

Critical evaluation of ethnography and grounded theory



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It is obvious that research is an important element of our everyday life.

Research is everywhere we go; it is background of everything we face in our present time like for example management, marketing or finance. There are two main streams of performing a particular research; it is qualitative method which is based mostly of words and statements or quantitative which involves statistics and empirical evidence. Two out of three most frequently discussed qualitative approaches which are grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology would be discussed in this paper (Avis, 2003).

In the first part of this paper I am about to discuss the main idea of ethnography. I am going to discover what is it and I would talk about the methods of research ethnographers use in order to get information they need, for making a relative conclusion. In addition, in this research paper I would to talk about what are the problems the researchers face in obtaining and evaluating obtained observations. This part would present several example of how this method could be applied in everyday life.

Second part would show the differences between two approaches ethnography and positivism approach. The purpose of this part is to show the understanding of ethnographic research method from positivist perspective.

Third part of this research paper would debate about second most frequently discussed qualitative approach, grounded theory. What is it, what are main notions of this research method? Moreover, I would discuss main methods and techniques of this research and the areas where it is usually applied. In

addition I would pay attention on the methods of hypothesis formation and testing.

In fourth part I would discuss grounded theory method from positivist point of view. I would argue why this research method would not suit positivist's requirements. My argument would present the examples of how certain grounded theory research could be performed from positivist point of view.

Last but not least, this research paper would present differences between two most frequent qualitative research methods, grounded theory and ethnography.

Ethnography

In general ethnography is a qualitative research method that recognized as a participant observation, it is the method where researcher contributes his or her time examining, communicating or cooperating with a social group. By observing and communicating with a social group researcher could understand how a particular group ties their relationships among each other, how a particular culture was built and maintained in order to keep social group together (Brown-Saracino, Thurk, & Fine, 2008). Making research ethnographers mostly focused on actions and intentions of the social group. Researcher observing the social group on daily bases tries to understand what idea is behind of a particular deed or objective (Herbert, 2000). By getting new information about the group, understanding what they take for granted, ethnographer could identify structure of their actions. Detailed examination of the group's behavior on daily basis separates ethnography from other qualitative researches, like interviews (Power, 2002).

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“ Any group of persons – prisoners, primitives, pilots or patients – develops a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it, and a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject” (Goffman, 1961, pp. 9-10).

There are various methods which researchers use in order to get a data about a particular group. One of the best examples of how ethnographer could participate in a group’s activities is research made by Burawoy (1979), he worked as a machine operator for ten months in a Chicago factory in order to answer the question, why workers of the factory do not work harder. Some researchers were trying to achieve more close relationships with the groups of study; however, some relationships are unchangeable.

Ethnographers usually balance between being insider and outsider, they are trying to see everything through the eyes of the social group ethnographers trying to analyze and in the same time trying to see whole picture in general applying theories (Taber, 2010). According to Power (2002) ethnographer has to maintain two positions at the same time. One, he or she has to be a good actor, who can engage obtained information in ongoing interaction. Second, has to be rational and logical scientist to correctly interpret obtained information.

Interviews, surveys and questioners are completely different from ethnography because rather than to examine what people say, ethnographers examine both what people say and do. There is huge gap between described relationships and reality. The fact that ethnographer can

differentiate between deeds and words make ethnography more informative methodology (Liebow, 1967).

Furthermore, ethnography involves more emotions and feelings. By getting inside of the social group researchers has to change his or her habits, sights and tastes. It is also an important factor in evaluation of observations (Dennison, Wintrob, & Brunt, 1972). The research made by Herbert (2000) in Los Angeles Police Department involved emotional responds because witnessing of suicide had a huge impact on him and this changed the observation results. Because of emotional effect, policeman's job appeared to him very tough and only for people with strong heart.

Ethnography from positivist's perspective.

Looking on ethnographic methodology from positivist point of view, we can agree and disagree in certain extent with ethnographers' epistemology. First of all, both of them, ethnographers and positivists, make some kind of observations in order to get information. However, the information ethnographers get is completely different from what positivists trying to achieve in their research. As it was mentioned before ethnography uses observations and involvement methods in order to understand what is the culture and behavior of the social group. Taking as example the experience of Burawoy (1979), ethnographer who entered society of factory workers to obtain information about why workers do not work harder. The idea of research made by Burawoy was to see the world through the eyes of those workers he was working with, understand their feelings and emotions.

Whereas, positivist researcher would not try to put him or herself in " shoes"

of another person he or she would rather employ empirical analysis in this case and for example would pay attention on such factors as what is the duration of working day, how often workers have to stay overtime, how often workers go out to smoke or everything that affects workers' productivity. According to Trochim (2006) the idea of positivism is to focus on what we could examine and evaluate, everything that goes outside of this scope is considered as impossible. Also Silverman (1998) stated that " there is no agreed doctrine underlying all qualitative social research". Ethnographers do not have certain rule to perform their analysis, while positivists follow certain set of rules during analysis (Avis, 2003).

Data collection is general aspect of qualitative research mostly in form of words and statements, and the method of analysis they use do not involve statistics or empirical analysis (Cepeda & Martine, 2005).

In above paragraph I was giving the example of research made by Herbert (2000) who went to analyze policemen's job. He was saying that case of suicide terrified him so much that his emotions affected his conclusion about his research. In case of positivism this is not acceptable; positivism states that this is only one truth (Somers, 1998). In case of positivism there cannot be to different interpretation of same results.

Moreover, if pay attention on the speed of research performance, positivists would say that ethnography is not efficient methodology. In order to get information ethnographer has to go inside of the company and spend ten, like in case of (Burawoy, 1979), or more month in order to obtain observations from a group of people. Whereas, positivists could obtain

information of the whole company roughly in same period of time. Positivism covers bigger sample size rather than ethnography (Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar, & Newton, 2002).

Grounded theory

Originally, grounded theory was introduced by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory was developed by leaning on the experience which they had in one of the Chicago school and also by taking into account the criticism; they developed their own strategy of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Design of the research frequently relies on the reviewing literature which leads to formation of hypothesis. After this, hypothesis would be tested in the real world. Whereas grounded theory examines the realities and analyses the data without any hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the qualitative research the analysis of data can be described differently as the result of an interpretivist point of view on a certain event or action. In grounded theory the analysis of data includes searching for concepts which are behind the reality, by searching for codes, concepts and categories. Creation of the grounded theory passes three stages – induction, deduction and verification (Strauss, 1987), each of them are absolutely important to formation of the new theory. Also it is important to notice that all three stages, according to Strauss, will be involved in research not consistently, and to some extent are present at each stage of research.

To make the construction of theory more systematized, Glazer and Strauss offer several necessary strategies of the analysis in qualitative research.

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Firstly, analytical process must alternate with process of gathering information or even to go in parallel with it. Secondly, observance of this principle allows to create theoretical sampling in the process of research, purpose of which, is to represent not the investigated group of people (object of research), but the aspects, properties of characteristic or quality of the investigated phenomenon (subject of research). “ Theoretical sample is a process of data gathering for theory generating by means of which the analyst collects, unites, codes, analyzes the data and decide, what of them to collect at a following stage and where to search for them to develop the theory in process of occurrence. “ This process of data gathering is supervised by the appearing theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thirdly, to make a continuous comparative analysis, this could be used at different stages of analytical process. Defining the place of the comparative analysis, in the developed methodological field, authors place it between two basic strategies, the approaches of the analysis. The first approach is the content-analysis at first the coding model must be set, and then data must be gathered regularly, estimated and analyzed on in advance certain, invariable and uniform scales for all of them which allow to give to the qualitative data, quantitative form. On the basis of the new structured data file by means of numerical model are proved preliminary put forward hypotheses (are accepted or denied). Glazer and Strauss connect second approach with a situation when it is necessary to develop some preliminary ideas or hypotheses. In this case operation of detailed coding can slow down the achievement of the objective, therefore “ the analyst only looks through the data for a finding of new properties of theoretical categories and writes memos about these properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Such approach <https://assignbuster.com/critical-evaluation-of-ethnography-and-grounded-theory/>

describes more likely an initial stage of coding and for theory construction is insufficient, as constant transformation and reintegration of the data in process of accumulation and the material review in the latter case is required. And the third corresponds to this problem, offered by authors, the approach. It connects in analytical procedures of constant comparison procedure of the developed coding the first and style of development of the theory of the second. The purpose of a method of constant comparison in which coding and the analysis, theory generating are united more regularly, than is supposed in the second approach, by means of use of the developed coding and analytical procedures. Being more systematized, than the second approach, a method of constant comparisons at the same time is not connected and with the first which is developed for preliminary testing, instead of theory opening.

Grounded theory from positivist's perspective.

In my opinion from positivism point of view grounded theory is not quite correct decision for theory deducing. Strauss mentioned that in some cases it is better to start the research with an initial hypothesis which can be changed or evaluate during the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this case I think that the initial idea can be lost which has been introduced originally in the research. Whereas from the positivists point of view the theory or hypothesis must be suggested and only then it must be tested, without changing its initially idea (Trochim, 2006). The result of this test should confirm or deny this theory or hypothesis. Use of grounded theory is useful in area as medicine; many researchers use the given approach for research of this area. For instance grounded theory was used in order to <https://assignbuster.com/critical-evaluation-of-ethnography-and-grounded-theory/>

understand how Medical Family Therapy helps patients to “ deal with complex family dynamics” that usually happens after hospitalization, also the therapy was directed to help people to avoid next hospitalization (Anderson, Huff, & Hodgson, 2008). In addition, as it was mentioned by (Trochim, 2006) positivist seeking to find one single truth, whereas one of the parts of the grounded theory research is coding the possible answers of participant, this is a certain type of interpretation due to the fact that every single researcher codes information in a unique way which is not acceptable by positivist researcher (Allan, 2003).

Similarities and Differences of Grounded Theory and Ethnography.

Grounded theory and ethnography can be very compatible; as ethnographic studies may give the wide explanation which can be extremely valuable data, for grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Some of these compatibilities came from the similarities in the characteristics of these two approaches. Ethnography is observing and analyzing behavior in natural conditions and the grounded theory makes collecting of data in the natural conditions too. Also there are similarities in backgrounds, both grounded theory and ethnography came from sociology, but in addition to ethnography it has also anthropological background. The main focus of this approaches are different where grounded theory stands for developing the theory whereas ethnography describing and interpreting a culture. In data collection both approaches gather information through different kinds of interviews, but ethnography moved beyond using observations of other (Creswell, 2006).

Conclusion

In this coursework I talk about two qualitative approaches ethnography and grounded theory. These two approaches are used in many areas of our life. They help us to justify some undiscovered phenomena's that we face. They both have similarities and differences which makes them unique in certain areas. As it was mentions above ethnography focuses on describing and interpretation of culture of the certain group of people. Whereas, grounded theory is used to “ grounding the theory in the view of people” (Creswell, 2006).

I looked on these two qualitative approaches from the perspective of positivist. I found that mostly positivism do not support both of them. In my opinion both of this approaches are time consuming in discovering certain hypothesis or theory. Also, as it was mentioned above positivists are seeking for single truth, whereas in both qualitative approaches, grounded theory and ethnography, could be found multiple truths depending on research emotions, feelings and understandings. In addition, I mentioned that one more criteria that is used by positivists comparing to grounded theory and ethnography which is statistical or empirical data analysis. Only because both qualitative approaches use mostly words and statements positivists could reject such evidence.