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Straussian Grounded Theory: An Evolved Variant in Qualitative Research

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Abstract

Grounded theory (GT) has emerged on the basis of different ontological and epistemological assumptions and is considered as a popular research approach in many branches of social science. Two American social scientists; Barney Galland Glaser (1930-2022) and Anselm Leonard Strauss (1916-1996) have founded it in 1967. Since the start of grounded theory in social science researches in 1967; more than 50 years have passed, and it has been using in many branches of social science, such as in nursing, healthcare, physiotherapy, education, economics, anthropology, sociology, political science, psychology, etc. Straussian grounded theory is a very well-known qualitative analysis in the world, and it explores dynamic and new phenomena. Straussian grounded theory researchers do not build their research on prearranged hypotheses; instead they develop theory of wellbeing for the humanity from the collected data of the reality. In this article an overview and significance of Straussian grounded theory for the qualitative research method has been discussed. This article also provides an understanding about the Straussian grounded theory approach for the novice researchers.

Keywords: Qualitative research, grounded theory, Straussian version, ontology, epistemology

1. Introduction

A qualitative researcher tries to describe a phenomenon due to in-depth information of the research environment (Hoepfl, 1997). There are several types of qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory, ethnography, narrative, action research, phenomenology, case study, historical research, and content analysis. Each of them has their own characteristics. In this study we want to discuss Straussian grounded theory (SGT) in some details (Charmaz, 2006; Mohajan, 2018).

Grounded theory (GT) is first proposed by two American sociologists; Barney Galland Glaser (1930-2022) and Anselm Leonard Strauss (1916-1996) in 1967. It is a renowned research approach in qualitative studies. It can be used to analyze both qualitative and quantitative types GT data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is suitable when “*the topic of interest has been relatively ignored in the literature or has been given only superficial attention*”. It enables a researcher to generate theories that explain behavior, advance to a theory, provide a perspective on behavior, and grow enough categories and hypotheses (Goulding, 2002). At present it is applied in a variety of disciplines of social sciences and education areas, such as in nursing, sociology, anthropology, healthcare, education, economics, physiotherapy, political science, psychology, information system, etc. (Rakhmawati, 2019).

In the 1990s, the two authors; Glaser and Strauss have started to work independently due to their different opinions in the methodological procedures. Glaser moves lonely to develop Classic Grounded Theory (cGT). On the other hand, Strauss proceeded with Juliet Corbin, a nurse researcher, to publish a landmark book *Basic of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Strauss and Corbin are known as the second-generation grounded theorists and finally have developed Straussian grounded theory (SGT) (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

2. Literature Review

Literature review helps novice researchers to understand the subject, and it serves as an indicator of the subject that has been carried out before. It also assists all researchers to improve research questions and to move forward energetically in the current research (Creswell, 2007). Ylona Chun Tie and her coauthors have given a contemporary research framework, which is suitable for informing of a GT study. They have illustrated the results through a graphic representation, which acts as a visual guide for the novice researchers (Tie et al., 2019). Straussian grounded theory has encouraged the researcher to do literature review. Charmaz has recommended holding a widespread literature review after data analysis to facilitate the openness and creativity of researcher (Charmaz, 2006).

Juliet Corbin and Anselm Leonard Strauss have examined the use of scientific canons and procedures to judge the research products (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Cassandra Groen and her coworkers have compared and contrasted classic GT (cGT) and constructivist GT (CGT). They have also introduced professional identity formation in undergraduate civil engineering students. They have provided strategies for data collection, organization, and analysis, model development, and theory abstraction (Groen et al., 2017).

Mayckel da Silva Barreto and his coauthors have described the theoretical sampling process in the development of a based on the Straussian approach. They have analyzed the field research about the perceptions and experiences of patients, family members, and health professionals regarding the presence of the family during emergency care. They have identified how theoretical sampling guided data collection, which occurred through the in-depth study of concepts (Barreto et al., 2021). Mai Thi Thanh Thai and her coauthors have demonstrated the benefits and application of Straussian GT for conducting research in complex settings and to internationalize small and medium-sized enterprises based in transition economies. They have described sampling to coding and then to theory formation, explaining the rationale each step of the way (Thai et al., 2012).

Windy Rakhmawati has notified that the three approaches of GT, such as “*classic grounded theory*”, “*Straussian grounded theory*”, and “*constructivist grounded theory*” have different points of views concerning the philosophical position, role of literature review, and coding process in data analysis. She warned that a researcher must understand about perspective of each approach before starts research (Rakhmawati, 2019).

Udaya Mohan Devadas and his coauthors have tried to show the differences between Glaserian and Straussian GT versions. They have searched to form a model for the application of GT approaches in human resource development (Devadas et al., 2011). Nor Syafini Mohd Muhaiyuddin and her coworkers have tried to develop a theory or seek for a form of meaning on the basis of data collection. They have emphasized on the historical events, overview and significance of GT for the qualitative research method. They have shown that the Straussian version of GT is a flexible approach to the researchers (Muhaiyuddin et al., 2016). Haradhan Kumar Mohajan has tried to discuss very elementary ideas of GT. He has discussed four waves of feminism and different types of feminism with sufficient efforts (Mohajan, 2018, 2022a,b). Devajit Mohajan and Haradhan Kumar Mohajan have highlighted on variants of grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022b,c). They have also provided brief concepts on feminism and feminist grounded theory (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022d). They have shown the memo writing techniques within the framework of grounded theory methodology of qualitative research in social sciences, which is one of the most important processes to develop and enrich theory (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022e).

3. Methodology of the Study

A good researcher must describe her/his ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions properly. Ontology is the branch of philosophy that studies concepts, such as existence, being, becoming, and reality (Hofweber, 2020). Epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge (Annis, 1978). Ontology describes the view of reality of a researcher, while an epistemology describes how a researcher can come to know that reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The ontology and epistemology of a positivist GT researcher are endorsed through an objective methodology (Charmaz, 2014). Straussian version

is developed on the basis of a symbolic interactionist perspective to the methodology, where the reality is constructed through language, symbols, and social interactions (Blumer, 1969). In any research, an expert researcher follows balanced and organized scientific methodology (Kothari, 2008). Reliability and validity are two most important and fundamental features for the evaluation a research. In this study we have tried to maintain them as far as possible (Mohajan, 2017).

To prepare this article we have taken the help from the secondary data sources (Mohajan, 2012, 2014a,b, 2015, 2016, 2017c, 2018c). The valuable materials of this paper are collected from the published papers, research reports, published books and notebooks, internets, websites, etc. Throughout the study we have consulted them unsparingly (Mohajan, 2020). At the start of the core analysis we have provided historical background and evolution of the grounded theory. Then we have tried to show how Straussian version of grounded theory. Characteristic of Straussian grounded theory, coding, and memo writing procedures are briefly discussed. Finally, strengths and weaknesses of Straussian grounded theory are designated (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022a-k, 2023a-f).

4. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to discuss Straussian variant of grounded theory elaborately. Some other minor objectives are;

- to indicate historical background and evolution of GT,
- to focus development and characteristic of SGT, and
- to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of the Straussian version.

5. Historical Background of GT

Once it is believed that qualitative research is imprecise, unsystematic, prejudiced and disordered; and quantitative research is arranged and structured (Charmaz, 2006). During the 1960s GT has affected on the domination of quantitative research (Dunne, 2011). The qualitative research world categorizes these sociologists as the first generation grounded theorists, because

they have created a challenging and supportive research environment (Birks & Mills, 2015). GT is developed to avoid highly abstract sociology (Jones & Alony, 2011).

The original GT is developed in nursing research at California University by two American social scientists Barney Galland Glaser (1930-2022) and Anselm Leonard Strauss (1916-1996) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They have developed it through the merge of quantitative and qualitative research approaches to produce a qualitative social research for studying the process of death in hospital environments (Groen et al., 2017). Glaser is a sociologist who came from Columbia University and graduated in the doctoral program of this university. He is a positivistic quantitative background person and is influenced by known quantitative researchers Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton (Glaser, 1992; Rakhmawati, 2019). On the other hand, Strauss studied at the University of Chicago and graduated from this university. He was influenced by famous sociologists, such as George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. Obviously, Strauss had a strong tradition of symbolic interactionism and ethnographic qualitative approaches of inquiry (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In 1960, Strauss has joined the University of California, San Francisco School of Nursing. In 1961, he has recruited Glaser to the research team of this university to examine the experience of dying (Birks & Mills, 2015). They have collaborated to publish a well-known book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded theory generates new theory from data and opposes testing the existing theory. It explores, develops, and describes social processes that gain with the experience of the social problem (Birks & Mills, 2015). It is well-known for the detection and explanation of social phenomena about what is happening (Haig, 1995). As a result, popularity of it is increased very rapidly and most social scientists have joined in this research area. Since 1961 for the next 10 years, Strauss and Glaser have taught together at the University of California (Morse et al., 2009). Grounded theory is well-equipped to discover socially related issues and it also provides detailed, rigorous, and systematic (Jones & Alony, 2011). It also assures to the researcher with greater freedom to explore the research area (Bryant, 2002).

6. Evolution of GT

The original GT of 1967 has been diverged both professionally and methodologically by Strauss and Corbin in 1990 (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). On the other hand, Glaser remained the defender of the original GT research (Glaser, 1992). Overtimes the GT has evolved that lead to the formation of two variants: the Glaserian variant and the Straussian variant; each is distinguished by their own ideographic procedures (Goulding, 2002). After the split of the GT research area, scholars have also parted and running their researches in a benign ways into their respective research arenas. Glaser believes in a “*true reality*”, on the other hand Strauss believes in “*constructive reality*” (Glaser, 1992; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Kathy Charmaz, a student of Glaser and Strauss, came from the University of California, who is known as the third-generation grounded theorist, has developed a new method of GT, constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022b).

The Glaserian variant stresses on the interpretive, contextual and emergent nature of theory development (Glaser, 1992). On the other hand, Straussian variant stresses on very complex and systematic coding procedures and certifies a preliminary literature study to recognize research problems. The researcher should not start research with a preconceived theory, rather begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Straussian type of research starts with some research questions and the researcher can use his experience, knowledge and even the literature if it is needed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, Straussian variant is more suitable than the Glaserian one (Douglas, 2004). In this method data are collected recurrence order, and then data are coded. Comparative analysis and theoretical sampling are preceded until theoretical saturation arises (Locke, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Straussian variant is influenced by interactionism and pragmatism. Pragmatists believe that the truth is temporary, conditional, and an evolutionary action. Pragmatism emphasizes on practice as significances to find the meaning or truth (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Pascale, 2011). Glaser has denied applying any specific philosophical settings. Because he believes that such settings can lessen wider potential of GT research procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Charmaz, 1995).

Their target was to present an accessible GT text with well-described performances (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

7. Development of Straussian Version

In 1990, Strauss and Juliet Corbin have published a book entitled *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* that has split the pathways of future research works between Strauss and Glaser (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Graham & Thomson, 2008). In this book they have shown about the difference between classical version and Straussian version. They have also presented major criticisms of the GT that is developed in 1967. Strauss and Corbin have been known as the second-generation grounded theorists and have developed Straussian grounded theory version (Rakhmawati, 2019). They have used variety of techniques, such as validity, reliability, credibility, plausibility and value of the theory, adequacy of the research process, and the empirical grounding of the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Strauss and Corbin emphasize basic techniques in the development of their method, such as data collection and analysis, concepts and categories, theoretical sampling, constant comparative method, theoretical memos, hypothesis about the relationships among categories and the development of categories. SGT organizes data collection and analysis in a simultaneous process. Also researchers can learn the importance of being flexible in all features of the research procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Strauss had died in 1996; however, Corbin has continued to develop their earlier work effectively (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Straussian grounded theory represents the first main departure from classic grounded theory. It offers a clear procedure and a defined coding paradigm drawing on a huge fund of “*coding families*”. It presents coding procedures and phases, such as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998; Corbin & Strauss 2015; Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022f).

8. Characteristic of Straussian Version

Straussian version has a particular system and procedures that guide researchers to organize and analyze data collections (Muhaiyuddin et al., 2016). SGT is methodological rather than ontological and epistemological aspects that have been cited as the main source of divergence from original GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Heath & Cowley, 2004).

The SGT researchers aim to identify a core category for the GT and they can enhance theoretical sensitivity, generate hypotheses, and create a base for making comparisons (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The research questions create from literature that increase theoretical sensitivity, and stimulate reflections (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). SGT drives the researchers with a systematic and flexible constant comparative approach for theory construction (Charmaz, 2014).

Interviews and observation are important instruments of Straussian data collection and researchers know how to code data, and categorized using the constant comparative method. An SGT researcher tries to describe his ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Muhaiyuddin et al., 2016).

9. Coding and Memo Writing

In SGT, coding is inductive, comparative, interactive, and iterative, and later deductive (Charmaz, 2009). Coding is the procedure of “*breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data*” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin have stated that coding process can be divided into three stages as: i) open coding, ii) axial coding, and iii) selective coding (Walker & Myrick, 2006; Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022f).

Open Coding: Open coding is usually the first approach to the data analysis. It initiates with line by line coding where concepts and key phrases are identified. For completing a SGT approach successfully the researcher begins his research with open coding (Glaser, 1992). In open coding, the data are broken up into smaller parts that are deeply analyzed (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019).

Axial Coding: Axial coding is the second level of coding. It is one way to construct linkages between data in a qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). In axial coding, the researchers contextually, inevitably, interactionally, and causally analyze the relations within the data (Jones & Alony, 2011).

Selective Coding: Selective coding is the method of selecting the core category and relates it with the other categories from axial coding (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). A selective coding occurs when the analyst identifies core categories. After the completion of selective coding, a researcher can move to develop theory and ultimately construct meaning (Williams & Moser, 2019).

Glaser has criticized the Straussian coding procedures and he has indicated it “*force to data*”. For example, according to Glaser selective coding should only begin when the core category emerges, but Straussian approach recommends that it can be done from square one to generate the core categories (Glaser, 1992; Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Memo Writing: Memo writing is a descriptive record of analytical discussion between the researcher and the data (Khanal, 2018; Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022e). It conducts continuously throughout the data collection and analytical processes. It makes comparisons among data, codes, and categories, as well as provides an interactive space for a researcher (Lempert, 2007). It records the interpretation of the data that are written throughout the life of the research study (Charmaz, 2006).

10. Strengths of SGT

SGT offers a clear description of its complex research procedures and enables the researcher to focus on both the micro and macro conditions using the conditional/consequential matrix (Mills et al., 2006; Walker & Myrick, 2006). By the coding pattern, sufficiently analytical theories can be constructed in SGT (Hunter et al., 2011). It is a well-matched and enjoyable research. It always favors the students and they can prepare a successful thesis. In SGT, expectation of the researcher increases gradually (Charmaz, 2016). The core category of SGT connects the

categories and subcategories together to provide a storyline that explains what is happening in the social positioning. Theoretical sampling assists researchers to unearth theory and memos provide a record of the process for analysis (Muhaiyuddin et al., 2016).

In SGT, the researchers should adopt literature review into the revision of data. It presents examples of GT that has been used before in social positioning (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The original GT strongly opposed the use of literature review. But, in SGT approach, there is no such hard and fast rule, and literature can be applied at any phase of the research. SGT allows the researcher to interactively construct the reality with the participants; in contrast Glasarian version strictly prohibited it (Glaser, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Devadas, 2011). It can be applied in nursing and healthcare, socio-ecological studies, education and learning, feminism, digital archival, and gender diversity in the workplace (Sebastian, 2019).

11. Weakness of SGT

SGT can be particularly difficult for novice researchers. After data collection and analysis, some inexperience researchers may not actually uncover substantial and significant theory. Sometimes they cannot separate the potential recipients from the research findings (Jones & Alony, 2011). When SGT uses interpretivist and constructionist tools, it stems from positivism/objectivism; consequently, suffers from internal misalignment (Bryant, 2002). To the some experts it is research-bias. Moreover, it seems time consuming, and laborious process to the SGT researchers (Timonen et al., 2018).

12. Conclusion

Grounded theory is one of the most popular research analyses in the world. The aim of grounded theory is not to discover the theory, but to form a theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation. In this study we have observed that Straussian grounded theory is an effective method for exploring insights, developing theoretical concepts, and finding causal link between these concepts to develop a new theory. It organizes the data collection and analysis in a simultaneous process. It works smoothly even in highly complex circumstances. It encourages

the researchers not to follow the guidelines precisely but freely using their own common senses. Straussian version also offers very useful procedures for novice researchers in terms of data collection and analysis. The popularity of the Straussian grounded theory is increasing very rapidly and global researchers are working in this field with confidence and enthusiasm. At present there are thousands of researchers in Straussian grounded theory research areas and there is also a collection of seminal texts and articles to guide them properly. Consequently, Straussian grounded theorists have taken various attempts that support philosophical and methodological sites to enrich the grounded theory research world. We hope that novice researchers can complete their research successfully in Straussian grounded theory.

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