

The Role of Theory in Qualitative Research and Practice: The Case of Grounded Theory

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Abstract:

The study seeks to examine the role of theory in qualitative research and practice placing emphasis on grounded theory. Qualitative research methodology was used for the study after a careful review and examining of literature. The study revealed that the most well-known and dependable rigorous qualitative methodology in the social sciences has proven to be grounded theory. It is recognized that the development of a theory describing social interactions requires methodical techniques to data collecting, analysis, and conceptualization. In qualitative research, it is the methodology that encourages credibility rather than validity and reliability. The advantages and qualities of grounded theory are beneficial to society. Grounded theory has been incredibly successful at collecting data, analyzing it, and creating ideas based on the researchers' actual experiences. Grounded theory can be intuitive, engaging, and can gather a lot of data. It also encourages creativity and provides a methodical approach to the examination of qualitative data. Following a set of methodical steps is required when applying grounded theory in order to produce successful qualitative research findings. The generated theory in grounded theory guides data recollection and reanalysis to assess the significance and applicability of the data collected. It is also known that generalization is a less commonly studied and regarded as a complex and contentious issue in grounded theory. In general, researchers that employ grounded theory do not begin with a hypothesis. However, the interaction between data collection, data analysis, and consequential theory contributes to the development of the theory.

Keywords: Grounded Theory, Qualitative Research, Theory, Social Research

1. INTRODUCTION

In social research, theory is commonly employed to describe specific social events and situations. Theory can be seen as the result of an alliance of ideas that have altered and cohered over time. For understanding and assessing research of any kind, whether it be in the social sciences, the natural sciences, theories act as a conceptual framework. Theories are essential when seeking to explain social phenomenon. Theories provide concise explanations of how complex reality is. Social investigation is guided and concluded by theory. Theory is used to interpret and direct how research and study findings are used. In social research, theory presents the subject of inquiry from the beginning to the end. Social research might seem better and have a stronger intellectual foundation due to theories. As a result, theories are derived from logic rather than empirical evidence and operate theoretically. Theory provides context for predictions and might motivate current or prospective research. There should be a theoretical underpinning for all studies, regardless of the topic area. The use of theory

is necessary for qualitative research. The use of theory is advantageous in all stages qualitative research process. The degree to which a theory is involved in social science research varies depending on the types of methodologies and techniques used to carry out the research. Theory can be defined as a system of ideas constructed with the intention of explaining a particular phenomenon. In other words, a theory can be defined as its ability to provide a framework on which researchers can base their actions and an explanation for why particular events occur or do not occur is how a theory is characterized, according to the idea underlying it. In the social sciences and in qualitative research, theories can be used to organize knowledge, illuminate knowledge gaps, and explain what has already been seen and why it occurred (Gay & Weaver, 2011). Theory directs research and helps to distinguish between evidence that is relevant to the topic and evidence that is not (Chilisa & Kuwulich, 2015:1).

The frameworks required to develop ideologies and schools of thought are helped by theories. Theory is a methodical justification for observations that have to do with a certain facet of life. Theories are not facts. This suggests that other researchers can question and modify any idea through exploratory studies that aid in developing research-related questions. There are three ways to analyze the role that theory had in a study when performing research. First, theory serves as a paradigm, which greatly aids in our comprehension of the research design. Thomas Kuhn defined a paradigm as a description of a style of thought that is shared by scientists in solving problems in their domains in order to express commitments, beliefs, methods, outlooks, and other things that are shared throughout a discipline (Cited in Chilisa & Kuwulich, 2015:1). Second, theory is considered as lens through which researchers might view situations or occurrences that serve as the focus of a research project or analysis. The third strategy is to think of theory as information that might come from our investigation. The paradigm of theory is concerned with the ontology, or what we take to be true of that reality, or rather the epistemology. Last but not least, it examines the methodology otherwise known as the means by which we obtain evidence and the tools we employ to study these backgrounds (Gay & Weaver, 2011: 26; Chilisa & Kuliwa, 2015: 1).

There are many issues that the paradigm need to be addressed. Some of the issues concentrate on ontology; what we believe to be in existing, they concern the core ideas that the person has about the social world and how it relates to people. There are social realities that we believe are social constructs, constructed by people from certain social, cultural, and historical backgrounds, and there are social realities that we believe they exist independently of how mankind conceptualizes and understands them. What constitutes trustworthy and reliable knowledge is a subject of epistemological inquiry. They concentrate on the connection between the observable circumstances and the meaning-interpretation process. How researchers can create dependable and accurate information is one of the key issues in epistemology. Here, the emphasis is on the methods researchers can use to generate accurate knowledge. The final round of queries focuses on the methodology, asking how researchers may get information to put our beliefs to the test. Here, the process for data gathering and the tools that can be utilized to collect the data becomes the main focus.

The rest of the paper was organised as follows: Section two discusses the methods. Section three focus on the discussions. The final section throws light on the conclusions.

2.0 METHOD

The research methodology used in the study was the qualitative research approach. In writing this paper, the researcher examined published articles in order to evaluate critically the role of theory in social research placing emphasis on qualitative research. Grounded theory, one of the most widely used qualitative research theory has been selected for the study. The study was supported by scholarly searches on the role and application of theory in qualitative research. The study examined the role of theory in qualitative research and practice. Literature has been reviewed and examined on the role of theory using grounded theory as it has been used by other successful researchers.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Role of theory in Qualitative Research

The main goal of a qualitative study is to make sense of society through studies into social phenomena and interpretations of the meanings associated with them. The fundamental tenets center on subjectivity and more precisely on interpretations and the development of a theory both during and following the study, and the inductive nature of the process (Pierce, 2008: 45; Taylor, 2005: 101-103). When doing an inductive study, a researcher first gathers data pertinent to the subject of interest, analyzes that data, looks for recurring patterns, and then develops a hypothesis based on that theory (Blaikie, 2009: 154). A theory act as a set of concepts and the supposed relationships among these, a framework that is intended to describe or model something about the world, according to Maxwell's definition of theory in qualitative research in 2005 (p. 42). Researchers are guided by the systematic organization of concepts to explain or forecast a certain occurrence while deciding on approaches and thinking about the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2002).

Beginning a study, researchers could have a "tentative theory" based on their own observations or ideas from academic literature about the phenomenon they are researching (Maxwell, 2005, p. 33). A tentative theory is transformed into a theoretical framework by fusing key ideas, theories, and literary works with presumptions, expectations, and beliefs. This framework guides the rationale, creation of research questions, selection of methodologies, identification of potential threats to the validity of the findings, and interpretation of those findings in a study (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2002). In addition to framing research studies, elucidating phenomena, or speculating on the viability of hypotheses, theories can be developed through empirical study. For instance, grounded theory is a popular method for creating theories by repeatedly evaluating emergent hypotheses against the available data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The latter should not be confused with a theoretical framework because it is a synthesis of important literary issues and lacks notions that provide problems, techniques, and validity a rigorous perspective (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). While some have used the terms interchangeably, Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009) made a distinction between theoretical and conceptual frameworks, stating that while the former draws from specific theories with a goal toward its investigation, the latter draws from a network of concepts relevant to the study's goals while looking for an emergent theory.

Application of Grounded Theory in Qualitative Research

A generic research technique called grounded theory enables the rapid creation of theories from facts that have been gathered using rigorous, ethical, and powerful research techniques. It is an inductive methodology that methodically gathers and examines evidence in order to construct theories about human behaviour from the viewpoints of social welfare. Grounded theory is one of the most often used qualitative research methodologies worldwide. It highlights the value of learning about human behaviour through a process of exploration. From its inception in sociology, grounded theory has spread to a wide range of other disciplines and is now a fundamental component of qualitative research approach. Grounded theory is the most often utilized qualitative technique in research (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). It is a modernist ontology-based, methodical, inductive research process aimed at developing theories that are based on actual data and nature of reality. In grounded theory in qualitative research, data are methodically and iteratively collected, then analysis is performed to create theory. In doing qualitative research, grounded theory must identify social and psychological processes that can be precisely understood, accounted for, and anticipated through the development of the fundamental theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). When a researcher infers patterns, themes, and categories from the data using their interpretation of the data, inductive reasoning takes place. As a result, fundamental theoretical assumptions are made in light of the evidence supporting inductive nature (Thomson et al., 2014). Grounded theorists offer novel epistemological and ontological perspectives that are relevant to a specific period, group of people, culture, setting, and circumstance. Grounded theory has evolved significantly throughout time and has helped to legitimize qualitative research (Glaser, 1998; Ralph et al., 2015; Bryant, 2021).

The Basic Principles of Grounded Theory

In essence, the grounded theory approach shifts focus from empirically confirming the theory to conceptualizing and developing the theory (Khan, 2014). It only discusses the inductive method of doing research, not the deductive method (Glaser, 1992b). In using grounded theory, it is necessary to follow specific systematic stages in order to successfully accomplish qualitative research outcome. These stages include establishing the research topic, selecting the data sources, data collection, data analysis and research conclusion (Hussein et al., 2014). In addition to these systematic stages, it is very important to start qualitative research with the core concepts in grounded theory which require the researcher to freely adopt a simple, broad study focus as opposed to any preset research themes (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher is advised to delay literature reviews as much as possible in order to preserve the highest level of neutrality regarding the concepts and body of work that has already been done (Glaser, 1978). Again, researchers can compare their own changing codes over the course of the same data collection and for the same data item. Here, it should be taken into account that, the aim of the researcher is to produce properties for each category in the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Unlu, 2018). Additionally, researchers can compare their evolving codes continuously within the same data item and throughout the same data set (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Unlu, 2018). In grounded theory under qualitative research, it also require researchers to adhere to the memo-writing rule, which enables researchers to explain their intentions or the rationale behind the use of particular codes in their study (Bryman, 2012). Further, it is also crucial for the researchers to be open to whatever arises from the data and require the possibility of links between the

newly discovered information and existing body of literature (Glaser, 1978; Urquhart, 2013).

Characteristics of Grounded theory

Grounded theory is a methodical procedure made up of a number of adaptable ways for developing theory through the analysis of qualitative data. It is easily recognized because of its unique style and form. Behavioral concepts like trust, resilience, compassion, and coping are most usually the focus (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is regarded as a theory and a data collection technique that improves in-depth investigation (Creswell, 2014). It uses comparative analysis and coding techniques to create a substantive theory (Howell, 2012). The current literature is used in grounded theory, but not as a theoretical base; rather, it provides data for the analytic techniques used in the study (Creswell, 2014). In general, in using grounded theory, researchers don't start with a theory. Yet, the interaction between data gathering, data analysis, and consequential theory helps to create the theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). One of the qualitative research methods for gathering data relies solely on the data rather than attempting to create a theory from the facts (Khan, 2014). Hence, the grounded theory data are consistent across time, experiential, easily conceptualized, and have a sufficient variance (Schreiber & Stern, 2001). To evaluate the meaning and relevance of the data gathered, the developed theory in grounded theory directs data recollection and reanalysis.

Grounded theory aims to interpret the gathered data to ascertain its importance (Parker & Roffey, 1997). Grounded theory provides clear analytic principles, perspectives on the data, command over the research process, and the assurance of finished projects (Charmaz, 2012). Researchers must thoroughly examine the context, research topic, literature review, and research question in studies that are very general in character in order to conduct qualitative research. So, a qualitative researchers shouldn't go into a study with preconceived notions, biases, or previous hypotheses. Qualitative researchers can attempt to start the investigation with as few assumptions as feasible (Nathaniel, 2020). Instead than delving deeply into a single phenomenon, grounded theory is a general discussion of the subject matter. After the hypothesis is established, an extensive review of the literature is conducted (Glaser, 1998).

Benefits of Grounded theory to Qualitative Research

The use of grounded theory in qualitative research has many advantages, including the identification of novel occurrences and ecological validity. Accordingly, grounded theory outlines clear, step-by-step instructions for conducting qualitative research and demonstrates how to rationally and effectively integrate data collecting and analysis (Charmaz, 2003). It aids a researcher in getting going, staying committed, and successfully completing an ongoing endeavour. Through early analytical writing, it encourages the exploration of ideas about the data and encourages seeing the data in new ways (Charmaz, 2008). It is a helpful technique for developing a theory in a new subject and for examining new domains or domains without a dominating theory (Muller & Kogan, 2012). It aids in conceptualizing, defining, and explaining what is occurring in the data. Also, it aids in the development of a sympathetic phenomenon that defies explanation by theories and paradigms. Research problems may be thoroughly analyzed since it offers a structured and understandable approach of data collecting and analysis. It encourages and make hidden processes transparent and allows for the examination of processes at various levels of data analysis. It helps most

researchers to finish their studies and provides information for different kinds of qualitative analysis (Charmaz, 2014, 2016). Grounded theory is a refined, practical, and reliable theory to qualitative research approach. It makes an effort to comprehend social issues (Charmaz, 2016). A compelling case has been made by grounded theory to support qualitative research as a legitimate methodological strategy in and of itself, as opposed to (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). That is a great way to prevent jumping to conclusions about the domain. Grounded theory helps researchers minimize confirmation bias in several fields of study, including medicine and forensics. It offers a deep grasp of the human experience that is contextualized (Hussein et al., 2014). Both the contextual nature of knowledge and the dependent nature of activity can be identified.

Strengths of Grounded theory in Qualitative Research

Grounded theory is a suitable and well-respected analytical technique for developing meaningful theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Milliken, 2010). It can decide what really occurs. It speeds up the research projects and makes them fascinating, controllable, and effective (Charmaz, 2016). It can react and adapt when the circumstances that influence behaviour change. It offers a compelling rationale for employing qualitative research to produce theoretical analysis (Goulding, 1998). It aims to create a strong hypothesis that advances scholars' comprehension (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It provides a clear explanation of how to carry out qualitative analysis. It acts as a place for research as well as a means of conducting research (Edwina & McDonald, 2019). Grounded theory is easily accustomed to the research of many occurrences. It provides a useful and adaptable method for interpreting intricate social processes (Charmaz, 2003). Grounded theory promotes creativity, offers a methodical approach to qualitative data analysis, and has the ability to be intuitive and appealing, conceive of, and collect extensive data (Hussein et al., 2014). Even though there is researcher bias in grounded theory, this bias has a limited impact on the research's findings, which are richer than those of traditional research. The grounded theory approach is user-friendly and suitable for a thesis (Charmaz, 2016).

Limitations of Grounded theory in Qualitative Research

Grounded theory research is time-consuming and challenging to carry out. For instance, open coding in grounded theory is a lengthy and difficult procedure. Grounded theory is labor-intensive since it necessitates in-depth interviews with numerous experts on the issue being studied (Creswell, 2007). It collects a lot of data, which is frequently challenging to deal with it. It outlines an analytical process rather than offering ways for gathering details (Charmaz, 2000). It fails to acknowledge the researcher's embeddedness so as to conceal the researcher's significant agency in the creation and interpretation of data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). An expert researcher in grounded theory encounters no significant challenges, although a beginner researcher frequently does (Simmons, 2006). Additionally, the coding process may impede and engross inexperienced researchers. Moreover, they frequently cross methodological boundaries, which undermines conceptual depth (Benoliel, 1996). It is evident that numerous grounded theory techniques are one of the researchers' worst mistakes. It is also established that in grounded theory, the topic of generalization is less frequently discussed and is seen as complex and contentious (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 1995). It can be difficult to present research findings clearly, and research can be biased. In grounded theory, the researcher will have produced a thorough account of a

phenomenon but not a well-developed theory. It might be challenging for new researchers to understand the methodology; for instance, theoretical sampling and saturation are typically unclear to them (Timonen et al., 2018). Because grounded theory was founded on positivism and objectivism, it has internal misalignment (Bryant, 2002). There are no set guidelines to adhere to in grounded theory for the classification of categories. It is not an effective way to test a hypothesis or attempt to support or refute a theory (Suddaby, 2006).

4. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, grounded theory is one of the most innovative and widely used approaches in qualitative research methodology. Grounded theory has proven to be the most popular and well-established rigorous qualitative methodology in the social sciences. It is established that grounded theory exemplifies methodical approaches to data collection, analysis, and conceptualization so that a theory explaining social interactions can be developed. It is the method that promotes credibility rather than validity and reliability in qualitative research. Grounded theory offers benefits and strengths that serve the society. When it comes to gathering data, analyzing it, and developing theories based on the researchers' actual experiences, grounded theory has had tremendous success. Grounded theory promotes creativity, offers a methodical approach to qualitative data analysis, and has the ability to be intuitive, appealing and collects extensive data. In using grounded theory, it is necessary to follow specific systematic stages in order to successfully accomplish qualitative research outcome. To evaluate the meaning and relevance of the data gathered, the developed theory in grounded theory directs data recollection and reanalysis. It is also established that in grounded theory, the topic of generalization is less frequently discussed and is seen as complex and contentious. In general, in using grounded theory, researchers don't start with a theory. Yet, the interaction between data gathering, data analysis, and consequential theory helps to create the theory.

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