework can also be adapted to review internal documents or internal reports, in the context of a very pragmatic research problem.

Table 1: Framework for systematic narrative literature/evidence review in marketing

Criterion	Questions
Period that the review covers	What time period will the review cover?
Search terms used to identify studies	What search terms are used to identify studies? Which search engines are employed to search for sources?
Qualifying sources	Which sources qualify for the review?
Inclusion/exclusion criteria	On what basis are studies included or excluded from the review?
Author(s) of the study	Who conducted the study? What organisations are the authors associated with?
Research questions	Which research question(s) did it focus on?
Research methods	What methods were used in the study? What are the limitations of these methods? Were they appropriate for the stated research problem?
Sample	What are the sample characteristics? How large is the sample? How was the sample selected?
Findings	What do the findings say? Do they solve the stated problem?

<a>Big data and its importance in teaching and practicing marketing research

Marketing specialists, especially those working in social media marketing or retail, will be faced with the challenge of working with large volumes of data. Whilst fields such as data science may be beyond the scope of standard research methods modules for marketing courses, it is important that students are exposed to those terms and are familiar with the concepts (Fayyad & Hamutcu, 2020). Analytics is a section of data analysis that focuses on the discovery, interpretation and communication of meaningful patterns in data. The data is usually available because technology allows organisations to collect data. For example, loyalty cards (such as the Tesco Clubcard) or social media platforms, enable organisations to collect large

volumes of data which are then used to discover patterns related to the selected behaviour(s). Marketing students should be at least familiar with some tools of analytics, such as Google Analytics, Clicky (https://clicky.com/), or Open Web Analytics (http://www.openwebanalytics.com/). There will be new analytics tools available at the time of publishing this book, but students should be familiar with one of them to understand what data are available and how it can be used to make decisions.

Each social media platform offers its own analytics tools, but marketers can also employ social media management platforms that help manage and track activity across several platforms. Social media management tools track and analyse how users interact with a company's social media profiles. At the time of preparing this chapter, the most used are Hootsuite and Sprout Social. More advanced research methods teaching could incorporate the use of application programming interfaces (APIs) to collect data from social media platforms or other online platforms.

Moreover, in the market research industry, the discussion around big data often includes social media data, and calls for an integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis to extract more meaningful information and provide a context to the interpretation of numbers (Ewing, Owens, & Cassidy, 2016). Whilst analytics is important, a more qualitative approach to analysis of social media data is also needed. For example, one of the methods discussed below, social media listening, is a qualitative approach to observing what people say and how they behave on social media. We discuss the use of social media in research in one of the subsequent sections.

<a>Selected quantitative and qualitative research methods

<b>How to teach statistics?

Teaching statistics to marketing students is often challenging and many authors have suggested solutions before about how to successfully teach statistics to non-specialists (Smith & Martinez-Moyano, 2012; Mustafa, 1996). There are academic journals, such as the *Journal of Statistics Education*, devoted to providing research-underpinned advice on how to teach statistics to various groups. Many excellent papers (e.g. Sowey, 1995; Martin, 2003) provide numerous pieces of advice on how to make teaching statistics effective. Here, we do not want to repeat the recommendations of these pedagogists (who know more than us about teaching statistics), but would like to add three more approaches that we found useful in teaching statistics. As statistics is an inherent part of quantitative research methods, students who choose to specialise in such methods will also have to learn at least the basics of statistics.

First, we believe that engaging students with statistics reported in the media may be helpful in sparking their interest in learning the ropes behind those statistics. Statistics are reported everywhere in the news media, in management reports and in market research reports (Bell et al., 2020). For example, the recent Covid-19 pandemic can serve as an illustration of how important it is to understand how data are collected, reported and presented. Many other examples exist that instructors can tailor to their own context. Second, we would like to recommend specific textbooks that present statistics in a fun and straightforward way. Specifically, we recommend books by Professor Andy Field (https://www.discoveringstatistics.com/). Professor Field has authored a range of books that

introduce and explain statistics, and the use of a number of statistical packages that we have used in our teaching (and learning!). Third, it is important that students learn how to use statistics packages, such as *SPSS*, *Mplus* or *R* (for those more advanced), or are at least aware that such tools exist.

As neither of the authors of this chapter is a trained statistician, we would like to refrain from making further recommendations on how to teach statistics and highly recommend the literature of those who are more suitable to do so. In addition, team teaching which we have mentioned earlier in the chapter, is also a suitable solution for those lecturers who are not quantitative researchers.

<b>Use of secondary data

The analysis of secondary data plays a vital role in marketing, for example, by supporting initial problem analysis or informing marketing models (Latta & Clark, 2016). Most marketing roles will involve analysing some kind of secondary data, be it sales figures or internal order documents, or previous research reports intended for a different purpose. Secondary data can include both quantitative and qualitative sources. Secondary data can be used in several ways: to demonstrate how research has been done previously, to demonstrate interesting relations between variables or to teach data analysis using publicly available data sets. Students should be able to evaluate the limitations of using secondary data and understand how such data can be used to support decision-making. The availability of publicly available secondary data creates numerous opportunities for research methods lecturers to teach students about the benefits and possible applications of such data. We give some examples of secondary data sources (Table 2) that can be used in teaching. Such data sets are a very good tool to teach students about study units, survey design, target population, sampling frame, sample size and response rate (Bell et al., 2020).

Table 2: Examples of secondary data sources for use in teaching research methods.

The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes	https://www.acspri.org.au/aussa
Find open data	https://data.gov.uk/
Public Attitudes Tracker	https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-attitudes-tracking-survey
UK Data Service	https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/
Statistical data sets	https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets
UK Data Archive	https://www.data-archive.ac.uk/

London Datastore	https://data.london.gov.uk/
Office for National Statistics (ONS)	https://www.ons.gov.uk/
WVS Database	http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/
ICPSR	https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/pages/
QualiBank	https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/QualiBank

<b>Teaching quantitative research methods

Quantitative research methods are usually employed in either descriptive or experimental designs. A descriptive study only establishes associations between variables; an experimental study aims to establish causality. One of the most well-known, and perhaps overused tools of quantitative research, is a questionnaire (Pew Research Center, 2020). Whilst ubiquitous, and many students admit to being exposed to such research as participants, this does not translate into the ability to design good questionnaires. Our experience with survey design teaching so far suggests that two approaches work very well: 1) ask students to bring along examples of questionnaires that they have come across; 2) expose them to a badly designed questionnaire as respondents. These two exercises allow students to evaluate the type of questions (open-ended versus closed-ended) and the structure of the questionnaire, as well as learn about common mistakes in survey design (overlapping categories for age, double-barrelled questions and imprecise response scales, to name just some).

Other quantitative methods that could be incorporated into teaching are experiments. Experiments are often used to test the effectiveness of communication approaches (for example, to test how liked adverts are) or to ascertain how consumers react to price differences. Simple experiments can be performed in class, e.g. dividing students into control and experimental groups (ideally assigning the students randomly), exposing each to the control/experimental stimuli and measuring their responses. In fact, experiments are one of the easier methods to teach and can be planned as class activities - taking students through each stage of designing and reporting experiments (Harris, 2008). Materials (experimental stimuli and response scales can be sourced from published experimental studies (e.g. Kalliny, Ghanem, Shaner, Boyle & Mueller, 2020; or Gunasti, Kara, Ross Jr & Duclos, 2020 are useful examples of experimental studies that can be replicated in a classroom setting); and from Open Science databases, such as the *Centre for Open Science* website (https://osf.io/) where lecturer can find data sets, experimental materials and questionnaires from previous studies.

<b>Teaching qualitative research methods

Qualitative research methods are an essential part of the marketing student's research toolbox. However, qualitative research methods and data analysis skills are often overlooked, or mentioned only superficially, when learning about research methods for marketing (Albinsson et al., 2018).Teaching qualitative methods to marketing students means that lecturers need to overcome students' prejudices and a series of challenges, namely: a) changing the biased view of subjectivity; b) changing the perception that qualitative research methods are easier than quantitative methods. Below we discuss those challenges and suggest some solutions that are based on our experience.

Most students will claim to know the difference between quantitative and qualitative research methods but their perceptions are often not supported by knowledge. One of the views held on the quantitative-qualitative divide is that the first is objective and the latter is subjective. Newcomers to research methods have a common misconception: believable and trustworthy research consists of and delivers numbers; all the rest is an art and purely subjective. Instead of trying to convince them of the opposite, or inviting them to join the centuries-old and never-ending discussion on qualitative versus quantitative (Ercikan et al., 2006), a successful approach for us was to provide real examples and exercises about the vital role that interpretation plays - even with numbers.

One tried and tested approach that we can recommend is to ask students to find examples of quantitative research results on any mainstream topic taken from two different newspapers (or websites, or magazines). For example, in the context of the UK, two newspapers that will present the same issue in most likely very different ways are *The Guardian* and *the Daily Mail*. Students can compare the interpretations of different journalists, and deconstruct the numbers and percentages, and the means of presentation. This is an excellent seminar activity. Students usually reach the conclusion that numbers and so-called 'objective' data can also be 'spun', i.e., interpreted and presented in many different ways. Usually politicians are very productive in providing material for these discussions, so it will not be difficult to find relevant examples.

Even examples from pop culture domains can be a playful and engaging way to support this point. Inspiration for quotes can be taken from comics. There are plenty of examples in *The Manga Guide to Statistics* (Takahashi, 2008) or cartoons such as those featured in *The Cartoon Guide to Statistics* (Gonick & Smith, 1993*).* Quotes such as "31% of fatalities in car accidents happen because of alcohol. This means that 69% of death happens to those who are sober. So it is safer to drive when drunk" (quote adapted from Dylan Dog comics series) are an excellent example to use in class to encourage students to think about limitations and boundaries of numbers, and how interpretation of numbers can be very subjective. In our experience, such exercises were very effective in taking students toward deductive reasoning to conclude that numbers are not always unequivocally interpreted, because interpretation plays a role - even in statistics.

Demonstrating and discussing a range of response scales and scaling techniques, such as Likert scales or semantic differential scales, is also useful to demonstrate how quantitative measurement of latent variables can be very subjective. At first sight, the response scales appear as objective and immutable in students' eyes. We take a closer look together at proxies and scaling techniques used. At this stage, students usually identify the scales as hard and objective science. However, once students are invited to discuss what each point on these scales

means to them, they often come to a conclusion that the categories 'strongly disagree' or 'strongly agree' may take on very different 'intensities'. In the context of marketing, customer satisfaction surveys can serve as an excellent example - does 'extremely satisfied' for one person mean the same to another person? These exercises teach students caution in approaching and relying on quantitative data derived from surveys in which such response scales are used.

Despite the firm and deep-rooted conviction that quantitative is superior to qualitative research, most students surprisingly opt for 'words' when selecting their methodology, i.e. they choose qualitative research methods. This happens because qualitative design is believed to be easier, as it does not imply any mathematical skill set. This is the second important misconception that lecturers need to bring to students' attention: qualitative research is not easy and there is a huge amount of messiness to deal with. This recommendation is systematically neglected by students and we all end up reading about common mistakes: a) difference between data and findings chapters, which are replicated in wordy and redundant discussion; b) lack of transparency, such as when personal opinions are obscurely drawn from interviewees' answers and proposed as clearly emerging from data; c) rushed writing up because students believe they can always 'waffle around' any finding based on qualitative research.

Therefore, a crucial point is to highlight to students that analysing qualitative datasets requires an interpretative skill set and follows a rigorous procedure, for which they must learn appropriate techniques. To support this point, it would be useful to run simple workshop exercises on thematic analysis. One way to do this would be to provide students with printed interview excerpts and ask groups of them to stick all the excerpts that have something in common on a single board (theme) and find a keyword which summarises the commonalities (code). Different groups of students will be likely to classify the excerpts in different ways and stick them on different boards. This is an effective visual approach to demonstrate that interpretation can vary, but if the analysis and classification process is made clear and explained, we should all reach the same or very similar conclusions (for more detailed description of such data analysis, please refer to Miles & Huberman, 1994). In other words, students need to be taught the meaning of 'rigour'. Coding of data is also applied in other contexts. For example, content analysis studies of advertising involve coders analysing and coding in order to identify advertising themes expressed through images or text. Whilst identifying such factors as gender of models feature din advertisements is mostly a very objective process, identifying cultural values, or emotions portrayed in advertisements is more subjective (e.g., Czarnecka, Brennan & Keles, 2018; Czarnecka & Mogaji, 2020).

The key takeaways from these exercises are that the process is long, requires time, and it should be rigorous and systematic. This approach also allows lecturers to demonstrate the difference between data and interpretation of findings, and discussion.

<b>Teaching qualitative research methods in a digital era

Market researchers have adapted their methodological stance to the digital world and many of the conventional qualitative methods can also be applied online, together with new emergent approaches (Cluley, Green & Owen, 2020). Online qualitative research, also called 'e-research', is "an umbrella term to describe methodological traditions for using information and communication technology to study perceptions, experiences or behaviour through their verbal or visual expressions, action or writings'' (Salmons, 2016). The advantages of doing e-research within marketing classes are numerous: a) quick access to data - the opportunity to

access information quickly; b) marketing-focussed research questions - the possibility to investigate research questions which are more marketing related, such as consumer perceptions, consumer sentiments, or customer complaints and satisfaction, but also to collect data on the company's storytelling, campaign evaluation, and (more generally) to gain market insights to inform marketing decisions or to gain competitive intelligence; c) familiar environment - social media interfaces make the research process less tedious, and provide a context in which students are more keen and comfortable to work in; d) broader range of available data - at undergraduate level, especially, we discourage our students from undertaking primary research, as it is costly and time consuming; e) variety of research techniques and design - data are collectable through social media, and netnographic studies, observational research, focus groups and in-depth interviews are all possible. An extended range and variety are also offered in terms of the type/format of data - not only text, but also photos, drawings, images, audio-visual presentations or podcasts, with a narrative or conversational structure for all of these in the same place.

<c>Social media monitoring or social listening: which one?

One example of digital research is social media research. Such research includes any type of research where data are collected through social media, which has the advantage of making a large volume of consumer data and user-generated content accessible to students. Promoting social media as a learning tool creates a more student-centric classroom (Greenhow, 2011), along with many other pedagogical benefits; moreover it is a great tool for doing online research. Two main approaches to social media research are through monitoring or listening. Even if they are often used interchangeably, they refer to different types of activities.

Social media monitoring is the act of monitoring social media platforms for information relevant to a given organisation (Hootsuite, 2020). This activity allows one to crawl (also referred to as trawling) social media to search for specific hashtags and words, to monitor the sentiment of a conversation around the brand, and to find out who is talking about the brand, how many times, how and why. The majority of the data that can be collected are qualitative, but some can also be quantitative. Social media listening, often labelled 'social listening' by market researchers, and recognised by academic researchers (Reid & Duffy, 2018), is defined as an approach that does not focus only on brand conversation, but analyses the conversations around an industry as a whole and any topic related to a brand (Sprout Social, 2020). To sum up, social media monitoring is more reactive while social listening is a proactive strategy, but both are suitable for collecting qualitative data in a simple and engaging way.

When teaching qualitative methods, social listening techniques and commercial social media monitoring tools can be used in combination with netnographic research to study consumer habits (Cheung & McColl-Kennedy, 2015; Harwood & Garry, 2015; Skålén et al., 2015), (see section on netnography). The advantage is that a netnographic approach can add richness and depth to the depth and scale of social media listening of mass consumer realities (Reid & Duffy, 2018). Social media monitoring and listening can be performed using social media application programming interfaces (APIs). In seminar classes or for workshops, instructors can simply let students use words, phrases and a brand name to search *Instagram* or *Twitter*, or to use Google Trends, Google Alerts or web crawlers. This is a basic search that can be done manually and is only possible on a small set of data, which nevertheless needs thematic coding from the students. When it comes to the analysis of larger datasets, and/or

listening to and monitoring different platforms, social media listening tools are necessary. There are plenty of commercial tools, such as *Hootsuite, BuzzSumo, TweetDeck, Social Studio, Talkwalker, Socialbakers, Brand24* and *Brandwatch*, which support identifying social mentions and conversations around a specific topic or brand. If a social media listening tool subscription is not available, students can use the free trial version. Together with the advantages of gathering all the information in one place ready to be analysed, premium subscriptions can offer data analysis features as thematic analysis, trend analysis and the creation of word clouds. Manual storage and coding of data can be done through Microsoft's Excel and OneNote, creating a local folder where files can be saved, but this is definitely old-fashioned and boring for students. In class, an NVivo add-on called NCapture (which can be installed free of charge on Google Chrome or Internet Explorer) can be employed to download web pages as PDFs or to store information downloaded from social networks to create a database. Some content or thematic analysis can be done manually by students. If available, *CAQDAS NVivo 12 Plus* allows the import and analysis of different types of qualitative documents, e.g. transcripts, videos, audios or images from interviews or focus groups, as well as data from the internet or social media such as YouTube. However, social media listening tools have an advantage over NVivo, as they offer the opportunity to track back the source of the social media post and enrich the dataset with information on individual community users.

There is a variety of possibilities among research methods which can be applicable in a social media context. For the scope of this chapter, we consider only those methods that might garner some more consensus and interest among marketing students. Of particular note, and in addition to social listening and social monitoring, are netnography and sentiment analysis.

<c>How to teach netnography

The word netnography, a portmanteau of internet and ethnography, is used to study behavioural and cultural practices, languages, rituals, values and preferences of groups and individuals online. This is the 'intelligent adaptation' (Kozinets, 2015, p. 3) of the most traditional ethnography, combining specific sets of research practices, such as archival and online communication work, participation and observation, with new forms of digital and network data collection, analysis and representation (Kozinets, 2015). For teaching purposes at undergraduate level, a good way is to stage it in four steps which feature in any ethnographic research process (Kozinets, 2002): 1) select an appropriate online community; 2) gather and analyse the data in an ethical way; 3) ensure the correct interpretation; 4) triangulate the findings.

A further elaboration of the netnographic inquiry is made of twelve roughly temporal and interactive levels (Kozinets, 2015). However, within a taught research method module with time constraints, we found that presenting the entirety of the process was unmanageable. Secondly, being a reflective and interpretative approach, it is also complicated for students to master the technique in its entirety. Nevertheless, this research method is an excellent opportunity for students to learn aspects of ethnography, online research and content analysis. In class, a major focus is put on the selection of communities. We always invite students to reflect on the type of research question and unit of analysis they want to investigate. Sampling is key, and requires accuracy and rigour, even if we carry it out on social media. It is crucial

that students understand the difference between two potential units of analysis: tribes and communities.

A brand community is a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Tribes, despite having the same set of characteristics, do not have a brand focus, and if consumption is part of their activities they rarely consume brands and products without adding to them, blending them with their own lives and altering them - turning themselves into 'consumer tribes' (Canniford, 2011; Cova et al., 2007).

These two concepts can be used in class to help students refine their research question. While brand communities are the most popular term within marketing, tribes are more suitable when addressing broader research questions, looking at a product category rather than focussing on a brand. Students must make clear that selecting a brand community means researching current and existing customers; opting for a tribe as a unit of analysis can provide answers about potential customers. Analysing the website *PurseForum* (https://forum.purseblog.com/), a tribe of passionate handbag fans, can address questions such as 'What are the rituals and the purchasing preferences/behaviours/perceptions of bag consumers?' A brand community type of research question can sound like: 'How do people passionate about handbags perceive Louis Vuitton's new canvas bag?' A seminar exercise could be set up to identify a relevant community using search engines, or even hashtags and keywords on social media, taking the students toward a reflective discussion on research objectives and effective sampling.

Netnography is a very flexible method, so it offers opportunities for teaching, because data can be collected using a variety of forms (interviews, archives, journals, photos and audio-visual information) and it is a perfect method to apply to social media platforms. From the instructor's perspective, netnography is an effective example of a method that can be directly applied to *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram* and *Pinterest*, exploiting pedagogical advantages of carrying out online research. *NVivo* works perfectly with social media material (Wilk et al., 2019) through the *NCapture* feature. Apart from the synergies stemming from the technological aspects, there is research advocating the usage of a 'holistic' methodological approach (Reid & Duffy, 2018), which systematically combines netnographic techniques with social media listening tools. For example, netnographic field notes can be used to explain the social media listening data; a netnographic immersive cultural observation can help interpret social media results and overcome the limitations of quantitative social listening results. The netnographic approach allows access to consumption groups which are vital and valuable units of investigation for all our prospective marketers. Indeed, during their studies marketing students might have already learnt how to create and manage social communities, so it makes perfect sense to teach them how to research consumption groups and study their characteristics in order to gain considerable marketing insights. If we correctly frame the netnographic method as an addition to the student's employability skill set, this could even raise the interest and motivation of our audience toward research methods.

<a>Teaching report writing and articulation skills

It is important for students to learn how to articulate, that is describe and explain how a given research project was carried out and what the data means. This step can only be successfully completed if students are comfortable with and proficient in the research skills they are using. Research reports should be focused (emphasising the important information), accurate (the report should not mislead the reader), clear (not confusing the reader) and concise (not wasting the reader's time). As always, we recommend providing and working through examples of good and bad research reports of various types, such as students' papers, research articles and research reports (e.g. Mintel). Another approach that we found effective was to ask students to write an outline of a research report in the first class of the module, ask them to save it and then compare it to the research report they had to produce at the end of the module (the same exercise can be applied to teaching survey design). This allows them to clearly see two things: 1) their learning and progress in a module, and 2) the importance of learning and understanding research methods and data analysis, in order to be able to produce a research report.

<a>The importance of teaching responsibility in business and management research

Last but not least, business and management research, as well as research in fields such as psychology, has come under scrutiny for being irrelevant to societies and businesses (Losada, Martell, & Lozano, 2011). Many initiatives now try to encourage research that is responsible and thoughtful, carried out to benefit organisations, communities or societies (see, for example, the network *Responsible Research in Business and Management* (https://www.rrbm.network/). Whilst there is no doubt that applied research conducted by researchers in organisations is certainly useful to the organisations, we wonder what messages are delivered to students conducting their undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations. Students rarely go beyond the standard required ethics application, in which they have to consider the ethical aspects of the data collection stage, but they are not required to think about how their choices at that stage of their education contribute to businesses, organisations or societies. Ethical challenges are part of the everyday practice of doing marketing research. Hence, lecturers are responsible for teaching students about research ethics and research regulations.

<a>Conclusion

If we had to conclude with only a few sentences to give a definitive piece of advice, it would be that successful research methods teaching relies on careful teaching preparation, which rests on the assumption that a student knows nothing about research methods. We think applying these principles to teaching research methods should yield positive results in students' understanding of methods and concepts, and lead to high levels of student satisfaction. As you do your teaching preparation, do not assume that students are aware of certain concepts. When structuring your work, realise that less is more - we found teaching fewer methods or concepts, but with greater attention, results in students understanding research methods better and their increased satisfaction with modules. Whilst we have shared a collection of our own eclectic experiences with teaching research methods, it is important to remember that a research methods curriculum should be designed to take students through the following structure of the marketing research process: (1) understanding business issues; (2) defining a marketing research problem; (3) designing marketing research; (4) analysing data and interpreting the

results; (5) translating results into actions; (6) interacting effectively with clients. It is impossible to become an expert in all methodological approaches within a standard module that lasts one or two semesters. Therefore, we also recommend that students (after acquiring the basics of both qualitative and quantitative methods) should then specialise in selected methodological approaches and selected areas of marketing, e.g., survey methods in the area of customer satisfaction or experiments in marketing communications.

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