UNIT 2   GROUNDED THEORY

Structure

2.0   INTRODUCTION

Grounded theory is one of the basic approach and most prominently used technique in qualitative research. Grounded theory refers to 'the process of generation of theory which is based on collection of data from multiple sources'. It is the only method of qualitative research which uses quantitative data also, as and when required. The grounded theory approach aims to collect data and interpret the data from the textual base (for example, a collection of field notes or video recordings). After the process of interpreting, the data base is categorised in to different variables and then the interrelationship between these variables are analysed and studied.

Any how, the process of dividing and forming variables requires a thorough knowledge of the literature as well as the selection of the technique for creating the variables is equally important. The ability to analyse and interpret variables is termed as " theoretical sensitivity". The theorist needs to emphasise and enhance this sensitivity. The approach of grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1960's. This unit deals with the basic goals and perspectives of grounded theory. It further deals with the different methods or techniques used in grounded theory. The steps or stages used in formulation of the theory by this method will also be discussed. The unit tries to clarify the concept of the grounded theory approach and discuss the other related facts to the theoretical approach.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the basic approach of grounded theory;

- explain the basic goals and perspectives of grounded theory;

- analyse the different methods applied for generation of theories using the grounded theory approach;

- describe the different stages of grounded theory methodology; and

- explain the significance of grounded theory in the field of research.

2.2 GOALS AND PERSPECTIVES OF GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theory provides a direction to the researcher and directs them to generate new theories or modify the existing ones. The interpretation and conclusion of the grounded theory approach is more reliable as it is based on data collected from multiple sources. The theory takes similar cases for analysis rather than variable perspective. The selected cases are similar on the variables, that is the variables of the cases are similar in nature but the outcome of these cases are different. The ground theorists/ researcher take these cases and compare them to analyse the causes and reasons behind the different outcomes of similar variables of the selected cases.

The *basic goals* of the grounded theory are:

i) Since the approach consists of a series of systematic steps and the data is collected from more than one source, it assures to provide a 'good theory' as the output.

ii) The grounded theory approach emphasises on the process by which the theory is evaluated. This determines the quality of the theory.

iii) The grounded theory approach also emphasises on enhancing the theoretical sensitivity.

iv) One goal of a grounded theory is to formulate hypotheses based on conceptual ideas.

v) On the basis of the questions asked the researcher tries to discover the participants' main concern and how they continually try to resolve it.

vi) It also aims to generate those concepts which explain people's actions regardless of time and place. The descriptive parts of a GT are there mainly to illustrate the concepts.

In the words of Glaser (1998), "GT (grounded theory) is multivariate. It happens sequentially, subsequently, simultaneously, serendipitously, and scheduled".

However, the results of grounded theories are not a reporting of facts but a set of probability statements about the relationship between concepts, or an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data (Glaser 1998).

Self Assessment Questions

Fill in the Blanks.

1) The ability to analyse and interpret variables is termed as ....

2) The process of generation of theory which is based on collection of data from multiple sources is termed as .... helps in formulating hypotheses based on conceptual ideas.

3) Grounded theories are a set of .... about the relationship between concepts.

4) Grounded theory approach is the only method of .... which uses quantitative data also, as and when required.

5) The approach of grounded theory was developed by ....

2.3 METHODS OF GROUNDED THEORY

Unlike other methods of qualitative research, the grounded theorists do not believe in collecting data through taping and transcribing interviews as it is believed to be a waste of time in grounded theories. The process of grounded theories is far quick and faster as the researcher delimits the data by field-noting interviews and soon after generates concepts that fit with data, are relevant and work in explaining what participants are doing to resolve their main concern.

Discussing about the theory before it is written up drains the researcher of motivational energy. Discussions and talks can either render praise or criticism, and both diminish the motivational drive to write memos that develop and refine the concepts and the theory (Glaser, 1998). Data is a fundamental property of the grounded theory which means that everything that gets in the researcher's way when studying a certain area is data. Not only interviews or observations but anything is data that helps the researcher generating concepts for the emerging theory. Field notes can come from informal interviews, lectures, seminars, expert group meetings, newspaper articles, Internet mail lists, even television shows, conversations with friends etc. It is even possible, and sometimes a good idea, for a researcher with much knowledge in the studied area to interview own self, treating that interview like any other data, coding and comparing it to other data and generating concepts from it. Interviewing one's own self helps in gaining an insight from the knowledge that the researcher has at the conceptual level and grounded theory deals with nothing but the conceptual level data.

2.4 STEPS OF GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theory approach helps in generating theories on the basis of the following systematic steps –

2.4.1 Memoing

The first objective of the researcher is to collect data in form of memos. Memos are a form of short notes that the researcher writes and prepares. These memos act as a source of data which is further put in other processes of anlysis and interpretation. These short notes or memos can be prepared in three ways:

a)   *Theoretical note*

This form of note contains the details regarding how a textual data bas is related to the existing literature of the concerned study. The note consists of about one to five pages, Any how, the final theory and report consists of an integration of several such theoretical notes.

b)   *Field note*

Field note consists of the notes prepared when the researcher actively participates with the population/ culture or the community under study. It can be the observations of behaviours, interactions, events or situations that occurs on the spot and it also contains the causal notes behind such actions.

c)   *Code notes*

The researcher or the ground theorist may also prepare notes by naming, labeling or categorising things, properties and events. The code notes are those notes which discuss the codes of such labeling. These code notes further acts as a source of formation of final reports. Further, these code notes also acts as a guide to the ground theorists while analysing a text or a case.

2.4.2   Sorting in Grounded Theory

Once the short notes or the memos are prepared, the collected information (or the data) is sorted in order to organise them in proper order. Sorting helps in putting all the data in proper order which leads to proper linkage of information and ideas. The researcher may also get an insight of some more relevant information and ideas which were not revealed during the preparation of memos.

2.4.3   Writing in Grounded Theory

After the memos are sorted, the next stage towards preparation of theory is "writing". The ground theorist arranges, relates and puts the collected information in to words. Therefore, in this step the researcher tries to give a shape as well as meaning to the relevant data. This may be said to be a crucial stage, as it is this stage in which the researcher interprets the information on the basis of his own perspectives. The collected information is also linked with the existing relevant literature in order to put the theory in a scholarly context.

Self Assessment Questions

State whether the statements are true of false:

1)   The process of grounded theories is far quick and faster as the researcher delimits the data by field-noting interviews.   ( )

2)   Data is not a fundamental property of the grounded theory   ( )

3)   Memos are long notes that the researcher writes and prepares during his or her survey.   ( )

4)   Sorting helps in putting all the data in proper order which leads to proper linkage of information and ideas.   ( )

5)   Sorting may be said to be a crucial stage in the steps of generating theories through grounded theory approach.   ( )

6)   Code notes acts as a guide to the ground theorists   ( )

2.5   TYPES OF CODING IN GROUNDED THEORY

Ground theorists analyse and categorise events and try to identify the meaning of the text with the help of the prepared code notes. Preparation of the code notes can be done in three ways-

2.5.1   Selective Coding

In this type of coding out of all the available categories, the ground theorist selects one category to be the center or the major one and then tries to relate the other categories with the selected major category. In this way, the ground theorist tries to analyse how other categories are affecting the major category or how the major category is having an effect on the other related categories.

2.5.2   Open Coding

It is the process of identifying, labeling and analysing the phenomena found in the text. The ground theorist on the basis of generalisation categorises names, events or properties in to more general categories or dimensions.

2.5.3   Axial Coding

It is the process of relating the categories or properties (that is the codes) to each other with the help of deductive and inductive thinking. The ground theorists try to analyse the causal relations between these variables, that is, which of the code is the 'cause' which has led to the occurrence of other codes- the 'context'. The ground theorist analyses and interprets the 'cause' codes and the 'context' codes without showing much interest on the 'consequences' of the phenomenon itself.

2.6   RELEVANCE OF GROUNDED THEORY

The data or the information collected and the theory generated with the help of grounded theory is significant because –

i)   The ground theorists prepare report on the basis of information collected with the help of various sources which increases the chances of reliability and validity of the theory.

ii)   The ground theory approach gives an opportunity for exploring the facts and analysing the causal reasons behind those facts.

iii) It is an inductive type of research which has its basis or is 'grounded' on the base of observations and data collected.

iv)   The grounded theory approach also provides a base to specify how a knowledge base should be changed in the light of new information.

v)   The grounded theory data often categorises data which further forms a basis for organising and reporting results.

2.7   IMPLICATIONS OF GROUNDED THEORY

On the basis of the significance and importance of the research based grounded theory, the discipline of research is having much gains and benefits. Following are some of the important implications of the grounded theory approach –

i) Grounded theory is often used in formulation of policies and program evaluation research, since it can more effectively help in solving the unanswered questions,

ii) Grounded theory approach can also be used to analyse the consumers' demands and preferences in the existing market.

iii) The approach can also be used to analyse product positioning and advertising opportunities.

iv) It is one of the best theoretical approaches that can be used in the field of education, management, women's studies, information studies, politics and communities, etc.

v) It helps in understanding, analysing and describing human psychology and experience.

2.8 CRITICISM OF GROUNDED THEORY

Basically grounded theory is an approach which systematically analyses the data and generates a theory. But unlike the theory says, there exists chances that the researcher may involve some preconceptions and in collection and analysis of data. Further, there is no doubt that the collection of corpus data helps in attaining more and more information, yet the content validity is questionable in this approach.

However, the grounded theory approach is still one of the most widely used and prominent methodology in the field of social science. It has a propensity to systematically generate theories.

Self Assessment Questions

Choose the correct alternative:

1) In this type of coding out of all the available categories, the ground theorist selects one category to be the center or the major one–

   a) Selecting

   b) Axial

   c) Open

   d) All of the above

2) The process of relating the categories or properties (that is the codes) to each other with the help of deductive and inductive thinking is also known as–

   a) Writing

   b) Sorting

   c) Coding

   d) Analysing

3) Grounded theory is often used in formulation of–

   a) Policies and program evaluation research

   b) Opportunity for exploring the facts

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c) Categorising data

d) None of the above

4) The ground theorists prepare report on the basis of–

a) The information collected

b) The existing information

c) The unexplored information

d) All of the above

2.9   LET US SUM UP

It can be summed up that, grounded theory is one of the best ways of systematically generating a theory on the basis of a corpus (that is a collected mass) of data. The data collected by the theorists is analysed systematically and their interpretation leads to formation of reports, which ultimately leads to creation of theories. Wherein, theory can be defined as a framework on the basis of which things, properties, behaviour and events can be interpreted. The basic purpose of the grounded theory approach is to emphasise on the process or method of formulation of a theory. Grounded theorists therefore help in providing a classic theory.

Memoring, sorting and writing are the systematic steps or stages of the grounded theory. The researcher needs to take care of the data or the information collected he or she needs to enhance the sensitivity of the variables. Grounded theory is the only qualitative research which allows the researcher to take the help of quantitative data as well. The theory has gained much importance and utilisation not only in the field of psychology, but also in management, sociology, anthropology, information, political science and several other fields. It has also gained much popularity in the field of market research.

2.10   UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Describe the basic goals and perspectives of grounded theory?

2) Explain the steps of grounded theory?

3) How can you say that the grounded theory approach is one of the systematic way to generate a theory?

4) What are the different types of coding?

5) Describe the relevance and implications of the grounded theory?

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