

BRACKETING: A REVIEW OF STATUS OF PRACTICE IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH

Abstract

With origins in phenomenology, bracketing has been established as an important exercise for qualitative researchers in all domains. There is highly cited reference material on how a researcher should do bracketing at different stages of research, and yet, there is a lack of instances of bracketing in management and organisations research. To examine reasons for variation in practice of bracketing across domains, this study employs a multi-study approach across two studies. In study 1, it takes a systematic stock of the qualitative research published in the management domain with a focus on observing if and how bracketing is done. In study 2, interviews of eight contemporary qualitative researchers have been conducted to triangulate findings from study 1 and develop a comprehensive understanding of what, why and how of bracketing for management domain to make three major contributions. First, it establishes the status in practice of bracketing across wide variety of domains. Second, it integrates understanding of bracketing for management researchers on 3 broad parameters: meaning of bracketing, relationship of bracketing to paradigm and reviewer expectation towards bracketing. Finally, the paper shares instances of bracketing from management domain to help future researchers observe bracketing in action in management domain.

Keywords: Bracketing, Qualitative research

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INTRODUCTION

Bracketing involves “investigator’s identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how they view the data” (Fischer, 2009, p. 583). The term bracketing finds its origins in phenomenology and is fairly established as a sacrosanct part of a qualitative researcher’s endeavour to bring rigor and thus, has multiple highly cited guides for researchers (LeVasseur, 2003; Gearing, 2004; Fischer, 2009; Tufford and Newman, 2012; Chan, Fung and Chien, 2013) (Table 1). However, there is an overall shift in researcher’s seriousness towards this exercise and it appears that this exercise has been reduced to a mere ceremonial act (Fischer, 2009). At the same time, the calls for and acceptance of qualitative research methods in the management domain has been increasing (Bansal and Corley, 2011), and so has been the emphasis on transparency. Editors and researchers concur that transparency is critical when it comes to qualitative research (Open Science Collaboration, 2015; Moravcsik, 2020; Harley and Cornelissen, 2022). This includes transparency about why, where and how data was collected, stance of researchers in relation to data, their ontological perspective and explanations of reason behind analytical strategies (DeCelles, Howard-Grenville and Tihanyi, 2021). While the instances of bracketing (explained in detail later) are abound in other domains (such as nursing, clinical psychology, anthropology), there is a clear lack of it for management domain. Given the importance of bracketing for qualitative researchers (Tufford and Newman, 2012), multiple possibilities arise. Does management domain bypass bracketing? If not, how do management researchers do bracketing? What is the expectation of reviewers with respect to bracketing? To understand and unearth, we undertook a multi-study approach across two studies to analyse the incidence of bracketing in practice and identify reasons for variation across domains. In doing so, this paper makes three major contributions. First, it establishes the status in practice of bracketing across wide variety of domains. Second, it integrates understanding of bracketing for management researchers on 3 broad parameters: meaning of bracketing, relationship of bracketing to paradigm, reviewer expectation towards bracketing. Finally, the paper shares instances of bracketing from management domain to help future researchers observe bracketing in action in management domain, in limited instances that it does.

Insert Table 1 Here

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Origin & Conceptualisation

The word phenomenology comes from Greek words phainomenon (Smith, 2018) and logos. Phainomenon means appearance and logos means person. Phenomenology is defined as a reasoned inquiry which discovers the inherent essences of appearances (Stewart and Mickunas, 1990). Husserl, who is seen as founder of phenomenology, was actually a trained mathematician (Beyer, 2022). Leveraging his training there, he set out to re-establish science of philosophy. He saw phenomenology as a way to see the world anew as it really is rather than how it is constructed. He urged to look beyond constructions, assumptions and preconceptions and unearth the essence of experience under investigation. And this was possible by what is known as reduction, epoche or bracketing (Gearing, 2004). Though these terms are not the same but they are used interchangeably. Hence, the process of tapping into this experience and looking beyond

preconceptions of the researcher is called bracketing. Various researchers at various points in time have proposed different definitions of bracketing (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 Here

Researchers see this variety in definition of bracketing as a strength as it facilitates support for an array of approaches to bracketing (Tufford and Newman, 2012). An important difference in definition of bracketing lies in whether or not to ‘suspend’ the researcher’s presuppositions and other things that they need to bracket. This is referred to in the literature as one of the major tensions in concept of bracketing and divides researchers into two schools of thought. While Husserl encouraged looking beyond preconceptions, other set of researchers argued that bracketing out preconceptions was neither desirable nor possible (Heidegger, 1962; Cohen and Omery, 1994; LeVasseur, 2003).

Methods of bracketing

Tufford and Newman (2012) suggest hands-on methods to do bracketing. These include keeping a reflexive journal, a memo or conducting bracketing interviews. The researcher can keep the reflexive journal even before defining the research question (Ahern, 1999). This helps identify the preconceptions as the research progresses. A memo can assume various forms within the research process. It can manifest as theoretical notes, which elucidate the cognitive processes involved in conducting research. It can also take the shape of methodological notes, which clarify the procedural dimensions of the research. Additionally, memos may encompass observational comments, providing an avenue for the researcher to delve into their emotional responses and sentiments concerning the research endeavour. Furthermore, researchers can engage in bracketing interviews with a colleague, serving as a valuable interface between the researcher and the collected data. These interviews serve the purpose of uncovering themes that might impede the researcher's ability to genuinely listen to respondents or trigger emotional reactions in the researcher that could prematurely halt further exploration of the research topic.

Even though different researchers have emphasised the importance of bracketing for different stages of research, Tufford and Newman (2012) proposed an integrative framework to understand ‘when’, i.e., at what stage of research one should engage in bracketing. For instance, at the time of project conceptualisation, researcher’s own prejudice because of their social location may interfere with analysis. Bracketing allows surfacing of previously hidden memories or unconscious preconceptions. At the time of forming research question, a key challenge is to come up with questions that encourage in-depth engagement of participant rather than bring researcher’s assumptions to fore. Bracketing at this stage lets the researcher identify unbiased questions that facilitate free exploration. While collecting data, depending on data collection method, challenges may be amplified if researcher’s emotions interfere with process. Memos and notes can aid deeper engagement with data and aid in iterative process of raising additional questions in subsequent interviews. Data analysis stage is again marred with multiple challenges, such as seeing what participants said instead of what researcher wants to see. Here, suspending one's preconceived notions can allow for the recognition of the intricate details and subtleties in participants' responses. Finally, at the time writing, unreflexively imposing dominant narrative in mind of researcher may obscure alternate narratives in the data. Bracketing can prevent researcher from

giving more weight to some narratives than others. At this stage, it is important to understand that nuances of this process of bracketing do not come to fore and part of input to the process. Absence of narratives from researchers in management domain is another gap that this paper will address by compiling an array of suggestions from contemporary qualitative researchers on how bracketing can help researchers at different stages of research. An extension of this section is ‘how much’ should a researcher share with the reader. Here, the disclosure refers to sharing of position of author with respect of design of study and data analysis (Fischer, 2009). It is assumed that author is cognizant of the assumptions that they may have owing to their position and how that may have influenced data analyses and representations and findings, thus, making a conscious effort to put them aside. On one hand, a short disclosure of researchers' engagement with the subjects may suffice. On the other hand, researchers may disclose fully to at least their dissertation committees so that they can guide them accordingly. In the next section, we will look at some examples of how researchers in other domains have done bracketing and what purpose does that serve apart from achieving objectivity.

Bracketing in organizational research

Compared to qualitative methods in sociology, anthropology and psychology, management domain may still be considered as opening its arms to these methods wherein the rigour of the research is of prime importance for any leading avenues of publication (Lamont and White, 2008; Small, 2013; Lubet, 2018; Pratt, Kaplan and Whittington, 2020). This includes transparency about why, where and how data was collected, stance of researchers in relation to data, their ontological perspective and explanations of reason behind analytical strategies (DeCelles, Howard-Grenville and Tihanyi, 2021). While the instances of bracketing are abundant in other domains (such as nursing, clinical psychology, anthropology), there is a clear lack of it for management domain. Given the importance of bracketing for qualitative researchers (Tufford and Newman, 2012), we pose the following research questions:

- How do researchers in management domain conceptualize bracketing for their work?
- How is bracketing done at different stages of research in management domain?
- What is the reviewer expectation from researchers with respect to bracketing?

We believe that bracketing to facilitate transparency for all stakeholders has to be of critical focus for studies in our domain at multiple levels: researcher, reviewer and reader.

METHOD

To examine reasons for variation in practice of bracketing across domains, we employed a multi-step approach across two studies. In study 1, we took stock of the qualitative research published in the management domain with a focus on bracketing i.e. if and how it is done. In study 2, we interviewed 8 contemporary qualitative researchers (4 OB&HR, 3 Marketing & 1 Finance) trained in top tier education institutions and currently employed as full-time faculty in premier institutions.

STUDY 1

Measures and Samples

Scopus provides access to a higher number of indexed journals compared to other databases hence, it was used to identify articles for this study (Centobelli and Ndou, 2019). “Qualitative*” was used as a keyword. The use of Astrix helped in retaining articles on the subject that would otherwise be missed due to the use of a different variation of the keyword by the researchers (eg. qualitative

research, qualitative method, qualitative analysis, among others). The keyword had to appear in either the title, abstract or the list of keywords provided by the authors or the journal. Since our objective was to examine if and how bracketing is carried out in qualitative research articles in the management domain, the database was further limited to the literature on - Business, Management and Accounting. Further, the data was limited to articles from peer-reviewed journals that were on the FT 50 journals list and published in the English language. The search was further limited to articles published in 2022 and 2023 (the search was carried out in November 2023). This yielded a total of 58 articles out of which 2 were review articles and hence were eliminated from the review thus, leaving us with a total of 56 articles.

Once the corpus was finalized, we then went through each article to see if bracketing was mentioned or carried out in its essence. We also kept an eye on what the authors have done to ensure truthfulness and to eliminate or address the effect of their presuppositions on the research.

Further anticipating scarce instances of bracketing in the articles published in the FT50 journals, we drew another set of twenty-one qualitative research articles published across domains (management, sociology, psychology, nursing, etc.) that have carried out bracketing. This sample of articles served as a comparative set to witness bracketing in action.

Findings

The 56 research articles presented a bouquet of methodologies deployed by the researcher's, case studies (eg. Bourguignon & Coron, 2023; Palakshappa et al., 2023; Schembera et al., 2023), simple qualitative research (eg. Jooss et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022; Śliwa et al., 2023) that relied on interviews were the most common. Ethnography (eg. Hong & Minbaeva, 2022; Prasad & Shadnam, 2023) and grounded theory designs (eg. Johnson et al., 2023; Reina et al., 2023) were also deployed. Data for these studies was collected in multiple ways. Primary data was collected through interviews (often semi-structured) and field observations. Archival data was frequently used as the secondary source for data collection and was useful in triangulation.

The word “bracketing” did not find a place in any of the articles. Researchers used existing theoretical foundations to direct data collection and analysis (Vaast and Pinsonneault, 2022). As expected with the research articles using the case study method, attempts to offer a thick description of the case context were made. Thick descriptions also focused on the procedural details thus providing readers with a glimpse into the thought process of the researchers (eg. Hart & Baruch, 2022; Risberg & Romani, 2022; Traeger et al., 2022). Triangulation of data was evident in most of the papers and was done to eliminate bias creeping in due to reliance on a single source of information. The coding process was iterative. During the analysis to ensure intercoder reliability, a sample of transcripts was coded by multiple researchers independently by the researchers, the codes were then discussed, and debated and a consensus was arrived at (eg. Butterfield et al., 2023; Zhu & Delbridge, 2022). A small sample of papers did share the researchers' positionality in a dedicated section (eg. Einola & Khoreva, 2023; van Eck et al., 2023). These papers were epistemologically interpretivist in nature. A few others, invoked Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Corbin & Strauss (2015), outlining their strategies to ensure truthfulness and, accept and address the possibility of their personal biases affecting the research (eg. Crane et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Saxena, 2023).

The second set of articles we examined, focusing on how bracketing is employed and how researchers address their subjective biases, demonstrated diverse approaches. In all these articles, a dedicated section or paragraph addressed either 'researcher reflexivity' or 'positionality.' Mrozowicz-Wrońska et al. (2023) utilized bracketing interviews during the preparation stage, interviewing all interviewers using the same guide designed for interviewees to facilitate the bracketing of their

experiences. Additionally, during data analysis, the researchers scrutinized their codes to ensure they were rooted in data rather than biased attitudes.

Recognizing that the positions researchers hold significantly impact their engagement with the research field, the dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship, and the interpretation of participants' experiences (Pullen, 2006; Zulfiqar and Prasad, 2021), reflexivity emerges as a critical aspect of the research process. A deliberate inclusion of section on researchers' reflexivity or positionality allowed researchers to acknowledge their privilege or social status, acknowledging potential influences on the research.

Bracketing serves not only to attain pure objectivity but also to recognize our active role in shaping evolving shared understandings of our research topics and methodologies. Its primary aim is to enable us to discern our viewpoints and subject them to scrutiny, sometimes leading to a deliberate shift in perspective. Another objective of disclosing and elucidating our personal backgrounds and viewpoints is to allow readers to adopt the researcher's viewpoint, potentially opening them up to fresh insights. Furthermore, these readers might provide feedback on the author's interpretations. Additionally, readers can intentionally adopt an alternate viewpoint and develop alternative interpretations of the data. Typically, readers are impressed by the rigor of a study that highlights identified assumptions that were later rectified during the research process (Fischer, 2009). In this section, we look in detail at the instances of bracketing as shared by researchers from other domains.

Bracketing has been commonly employed and discussed in phenomenological studies, which often delve into unique situations and contexts such as research on HIV-positive individuals (Mulqueeny and Taylor, 2019), patient and partners journey in diagnosis of Non- Hodgkin's Lymphoma (Wall *et al.*, 2004), counsellor bereavement (Swinden, 2023), experiences of living with terror (Borell, 2008), exploration of private security guards' lives (Priya, 2017), chronic diseases in the elderly (Bahtiar, Sahar and Wiarsi, 2022), premarital counselling (Moeti, Koloi-Keaikitse and Mokgolodi, 2017), music festivals (Jackson, Vaughan and Brown, 2018), and the narratives of LGBTQSA individuals on panels (Crawley and Broad, 2004), among others.

These contexts, with the exception of music festivals, present particular challenges as they often involve themes of death, grief, and various forms of illness, both life-threatening and chronic. What adds to the complexity of these studies is that they frequently originate from the researchers' own personal experiences. For instance, Mulqueeny and Taylor (2019), in their exploration of the lives of HIV-positive individuals, were themselves HIV positive, while Crawley and Broad (2004), in their research on how LGBTQSAs share their stories on panels, were panel members who had publicly come out as lesbians. Wall *et al.* (2004) that focussed on lived experiences of patients and partners during diagnosis of Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma had their own lived experience of caring for patient with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma. Similarly, Moeti, Koloi-Keaikitse and Mokgolodi (2017) had undergone pre-marital counselling, which fuelled their research questions. Having personally experienced these situations and being part of the similar social circles due to their rare experiences, the researchers found it relatively easy to identify participants for such rare instances.

To summarise, bracketing in extant research is explicitly carried out when the context are related to emotional experiences, pain, death or grief. Further, the motivation of the research lies in researchers lived experiences of such contexts. Hence, it becomes imperative for the researchers to clarify their position and attempt to eliminate biases originating from their presumptions. Next section highlights how these objectives are met by the researchers in the manuscripts.

Fisher *et al.* (2017) argue that it is the duty of researchers to provide readers with an opportunity to step into their shoes and perceive the phenomenon from their perspective. Researchers

often disclose their motivations right from the outset, sometimes by explicitly stating them, and in cases like Crawley and Broad (2004), by sharing their diary entries. This sharing enables readers to empathize with the researchers and view the phenomenon through their lens. Priya (2017) shared his common background with the participants, being from the same state and having migrated from there. He also acknowledged the power differential resulting from his educational qualifications and higher economic status compared to the participants. The act of disclosure itself is a form of bracketing.

While disclosure informs readers about the researchers' standpoint, it is imperative to eliminate any biases that may arise from their experiences. They must ensure that the research findings are rooted in the participants' experiences and not overly influenced by their own. Researchers employed various methods of bracketing to achieve this. They took measures to ensure that participants were unaware of their past experiences. Additionally, researchers engaged in reflexive writing to set aside their own experiences and prevent them from influencing their interactions with participants (Priya, 2017; Mulqueeny and Taylor, 2019; Swinden, 2023, 2023). In some cases, researchers wrote memos after analysing each transcription (Swinden, 2023). Bahtiar, Sahar and Wiarsih (2022) conducted trial interviews in the presence of supervisors. This process allowed them to reassess their questions and responses, leading to improved framing of questions.

Undergoing similar experiences as the participants while simultaneously ensuring that their conduct is not swayed by these experiences can be emotionally draining. To safeguard against the potential impact of their experiences on the research and to prioritize their own well-being, both Mulqueeny and Taylor (2019) and Swinden (2023) sought support through bracketing interviews. While the former engaged in discussions with their research associates, the latter interacted with their supervisors. These various methods, including reflexive writing, memos, and bracketing interviews, were employed in various combinations. However, it appears that in cases where the research topics are particularly sensitive and entail emotional labour, bracketing interviews become crucial.

Furthermore, there are instances where bracketing is mentioned in the study, but the specific methods used are not detailed, as seen in examples like Moeti, Koloi-Keaikitse and Mokgolodi, (2017) and Jackson, Vaughan and Brown (2018). Such approaches may come across as more ritualistic than serving the intended purpose of the exercise.

Bracketing is applicable in educational contexts as well. Researchers like Thomas and Sohn, (2023) and Hay and Samra-Fredericks (2016) have found that employing bracketing can provide novice researchers with transformative experiences, leading to a deeper understanding of oneself. Engaging in bracketing techniques, particularly through interviews, equips them with skills for conducting effective bracketing interviews that cannot be fully acquired through mere reading (Thomas and Sohn, 2023).

Continuing education programs primarily focus on honing a diverse range of skills. In the field of medical practice, where the foremost requirement is self-care amidst the pressures of routine clinical work, instructors can integrate the practice of "bracketing" as an ongoing technique in the educational process. This aids in developing the ability to observe, take responsibility, and address emotional responses (Zannini, 2014).

During their doctoral fieldwork, students may encounter distressing incidents. Neglecting the impact of these events in order to meet institutional demands was found to have negative consequences within a few months, as highlighted by researchers (Hay and Samra-Fredericks, 2016). Therefore, in addition to utilizing bracketing, it is crucial to recognize emotional experiences and promptly seek support when necessary.

In summary, bracketing not only serves to prevent research from being influenced by researchers' assumptions but also facilitates self-discovery and ensures emotional well-being.

Conclusion

To conclude, a brief review of qualitative research in FT50 journals indicates that bracketing does not ‘appear’ to be critical to conducting qualitative research. Researcher biases are taken care of by relying on existing theoretical foundations to guide their research and using debates and discussions to arrive at codes through consensus.

However, the second set of articles indicates ample importance to the researcher’s positionality or reflexivity as they deem the researcher’s position critical to access to the field and researcher-participant relationship. The articles that were part of this set used a phenomenological approach and the topics revolved around gender and identity. So, is it the case that bracketing is only critical to the research that uses a phenomenological approach? Or does it also hold importance for qualitative research in general? The reasons why bracketing does not hold a significant position in qualitative research articles from the management domain in top journals remains a puzzle that needs to be solved.

STUDY 2

Measures & Samples

We interviewed 8 contemporary qualitative researchers (4 OB&HR, 3 Marketing & 1 Finance) (see Table 3 for details) trained in top tier education institutions and currently employed as full-time faculty in premier institutions of India. Following questions are an indicative list of questions that guided our discussions with these researchers:

1. As a qualitative researcher, one needs to identify his/her vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how they view the data. How do you do that? What are the methods you have used?
2. Have there been any revelations about your preconceptions while using any of the methods? Can you share some of these revelations?
3. What are the challenges involved with different methods deployed for mitigating preconceptions?
4. Do you also inform the reader of your position about study?
5. How do reviewers ensure that a researcher has been able to be unbiased in the research process? What kind of clarities, questions, and specifications that they ask for?

The interviews were conducted in-person with 3 participants and on video call with 2 participants. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded to identify themes around research questions that guided this study. The final analysis was triangulated with evidence from literature to present integrated learning.

Insert Table 3 Here

Findings

We share the themes of discussion which have been organized on three broad parameters: meaning of bracketing, relationship of bracketing to paradigm, reviewer expectation towards bracketing.

Meaning of bracketing. Literature does not present a consensus on definition of bracketing and the two broad schools of thought led by Husserl and Heidegger also vary (Tufford and Newman, 2012). The researchers that carried out bracketing for their research alluded with Heidegger as they expressed difficulty to not bring themselves in the research. The researchers using interpretive paradigm believe in social construction of knowledge and hence, explaining one's position becomes important. They believe that the presuppositions cannot be suspended totally but need to be acknowledged.

"it is not that I am keeping myself aside and, uh, doing the work. It's actually I am bringing myself in and doing the work. So, I have to explain what is that myself that is brought in and how much I have realized about myself." (Participant - #3)

Furthermore, we also find that interpretive researchers believe (Participant #6) that bracketing is how Husserl defines it, and consequently, as guided by epistemological position, believe that they are looking at subjective truth subjectively, and hence, side with Heidegger and depend on reflexivity. This is followed by their discomfort with using the term 'bracketing'.

"I would reveal to the audience (researcher's identity, social class, religious identity, educational identity) and audience will make a decision about or understand what this research is all about." (Participant - #6)

Researchers coming from positivist paradigm, however, were less acquainted to the term bracketing. However, after they were made familiar with the concept of bracketing, they shared their understanding of the term that was applicable to their research. We think that one reason for this could be that positivist research has a template that researchers can follow.

"To be honest, I have not come across the term (bracketing)" (Participant - #4)
"I did not hear of this term" (Participant -#8)

Interestingly, while researchers in our interviews differed in their understanding of the term bracketing, most cited guides on bracketing link the concept to qualitative research in general and not to a specific paradigm or methodology only.

"The whole idea, even in the post-positivist, is that you have to represent the view of the participant, who you are engaging with (...) and you have to be aware that you are doing that and not imposing your own view." (Participant -#7)

Bracketing and paradigm. The conduct of bracketing depends on the paradigm chosen by the researchers for their research projects. It is expected in interpretive research and not in the positivist research. Scarce use of bracketing in management research is possibly due to lack of researchers using interpretive paradigm. Since management research is largely dominated by the positivist research bracketing does not come across as a common practice.

"It's fairly rare for you to actually see conversations about bracketing because, you know, there is simply not enough people working in that space, nor are there enough publications which occur in that space, right?"(Participant - #4)

"It is an interpretive practice- critical interpretive methodology. So there you are expected to show (positionality)" (Participant - #3)

The positivist researchers however are not immune to presumptions. These presumptions have their origins in theory and extant research rather than personal experiences. Such presumptions also have potential to affect research as researchers may selectively observe and record observations that align with the theory. In such a scenario how this mutilation is prevented in the research process becomes important.

"I am a positivist qualitative researcher, meaning I go with presumption of a theory." (Participant - #5)

The positivist researchers deploy various measures to prevent the research getting affected by their presumptions or ensure truthfulness of the data. These measures start with being conscious of their theoretical lens. The questions designed for the participants must not reflect these presumption. Hence, framing questions that do not pre-empt a particular response is critical. Unbiased questions may sometimes present findings that are conflicting with the theory. Such findings help in further refinement of the theory. Further, triangulation is another way presumptions are kept at bay. Measures such as inter-coder reliability are shared with the readers to keep the bias out.

"When I walk into the company to collect data, I will never ever use and have never used theory language, number one. I never tell them that this is what theory says what do you think? This is pre-empting." (Participant - #5)

"Is there a documentary evidence of, you know, client getting back and saying that yeah, this person did this and this had this impact for us. So, we always try to do that triangulation." (Participant - #4)

Experience of researchers with journal reviewers. Bracketing is not expected in research carried out from the positivist paradigm nor are readers expected to know the researchers position on the topic. The editors however have responsibility to ensure objectivity and truthfulness. To achieve this objective, editors expect thick description of the context and strong evidence to corroborate findings, often done through triangulation.

"Thick descriptions are very much desired when it comes to reviewers. Ultimately, they want more conviction in what we have provided. And that conviction can only arise by our thick description and providing a lot of evidence from multiple sources." (Participant - #4)

"As a reviewer, if I feel the analysis is described well-enough, or the whole process is described well-enough, you may assume that they (authors) have taken care of these matters." (Participant - #7)

It becomes clear in our discussions that only a small part of overall research (due to space constraints or so) reaches the reader. Reviewers and editors however ask for multiple revisions (if needed), strong evidence, data triangulation, and ample evidence until they are convinced of the rigor of a qualitative study.

“If you have not clearly mentioned, the editors ask to write about how you were reflexive in this entire process.” (Participant - #6)

“I know some of my colleague, they faced a situation, when the reviewer request(ed) to recollect data, and that this one-year work.” (Participant -#8)

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Our research started with the broad question, ‘what is the status of bracketing in management domain?’. To answer this question, we deep dived into last one year’s publications (N=58) in FT50 journals of management domain as well as interacted with 8 contemporary management researchers. With no mention of bracketing in our chosen set of articles from FT50 journals and comparing that with aa set of articles that did bracketing, it becomes clear that management as a domain has kept itself aloof from the concept. A possible explanation may be the maturity of qualitative methods (percentage of qualitative research articles in FT 50 journals) a in management domain when compared to others such as sociology and anthropology. A more likely explanation that we could arrive at after triangulating findings from both the studies is there is a clear link between researcher’s epistemological position and their awareness, and consequent employment of bracketing (Table 4).

Insert Table 4 Here

(Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991) suggest three ‘paradigms’ for qualitative research: positivist, interpretive, and critical. And a researcher can choose a method independent of this philosophical position. For instance, case study research can be positivist, interpretive, or critical.

Positivist researchers generally assume that reality is objectively given and can be described by measurable properties. These properties are independent of researcher, thus giving way to a ‘subject-object’ relationship between the observer and the observed (Myers, 2019). Interpretive researchers assume that reality is socially constructed and thus, do not predefine dependent and independent variables. They attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them. Interpretive research and critical research are similar in some ways and majority of assumptions that guide interpretivist research are applicable to critical research. However, critical research is a distinct paradigm as the researchers here assume that social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced and reproduced by people. The main task of critical research is thus seen as being one of social critique, whereby the supposedly restrictive and alienating conditions of the status quo are brought to light. Researcher here assumes that the current social conditions prevent the achievement of enlightenment, justice, and freedom (Myers, 2019).

After a researcher decides their philosophical position, they decide on the method of research which are, but not limited to, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, case study

and so on. In our interactions with researchers, they kept bringing our focus to the philosophical assumptions that guided their research and while these three broad schools might have their own shades, the degree of bracketing for researchers and reviewers did vary between these three.

For researchers using interpretivist paradigm, their research questions, and their lens to examine these questions are derived from their interactions with the society. When it comes to bracketing, believe that bracketing is how Husserl defines it, and consequently, as guided by epistemological position, believe that they are looking at subjective truth subjectively, and hence, side with Heidegger and depend on reflexivity. This is followed by their discomfort with using the term 'bracketing'. This manifests in written manuscripts in the form of a separate section on 'positionality', or 'researcher's reflexivity' or sometimes disclosed as part of 'methodology' section. The positivist researchers on the other hand draw gaps from the literature and use theoretical lens to answer them and hence feel that bracketing as done in other research domains is not required for them. While the word "bracketing" is not used by the researchers conducting qualitative research from positivist paradigm, they do indulge in practices that achieves objectives of bracketing i.e. preventing research from getting affected by the researchers' presumptions. Researchers using positivist paradigm do not express positionality, but they attempt to eliminate or reduce bias through design of interview guide, triangulations of data and offering thick description. However, it is worth mentioning that when the researchers do mention the biases that they tried to control for, such as, social desirability bias, retrospective bias and so on. But there was no explicit mention of any method to ensure prevention of personal bias from entering research.

The instances of bracketing in extant research are from some unique contexts where emotional pain, grief and death are common features. Further the motivation of research has its origins in researchers lives experiences. We suggest that bracketing as carried out in domains of sociology, anthropology and psychology may become relevant even for research carried out from positivist paradigm in management research if the context is related emotional pain, death and grief and the research idea arises from the researchers felt experience.

The current study, though it provokes thought, also has several limitations. Firstly, we understand that five is a very small number of interviews to make generalisations about a domain. But the variation in responses puts forward a case for further research. Second, it is possible that there are further deeper variations in how bracketing is done across domains in management which we could not account for given the small sample. Finally, due to lack of overall number of researchers pursuing critical research, we could not interview someone from that position. Theoretically, great number of assumptions of interpretivism apply to critical research but it would still be valuable to observe differences that might arise due to difference in standards that guide publication acceptance.

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TABLES

Table 1
Highly cited key articles on bracketing that serve as guides for researchers.

Reference	Title	Scope of Article	Number of Citations
Tufford and Newman (2012)	Bracketing in qualitative research	History of bracketing, methods of bracketing, proposed conceptual framework to elucidate role of bracketing at different stages of research	4421
Fischer (2009)	Bracketing in qualitative research: Conceptual and practical matters	Meaning & examples of bracketing, author's disclosure, role of bracketing for research rigor	1126
Gearing (2004)	Bracketing in research: A typology	Differences in bracketing elements basis research approach adopted	1311
Chan, Fung and Chien (2013)	Bracketing in phenomenology: Only undertaken in the data collection and analysis process	Description of experience of doing bracketing while undertaking a phenomenological research	1962
LeVasseur (2003)	The problem of bracketing in phenomenology	Proposing a new definition of bracketing	1001

Table 2
Major definitions of bracketing proposed by different researchers.

Researcher	Definition
Drew (2004)	Task of sorting out the qualities that belong to the researcher's experience of the phenomenon
Gearing (2004)	Scientific process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance their presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon
Starks and Trinidad (2007)	Researcher's honesty and vigilance to their own perspective, pre-existing thoughts, and beliefs, and developing hypothesis
Fischer (2009)	Investigator's identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how they view the data

Table 3
Participants responses on various dimensions with respect to bracketing in their domain.

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8
Area	Marketing	OB & HR	Marketing	OB & HR	Finance	OB & HR	OB & HR	Marketing
Nature of Works	Not Clear	Interpretivist	Mostly Positivist, (Interpretivist collaborations)	Positivist	Positivist	Interpretivist	Interpretivist	Not Clear
Awareness of Bracketing	Non-continuous notes with researcher	Continuous conscious aware-ness	Not asked by collaborators	Not aware	Aware of bracketing as a concept though not jargon	Continuous conscious awareness	Would do whatever is necessary for bringing out the truth of respondent	Not aware
Reviewer Expectation		Author's positionality, Rigorous process and thoroughness expected	Does not expect reviewer to ask	Expect rigour - Triangulation, Memo's, transcripts, Code creation through consensus	Stronger evidence, thick descriptions, triangulation in evidence	Author's positionality, Rigorous process and thoroughness expected	Author's positionality, Rigorous process and thoroughness expected	Triangulation, Thick description

Table 4
Proposed framework by authors on variation in bracketing as per epistemological position of researcher.

	Positivist	Interpretivist
Relation with Field	Subject-Object	Subject-Subject
At Researcher Level	a. Cognisance of the theoretical lens b. Design of interview guide	Awareness of position
At Reviewer Level	Demand for thick description and strong evidence through triangulation	Thorough understanding and disclosure of positionality
At Reader Level	Convey measures undertaken to ensure truthfulness of the data and rigour of the analysis (such as inter-rater reliability)	Appropriate disclosure in final document on the relation of researcher to the data (such as in methodology section or footnotes)