



GROUNDING THEORY REVIEW

An international journal

Marketing for Acceptance

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November 2009

Grounded Theory Review, Vol 8 (Issue #3), 19-27

The online version of this article can be found at:

<https://groundedtheoryreview.org>

Originally published by Sociology Press

<https://sociologypress.com/>

Archived by the Institute for Research and Theory Methodologies

<https://www.mentoringresearchers.org/>

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Tina L. Johnston, Ph.D.

Abstract

Becoming a researcher comes with the credentializing pressure to publish articles in peer-reviewed journals (Glaser, 1992; Glaser, 2007; Glaser, 2008). The work intensive process is exacerbated when the author's research method is grounded theory. This study investigated the concerns of early and experienced grounded theorists to discover how they worked towards publishing research projects that applied grounded theory as a methodology. The result was a grounded theory of marketing for acceptance that provides the reader with insight into ways that classic grounded theorists have published their works. This is followed by a discussion of ideas for normalizing classic grounded theory research methods in our substantive fields.

Introduction

Publish or perish is an often quoted phrase in academia aptly describing the pressure put on scholars to produce and get research articles through the journal review process and into content area publications so that new knowledge can be shared throughout the reading populous in their field of study (Vernier, 1994). Submission processes are much the same (although blinding policies may differ). An author writes an article, finds an appropriate journal in which to submit the article for peer-review and then waits for a response from a few volunteering reviewers who will choose to accept, ask for revisions or reject the article for publication (Groves, 2006; O'Gorman, 2008). Regardless of the debate as to the general efficacy of this method, it is the one in place (Groves, 2005; Winkler, 2009; Lee, 2006). Like any researcher, the Grounded Theory author must pursue publication in this way. There are complications that arise when writing and submitting classic grounded theory (hereafter CGT) articles for publication. CGT research methods and articles have different structures than others (Glaser, 1978; 2006). In addition, there are many derivatives of grounded theory methodologies (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Glaser, 1992b; Chen & Boore, 2009).

When reviewers volunteer at various journals they are asked

to provide topical and methodological expertise by filling out surveys where they check off boxes in which they feel they have expertise. In these lists, very often grounded theory is one of those choices, however, what kind of grounded theory the reviewer is familiar with or even whether that reviewer has a real understanding of the method is not insured. To further complicate matters these journals may publish standard formatting requirements that do not match the standard format of CGT papers.

The Problem

The problem then is two-fold; users of CGT are under the same pressures as their colleagues to publish studies, yet the journals and reviewers in their field are often inhospitable or ignorant of the intricacies of papers written using the CGT method. Additionally, the 'Grounded Theory' articles that do get through to publication in many content area journals have either used some other form of grounded theory (i.e., Qualitative Grounded Theory, or the Strauss and Corbin method) or are claiming to use the method but instead have applied certain aspects or jargon from the method (Glaser, 2009) in combination with other often qualitative research methods such as case study or ethnography. The prevalence of these 'other' grounded theory articles set reviewers expectations of what the grounded theory methodology is and what studies that use grounded theory should look like. These expectations cast a shadow on CGT article submissions.

Methodology

This research study employed the use of classic grounded theory (Strauss and Glaser, 1968; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1992b). Using data in the form of reviewers' comments to CGT authors who published Grounded Theory articles and interviews with CGT authors, this theory of *marketing for publication* was discovered over a period of three years.

The author collected memos/notes following incidents of data collection and line by line analysis of data. Every time a new memo was collected the previously collected memos were read and sorted seeking a main concern and patterns of behavior to resolve that main concern. In this case a main concern was quickly realized, however the details (causes of the difficulty in publishing CGT articles) came after much of the theory was

discovered. A working paper was written and presented at the 2007 Grounded Theory Seminar in New York. This presentation provided the author with additional subject volunteers who sent publication reviews and provided interview data for the author.

A final data set was collected from the grounded theory literature by conducting a search of a random collection of published articles by searching library databases for 'grounded theory' as a keyword. Seeking examples of grounded theory articles to scan for the type of grounded theory used. Articles were then scanned for references to classic grounded theory or references to Glaser and then read for article format and interpretation of grounded theory methodology. If open reviews or article iterations were available these were read.

Marketing for Publication

As the early career grounded theorist commences with paper submissions to the various journals in his/her field invariably he or she receives rejection or revise and resubmit notices. Scrutiny of these notices may reflect a variety of non-methodological suggestions for improvement of the articles (general style or content concerns) while others suggest that the reviewer has misconceptions of or a lack of knowledge of the classic grounded theory method. These voids of knowledge lead to unfair criticisms and ultimate rejection of articles.

Most reviewers, and [editors name], expressed significant concerns with the conceptual framework for the study, the literature review, the methodology, data collection and analysis, as well as the paper's structure. These concerns have resulted in our decision to reject the manuscript.

The rejecting journal reviewers may suggest that all articles should be formatted to include, a section for the problem, a theoretical framework, literature review, analysis, results and discussion sections. Some receive reviews suggesting that there is not enough detail in the data, documentation of data, or attention to the literature, or they are criticized for poor sampling techniques.

Once rejected, the classic grounded theorist begins to be more strategic in his/her writing and submission process. This process, termed *marketing for acceptance*, may include both

changes in the article's content and/or a focus on article placement. The changes to the article may include method masking, qualitzing, and methodological redefinition. While the article placement strategies include piggy-backing and strategic submitting.

Method Masking

Method masking occurs when the researcher, in order to make his/her study more marketable must compromise on many aspects of the method. He or she may feel compelled to write the article to match deductive formatting requirements out of pressure to apply a theoretical framework or literature review. Reliability and validity measures are detailed and sampling and interview questions described (Swanburg, et. al, 2009). Under these clearly mismatched pressures towards confirmatory research paradigms, the researcher may feel compelled to gain acceptance by minimizing the discussion of grounded theory in the research process or eliminating it all together by going back to the data and using another method but with a view to their completed grounded theory results.

Qualitizing

Qualitizing occurs when the early researcher seeks to adapt an article to journals that report qualitative studies. Grounded theory, in general, seems to have had a better reception among Qualitative researchers and therefore to reviewers of journals that focus on these types of studies. Grounded theory researchers may adapt their article for this type of publication by increasing the number of illustrations included in their article submission or by increasing the overall details of the study and its results. Qualitizing is characterized by a shift from a focus on the overall patterns and those patterns application to thick description of the substantive area.

A reviewer liked the work but questioned whether I needed to give much attention to the method. In her view I was explaining something that is common practice (not a distinct method). Another person took issue with my limited attention to certain literature. A third wanted more examples and also took issue with the notion that I was presenting a theory (another common resistance). I stuck with the reviewers and tried to balance their comments and create something I could live with...There

is more description, but I think I was able to convey some key elements of the work.

Methodological Redefinition

Methodological redefinition is a very common phenomenon among grounded theory studies published in the research literature. The author of a grounded theory article may suggest that grounded theory is a data sorting method, a qualitative analysis method, or a method that can be attributed to Dr. Glaser, Strauss and Corbin, and Charmaz in tandem (Hunt et. al, 2009; McGlachlan, 2009). The extent to which these authors are displaying misunderstanding of the various grounded theory methodologies or represent a strategic display of the grounded theory literature is unknown.

Piggy Backing

A grounded theory researcher may piggyback their grounded theory study with another deductive study. This piggyback study uses the authors initial grounded theory study as a theoretical framework for the new deductive study (Calvin, 2004; Calvin & Erikson, 2006). This method provides the researcher with an opportunity to gain exposure for their theory while submitting to a journal that may require a non-compatible article organization, or narrowly defines the types of articles it will print (i.e. quantitative studies etc.)

Strategic Submitting

The grounded theory author may submit a classic grounded theory article to the methodological journal that currently accepts and prints CGT research. *The Grounded Theory Review* is a peer-reviewed journal that was created explicitly for this purpose. However in author's substantive area, articles have been targeted to journals that are grounded theory friendly, that is they may allow generous word limits for explaining grounded theories unique reporting components and organization or have open review processes (Sandgren, et. al, 2007; Thulesius & Grahn, 2007). These journals may have a track record of including classic grounded theory articles (such as many of those in nursing fields). The author's findings might be so well matched to the substantive area that these results overshadow any objections that may be made to the methodology in other words the study results have grab (Glaser, 1992).

Discussion

The results from this study indicate that authors do find some difficulty in publishing CGT articles and employ a variety of strategies to garner the publications that are so important to advancing one's early career in academia. Using interview data and published examples of articles labeled to have used classic grounded theory methodology indicates that the authors employ strategies of *marketing for publication* in their quest to garner publications to further their careers. These strategies included *method masking, qualitizing, methodological redefinition, piggy-backing, and strategic submitting*. These strategies are not employed in any order but in their variety suggest some problems and solutions for classic grounded theorists as they too pursue publication opportunities.

Normalizing Classic Grounded Theory

Within many substantive fields of research there is a great need for CGT to become more a part of the research culture. Some of the strategic marketing strategies discussed in this article impede this process as they perpetuate a culture of methodological misunderstanding while others work towards this goal. This need is two-fold: one, to share the method itself so that others can experience the power of theory development, and, two, the focus of this paper, is to increase the literary exposure of classic GT results into all fields of research. The author and discussions with other grounded theorists suggests there are some things we can do to aide in the normalizing process.

Becoming a Reviewer

The collected reviews of article submissions suggest there is a need for more reviewers with expertise in evaluating classic grounded theory articles. If we want our article submissions to be read by competent grounded theorists we must be willing to provide that service to our discipline colleagues who also use classic grounded theory. Increasing the number of reviewers will increase the acceptance rate of submissions and increase the visibility of method through print.

Train New Grounded Theory Researchers

In developing grounded theory seminars Dr. Glaser has build a foundation of knowledgeable classic grounded theorists around

the world. These growing bodies of experts are beginning to train new users of grounded theory. If this process continues to grow more and more researchers will have expertise in classic grounded theory, they will write about their substantive area, become reviewers themselves and again both the method itself and the opportunities of exposure through print will increase.

Conclusion

Clearly the results of this study indicate that there is still much progress to be made in publishing studies that use this more than 40 year old method of theory development. Still, there is also clear progress as is evidenced by the growing popularity of grounded theory institutes, *The Grounded Theory Review* and the diversity of disciplines represented by the novice to expert classic grounded theorists (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 2007). It is hoped that this article will further assist in normalizing classic grounded theory across disciplines and inspire grounded theorists to both become grounded theory reviewers in their content fields and submit positive examples of studies that employ the use of the method.

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