

**Grounded Theory as a Methodology for Exploring Marketing Strategies for a Special Context****S.Shivany**Senior Lecturer, Department of Marketing
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University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka**ABSTRACT**

Research methodology means, how the research should be undertaken or it is theory or science of methods. Qualitative research refers to interpretative naturalistic approach to the world in which the study of things of in their natural settings, make sense of interpreting , phenomena, in terms of meaning people bring to phenomena. The outcome of the qualitative research is qualitative understanding of phenomena or experiential knowledge about the phenomena. Grounded theory approach although traditionally associated with sociology, nursing and health, and organizational studies. Grounded theory has, in recent years, started to enter the repertoire of marketing and consumer research. However, in comparison to other qualitative methodologies its application is still fairly confined to experiential consumer behavior, despite its potential for theoretical developments across a range of marketing phenomenon that are predicated on a behavioral component. Post war marketing environment is unique in its characteristics, understanding the in-depth, Un- known knowledge in that particular context is needy in the current research gap. Grounded theory grounds theories from the data to make known theories for generating new knowledge still there are lack of researches, which focused to generate theory in the post war marketing environment by using the grounded theory methodology. This study fills the gap by exploring the aptness of grounded theory methodology in exploring marketing strategy in the post war marketing environment.

Key words: Grounded theory, Marketing strategy, Post war marketing environment.

INTRODUCTION

There are many researchers get into researching the reality with some presumptions about various aspects of reality methods of knowing himself or herself. Assumptions about the reality are called ontology, Assumptions about methods and methodology are called epistemology. Collectively, these assumptions or beliefs provides the boundary and nature of doing research which is more formally called as paradigm (Thompson & Mchugh, 2000). It seeks to explain the stability of behavior from the individuals view point. They are most interested in understanding the subjectivity created world "as it is" in terms of ongoing process

Positivism favors quantitative methodology and go to the level of hypothesis while other two paradigms prefer qualitative methodology and remain at the level propositions, if not directly moving into the field with the research problems and foreshadowed questions. There are two main elements of choice when selecting a methodology. Firstly, the merits of each method must be assessed in light of the needs of the research goal. Each method has its advantages, and its strengths and weaknesses.

The alternative view in social sciences is the so-called constructivist or interpretivist view. Constructivist grounded theory methodology is for example advocated by Kathy Charmaz (Charmaz, 2006). This strand of grounded theory methodology emphasizes the research participants' experience and how *they* construct their view of reality. Knowledge, and hence the grounded theory, are constructed by both researcher and research participant and aim at interpreting the empirical evidence within the research context.

RESEARCH GAP

The research method must be able to accommodate the researcher's personal preferences and philosophical assumptions. For example a person with positivistic tendencies would not be comfortable with the highly subjective nature imposed by phenomenology. In the case of making strategy in a special context, Grounded Theory is the method of choice because it enables an understanding of an area which requires no preformed concepts of knowledge or reality. The ontology and epistemology accepts that knowledge is not stationary, but is always emerging and transforming, and is interpreted by both observer and participant. Real marketing strategy making for the post war marketing environment is based on the consumer perspectives and it is need to see whether the strategies are adopted by the marketers are best match with the consumer behavior. From this perspective, Grounded Theory provides a method which enables a researcher to adduce true meaning and understanding. Most of all Grounded Theory allows researchers to get into the field, and quickly acquire an empirically grounded understanding of social phenomena, and to evaluate the phenomena without reliance on extant theory. The research allows theory to emerge through the inductive process of Grounded Theory.

Grounded theory approach traditionally associated with sociology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), nursing and health (Sandelowski, 1995; Morse, 1994), and organizational studies (Parry, 1998; Hunt and Ropo, 1995; Brown, 1994, 1995; Turner, 1981, 1988), grounded theory has, in recent years, started to enter the repertoire of marketing and consumer research (Goulding, 1998, 1999a, 2000a; Pettigrew, 2000). Belk et al., (1989) utilized aspects of grounded theory in their ground breaking analysis of the sacred and profane in consumer behavior. grounded theory analysis of advertising and the mass media, (Hirschman and Thompson's ,1997) ; examination of product concept development,(Burchill and Fine's ,1997); study of marketing and health visiting, (De la Cuesta's ,1994) interpretation of health care consumption practices (Houston and Venkatesh, 1996) ; research into consumer experiences at heritage sites and museums (Asian immigrants, and Goulding, 1999b, c, 2000b, c). In comparison to other qualitative methodologies its application is still fairly confined to experiential consumer behavior, despite its potential for theoretical developments across a range of marketing phenomenon that are predicated on a behavioral component. GT is now Started to enter into the marketing (Goulding ,1998,1999a,2000a; Pettigrew ,2000). Advertising and mass media research (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997).Product concept development (Burchill and Fine, 1997; Dela cuesta, 1994) Health care consumption practices (Houston &Venkatesh, 1994).Consumer experience at heritage site and museums (Asian immigrants, and Goulding, 1999b, c, 2000b, c), Deeper consumer experience (Pettigrew, 2000). Women clothing in the work place (Kimle and Damhorst, 1997).Consumption of technological products(Mick, and Fourniew,1998),Symbolic meaning in advertisement (Phillips, 1997; Hirschman &Thompson,1997),There is a need for adopting grounded theory in marketing (Calder, 1977), what makes strategy making across the sales marketing interface more successful (Malshe, Sohi, 2009). Still there are lack of researches, which focused to generate theory in the post war marketing environment by using the grounded theory methodology in Sri Lanka.

Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory methodology has evolved since its inception in the 1960s in the United States. Particularly, the writings of Glaser (1967, 1978), Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and Charmaz (2000, 2006) are seen as influential for the development of GTM. The original work of Glaser and Strauss from 1967, 'The *Discovery* of Grounded Theory', suggests that the researcher should start collecting data with a 'blank mind', meaning without reviewing the existing literature in order to carry out a truly inductive study. This perspective assumes that every individual will see and understand the data from the same point of view, making the same observations and therefore will come to similar conclusions. The researcher should take a passive stance and 'let the data emerge', which can be seen as a characteristic of an objectivist or positivist paradigm (Bryant, 2003; Charmaz, 2000).

Glaser (1992) recommends that researchers use their theoretical sensitivity (to generate concepts from data and relate them according to normal models of theory in general and theory development in

sociology in particular. Grounded theory method (GT) is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the discovery of theory through the analysis of data (Faggiolane and Chiara, 2011; Patrica, Yancy Martin & Barry, 1986). It is a methodology that has been used to generate theory in areas where there is little already known (Goulding, 1998). Here the lack of theory in marketing strategy in the post war marketing context still needs a new knowledge to explore the unknown knowledge in the context.

Its usefulness is also recognized where there is an apparent lack of integrated theory in the literature (Goulding, 2002). Grounded theory adapts well to capturing the complexities of the context in which the action unfolds (Locke, 2001) and emphasizes process. In so doing it assist the researcher in retaining the link between culture, language, social context and construct (Gales, 2003). Therefore, grounded theory generates theory that is of direct interest and relevance for practitioners in that it analyses a substantive topic and aims at discovering a basic social process (BSP) which has the potential to resolve some of the main concerns of a particular group (Jones, 2002). The processes can be followed to explore the marketing strategies which are adopted by the marketers in the post war marketing environment.

Process 1: Technical review of literature

Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommended using what they called technical literature in the early stages of the research. Glaser (1992) stresses that non-related literature only should be used initially and later, when the researcher is sure of the emergent categories, related literature can act as more data.

Process 2: Coding and analysis the data

Grounded Theory was founded on the conceptualization of data through coding, using a method of constant comparison. Through analysis, data, mainly in the form of transcripts, observations or literature, are fractured into conceptual codes. Then, during a process of comparison these individual codes are compared, and are collected together to form meaningful categories. Finally, through a process of abstraction, these categories build and are refined until they are able to lead the researcher toward the development of substantive theories or conceptual hypotheses.

Process 3: Deciding the sampling method

Grounded Theory bases its unique methods on a pair of principle foundations *theoretical sampling* and *constant comparison*. Theoretical sampling regards the process of data collection, where new targets for data collection are directed by the results collected from the preceding sample, as the theory emerges and the investigation focuses, so too does the selective sampling.

Constant comparison is the simultaneous and concurrent process of coding and analyzing the collected data (Partington 2000). These two processes lead the researcher through the exercise of theoretical discovery using Grounded Theory. A Grounded Theory study begins with a general opening of a subject area.

GT is a general method that can use any kind of data even though the most common use is with qualitative data (Glaser, 2001, 2003). However, although working with probabilities, most GT studies are considered as qualitative since statistical methods are not used, and figures not presented. The results of GT are not a reporting of statistically significant probabilities but a set of probability statements about the relationship between concepts, or an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data (Glaser 1998).

Grounded Theory provides a mix of structure and flexibility, with clear and unambiguous guidelines. Results in a smooth uninterrupted emergent analysis and the generation of a substantive or formal theory' (Glaser and Holton 2004). Grounded Theory takes a research approach, which is contrary to most of the more conventional research models. Data collection, coding and analysis occur immediately, concurrently, and throughout. The process is not impeded by the development of

research problems, theoretical understanding or literature review. Instead, the researcher is granted the freedom to enter the field and discover the main concerns of participants and analyze ways

At some stage of a research, the researcher(s) must choose between: (a) initially adopting or generating a theoretical framework with which to analyze and interpret a specific phenomenon; and (b) allowing an understanding of the phenomenon to emerge through data analysis and a literature search that is performed mainly after data have been collected, a procedure known as grounded theory generation (Johnson 1990). Both methods are legitimate approaches to the qualitative objective of explicating relationships (Huberman and Miles 1994). The grounded theory method was initially developed as a response to the perceived lack of new theories being generated in sociology (Locke 1996). Firmly believing in the inadequacies of logical deduction as applied in sociology, Glaser and Strauss (1967) sought to redress the emphasis on the verification of existing theories by constructing a methodology that could guide qualitative researchers through the theory development process. By doing so, they bridged the gap between empirical data and theory generation (Hammersley 1989). They proposed formalized procedures, such as theoretical sampling and coding, to provide structure to theory generation (Barnes 1996). Grounded theory has its emphasis on the socially constructed nature of reality (Goulding 1998), and the aim is to produce interpretations that can explain social phenomenon and provide information of value to those engaged in the behavior under study (Annells 1996; Glaser and Strauss 1967). In particular, grounded theory aims to identify the main concern of social actors, along with the various strategies that can be employed in the resolution of this concern (Glaser 1992). In the process, grounded theory can be viewed as a potential instigator for change as it explains their own behaviors to social actors, giving them a degree of control that they did not possess previously (Wuest 1995; Hammersley 1989). Thus, one of the major strengths of grounded theory is that it recognizes the complexity of the social world, and works to make sense of it to both analysts and lay-people (Glaser 1992; Wells 1995).

The ways in which grounded theory has been employed in consumer research have not corresponded entirely with the procedures outlined above. For example, rather than explicitly deriving categories, properties, and dimensions, Mick and Fournier (1998), Hirschman and Thompson (1997), and Kimle and Damhorst (1997) have produced accounts of the strategies employed by consumers to cope with the social processes under examination. By doing so, these researchers have addressed the information needs of social actors while explicating the phenomenon of interest, thus meeting the major objectives of the grounded theory method.

Applications of the Grounded Theory Method

Rather than being limited to a particular discipline. Grounded theory has been found useful across multiple research areas (Wells 1995). Grounded theory relates specifically to the analysis phase of research, although it can refer to data collection as well (Glaser 1992). In fact, Glaser (1992) argued that the grounded theory method of analysis can be applied to any data not just that collected qualitatively. Grounded theory has been effectively and widely employed in the social sciences since its inception in the mid-1960s (Wells 1995), and to a lesser extent has been found suitable for consumption studies. For example, areas of application of relevance to consumer behavior include the analysis of women's clothing in the workplace (Kimle and Damhorst 1997), the consumption of technological products (Mick and Fournier 1998), and the symbolic meaning found in advertisements (Phillips 1997; Hirschman & Thompson 1997). These, however, are only studies that explicitly acknowledge the use of the grounded theory method. It is likely that many consumer research studies have employed grounded theory methods without recognizing or acknowledging them as such (Belk 1996; Schouton and McAlexander 1995).

Data collection and analysis in grounded theory methodology

GTM uses a form of purposive sampling, known as *theoretical sampling*, where participants are selected according to criteria specified by the researcher and based on initial findings. Early analysis of data indicates issues that need exploration; hence the sampling process is guided by the on-going theory development. Data collection and analysis take place in alternating sequences. This can also be

described as an iterative cycle of induction and deduction, consisting of collection of data and constant comparison between results and new findings in order to guide further data collections (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994). For these reasons the development and identification of variables does not take place prior to data collection but instead as part of the data collection process. Consequently, the variables or concepts are initiated by the interviewee and further developed and conceptualized by the researcher. Data are collected until *theoretical saturation* is reached, in other words until no new or relevant data emerges regarding a category and relationships between categories are established (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Interview questions should give as little guidance as possible to allow the interviewees to talk about what is of importance to them regarding a given context. The researcher then needs to extract those phenomena or experiences significant to the interviewee by assigning a conceptual label, known as a *code*. Several codes can be grouped into more abstract *categories* which will eventually form the basis for the developing theory.

Interview coding is used to capture what is in the interview data, to learn how people make sense of their experiences and act on them. Coding is the first step of data analysis, as it helps to move away from particular statements to more abstract interpretations of the interview data (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory methodology advocates using several coding techniques to examine interviewee's accounts at different levels. *Open coding*, also known as line-by-line coding, provides a good starting point to identify initial phenomena and produce a list of themes of importance to the interviewee. Conceptual labels are attached to almost every line in the interview transcript to capture what has been said. These labels can correspond closely to the interview context and when taken from the interviewee's own words, are known as *in vivo code*. Codes are assigned to participants' words and statements to develop concepts, constituting the start of the analytic process. The detailed and meticulous process of line-by-line coding helps to open up the text and interpret the transcript in new and unfamiliar ways which also helps test the researcher's assumptions. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest using initial or 'sensitizing questions', to help the researcher grasp what the data might be indicating. Suggested questions are "Who are the actors involved?", "What are the actors' definitions and meaning of these phenomena or situations?" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The next coding phase is more abstract than open coding and known as *focused coding* or selective coding. Focused codes are applied to several lines or paragraphs in a transcript and require the researcher to choose the most telling codes to represent the interviewee's voice. Using open codes as a starting point, the process of focused coding helps to verify the adequacy of the initial concepts developed. As the focused codes will be applied and therefore 'tested' on further interview transcripts. Another subsequent phase of coding is *axial coding*, defined by Strauss and Corbin as "the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The aim of axial coding is to add depth and structure to existing categories.

Charmaz (2006) explains that axial coding re-assembles data that has been broken up into separate codes by line-by-line coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) use axial coding to investigate conditions of situations described in the interview, their actions and consequences. Charmaz (2006) warns that axial coding applies a too rigid and formal frame to the data analysis. Instead she recommends the less formalized

Approach of reflecting on categories, sub-categories and to establish connecting links between these to make sense of the interview data. The most abstract level of coding is *theoretical coding*, which explores the relationships that have been established between categories. Several 'rules' or "analytic coding families" are put forward by Glaser (1978) to develop an advanced analysis of the subject area.

Developing Categories

The general process of how to code an interview and develop a theory is depicted in simplified form in Figure 3.4, below. After coding several interview transcripts a researcher can identify many issues that

are of importance to the respondents. These issues are also known as *phenomena* and are assigned a conceptual label to become a *code*, also known as a *concept* by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Some codes or concepts will share the same or similar characteristics and can be pulled together into more abstract *categories*, which can typically be interlinked and build the basis for a theory.

It should be stressed that categories have to 'earn' their way into an emerging theory (Glaser, 1978). Grounded theory methodology typically does not use quantifying data to obtain meaning. However, counting the frequency with which categories occur in interview transcripts can be useful to confirm their importance for the interviewees. Categories can carry so-called *properties and dimensions*. A property is a general or specific characteristic of a category, whereas a dimension denotes the location of a property along a continuum or range (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The central or *core category* is a distinctive category that sits at the heart of the developed theory and summarizes what is happening. All other major categories should relate to the core category, which ought to appear frequently in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Charmaz, (2006) sees coding as an important link between collecting data and developing theory but also as a connection between empirical reality and the researcher's view of it. Coding highlights problems, issues, concerns and matters of importance to those being studied. Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to categories as having 'analytic power', due to their potential to explain and predict. 'Constant comparisons' between collected data, codes, categories and initial findings help to crystallize ideas to become part of the emerging theory.

Use of grounded theory methodology for exploring marketing strategies in a unique context.

The data collection and analysis for this study followed a cyclical process typical for GTM, by using early findings to shape the on-going data collection. The pilot study involved identifying research problem by conducting 10 focus group discussions.

Focused coding was utilized for the next two interview phases, which used the initial codes as a basis. Present study adopted grounded theory method, and highlighted the reasons of why the qualitative methodology such grounded theory is appropriate to this phenomenon. The extant literature lacks established theoretical frameworks that explore marketing strategies in the post war marketing context. Therefore methodology that bank on exploration and theory development, such as grounded theory, is more appropriate to study this phenomenon in contrast to approaches that rely on deductive reasoning. In grounded theory, the emergent theoretical framework is shaped by the views of the participants who are involved in the process (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1997, 1998).

Conclusion

According to Taylor, Kermode, and Roberts (2007), a paradigm is "a broad view or perspective of something". Additionally, Weaver and Olson's (2006) definition of paradigm reveals how research could be affected and guided by a certain paradigm by stating, "paradigms are patterns of beliefs and practices that regulate inquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which investigation is accomplished". Therefore, to clarify the researcher's structure of inquiry and methodological choices, an exploration of the paradigm adopted for this study discussed prior to any discussion about the specific methodologies utilized in this study.

The qualitative methodology shares its philosophical foundation with the interpretive paradigm which supports the view that there are many truths and multiple realities (Weaver and Olson, 2006). Additionally, the interpretive paradigm is associated more with methodological approaches that provide an opportunity for the voice, concerns and practices of research participants to be heard (Cole, 2006; Weaver and Olson). Cole (2006) further argues that qualitative researchers are "more concerned about uncovering knowledge about how people feel and think in the circumstances in

which they find themselves, than making judgments about whether those thoughts and feelings are valid”.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and the assumptions and beliefs that we have about the nature of knowledge. How do we know the world? What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known? Ontology concerns the philosophy of existence and the assumptions and beliefs that we hold about the nature of being and existence. Paradigms models or frameworks that are derived from a worldview or belief system about the nature of knowledge and existence. Paradigms are shared by a scientific community and guide how a community of researchers act with regard to inquiry. Methodology - how we gain knowledge about the world or "an articulated, theoretically informed approach to the production of data" (Ellen, 1984). A paradigm is a “worldview” or a set of assumptions about how things work. Rossman & Rollis define paradigm as “shared understandings of reality” Quantitative and qualitative research methods involve very different assumptions about how research should be conducted and the role of the researcher.

Anti-positivism emphasizes that social reality is viewed and interpreted by the individual him/her self-according to the ideological positions he/she possesses. Therefore, knowledge is person all experienced rather than acquired from or imposed from outside. The anti-positivists believe that reality is multi-layered and complex (Cohen et al, 2000) and a single phenomenon is having multiple interpretations. They emphasize that the verification of a phenomenon is adopted when the level of understanding of a phenomenon is such that the concern is to probe into the various unexplored dimensions of a phenomenon rather than establishing specific relationship among the components, as it happens in the case of positivism

‘Phenomenology’ is a theoretical view point which believes that individual behavior is determined by the experience gained out of one’s direct interaction with the phenomena. It rules out any kind of objective external reality. Husserl and Schutz are the main proponents of this school of thought. During interaction with various phenomena, human beings interpret them and attach meanings to different actions and or ideas and thereby construct new experiences. Therefore, the researcher has to develop empathic understanding to know the process of interpretation by individuals so that she can reproduce in her mind feelings, motives and thoughts that are behind the action of others

In this study researcher considered epistemological approach, which was most appropriate for this present study. After examining both positivistic and interpretive research approaches, researcher initiated that the research approach that served this research would be grounded theory based on interpretive epistemology and ontology of social constructionism. Social constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is depending upon human performs, being created in and out of interface between human beings and their world, and developed and diffused within an fundamentally communal setting (Crotty, 2003).

In this study researcher felt that creating new theories on marketing strategies in the post war marketing environment is depend on the interaction between the researcher and the social which included marketers who develop the strategies and the customers who accepts or reject the strategies.

Researcher did an initial literature review to see the literatures based on the marketing strategies in the post war marketing context. But researcher was unable to find literatures or theories with specifically addresses this topics. Literatures were reviewed based on the headings as post World War II, marketing environment in other countries, marketing strategy theories, and the marketing practices adopted in post the World War II marketing environment. Subsequently the researcher did not begin this study with the preconceived theory. The research methodology which is best suited to make new theory form the data would be collected in the special context was the grounded theory methodology. Therefore the researcher used the grounded theory methodology as the most suited methodology for this research. Grounded theory is an informational Research methodology that uses a set of procedures to develop a theory which is grounded in rich Data about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2002; Dey, 1999). As a methodology, it has been used to discover many

management issues, including culture, Consumer behavior, and other business topics (Goulding, 2002).

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