

Reusing Qualitative Data to Generate Theory: Reflections on 'Working at the Margins'

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Abstract

This paper intends to contribute to the Academy of Marketing conference 'Reflective Marketing in a Material World' debate on 'how to research issues of relevance' by discussing the theory generating opportunities presented in the secondary analysis of qualitative data. The paper reviews the rationale and critiques of reanalysing qualitative data and discusses analytical commitments involved in the theory generating approach 'grounded theory'. A worked example of the process of developing a grounded theory based upon data generated in six separate focus group studies facilitated by NVivo7 is presented. Reflections upon the mechanics of employing these analytical processes (secondary analysis, grounded theory and NVivo) are provided. Although these activities are largely at the periphery of marketing research, the paper argues that there may be some merit in developing marketing theory by 'working at the margins'.

Track Indication

Marketing Research incorporating Qualitative Inquiry in Marketing

Keywords

Secondary analysis of qualitative data, grounded theory, NVivo7

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Introduction

The Academy of Marketing Conference 'Reflective Marketing in a Material World' encouraged academic debate on 'how to research issues of relevance'. This paper aims to contribute to this debate by asking qualitative marketing researchers to reflect upon the opportunities and issues involved with reanalysing qualitative marketing data to generate theory. Funded marketing research has to address the contractual aims and objectives of the sponsoring organisation. In qualitative interview based studies, the depth and richness of data generated may result in the emergence of concepts that although not directly relevant to the original study aims, are worthy of further scholastic examination. It is in this fertile area that latent opportunities for the secondary analysis of qualitative data to generate marketing theory exist. The need for theoretical development of the marketing discipline is generally accepted (Kerin 1996). The practical value of marketing theory includes improved managerial decision making and problem solving; knowledge creation by giving direction and structure to academic inquiry; and intellectual curiosity by providing the basis for understanding how the marketing system works (Saren 1999). To highlight the theory generating opportunities via the secondary analysis of qualitative marketing data, this paper begins by 1) reviewing the rationale and critiques associated with the secondary analysis of qualitative data; 2) introducing the 'Grounded Theory Method' and its key analytical commitments; 3) providing a worked example of the process of generating theory from the secondary analysis of focus group data facilitated by NVivo7 and 4) reflecting upon the mechanics of employing these analytical processes which together are largely at the periphery of marketing research.

Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data

Secondary analysis is a research strategy which makes use of pre-existing quantitative or qualitative data for the purposes of investigating new questions or verifying previous studies (Heaton 2004). Historically the strategy has been applied to quantifiable data sets and seldom to qualitative data (Fielding 2000, 2004). However, within the past decade, interest in what has been labelled 'secondary analysis of qualitative data' has emerged within social science methodological literature. Discussions on the application of secondary analysis of qualitative research have been shaped by developments in data archiving, the promotion and retention of data sharing (Corti 2000) and the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) (Fielding 2000). The empirical arguments for revisiting qualitative data include the avoidance of distress to future informants when exploring sensitive topics and where research participants are 'hard to reach' (Fielding 2004).

Heaton (2004) identified five types of secondary qualitative data analysis based upon two decades (1980 to 2000) of associated studies published in health and social care research. They are: 1) 'supra analysis' where the focus is to transcend the primary study by examining new empirical, theoretical or methodological questions, 2) 'supplementary analysis' where the focus is to provide an in-depth analysis of an emergent issue or aspect of the data not considered or fully addressed in the primary study, 3) 're-analysis' where the focus is the same as the primary study and data are re-analysed to verify and corroborate primary analyses, 4) 'amplified analysis' where the focus is to combine data from two or more studies and provide an in-depth analysis of an aspect of the primary study, 5) 'assorted analysis' where the focus is to combine secondary and primary data and conduct an in-depth analysis of an aspect of

the primary study. Few studies within marketing explicitly state the use of secondary qualitative data analysis, although it is implicit within the methodology, for example Otnes *et al* (1997).

Re-using qualitative data has raised both methodological and epistemological problems. Methodological problems include data 'fit' or the likelihood of a pre-existing data set providing a match for a new research question. To address this issue, Hinds *et al* (1997) developed a list of guidelines for assessing the reusability of secondary qualitative data according to the categories of 'accessibility', 'quality' and 'suitability'. Ethical and legal issues, in particular the protection of research participant confidentiality are further methodological problems. This predominantly relates to archived qualitative data that is likely to be analysed by a third party. However, conditions of such archival require protection of research participant anonymity in secondary as with primary research. Epistemological problems include a lack of personal connectivity to the research (Fink 2000). In qualitative research, the relationship of the researcher to research participant is described as a subjective, interactive, 'insider' role (Bryman 1988; Ozanne and Hudson 1989). The empathic requirements of understanding people, their actions and behaviours from their unique perspectives, and the reflexivity practised by the researcher in analysing their role in the data generation process are considered lost with secondary qualitative data analysis. Due to this potential compromise in research context from the researcher 'not having been there', most published research on secondary qualitative data analysis uses a researcher's own data also referred to as 'auto data' (Heaton 2004).

Grounded Theory Method

The Grounded Theory Method (GTM) is the singular research approach associated with conceptual or theoretical development. The methodology was introduced in the seminal text *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* by Sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss during the 1960's (Glaser and Strauss 1967). *Discovery* was penned in part to address a perceived impoverishment of theory generation within the discipline of Sociology due to the dominance of logical empiricism which used quantitative methods to test established theories rather than build theories through qualitative techniques more suited to this endeavour. In addition, *Discovery* challenged the criticism that qualitative research lacked procedures in data collection and analysis to legitimate it. Such methodological debates were similarly experienced in the fields of marketing and consumer behaviour in the 1980's (Anderson 1983, Belk 1995, Calder and Tybout 1987, Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, Hunt 1983, Lutz 1988). For social science disciplines including marketing, *Discovery* provided a historical defence of qualitative research by: legitimising qualitative research as a research endeavour in its own right; contesting assumptions that qualitative research was unsystematic in its process and impressionistic in output; challenging the dominant research approach of separating data collection with its analysis; opposing the belief that qualitative research was only 'descriptive' and unsuitable for theory development; providing written guidelines for systematic qualitative data analysis enabling qualitative research to become accessible to a wider audience (Charmaz).

In essence, GTM is a 'general methodology' or 'research approach' (Strauss and Corbin 1994), which offers qualitative researchers a set of guidelines to develop or build concepts at an abstract level that are derived from behaviours observed within data. The emphasis on 'methodological strategies' makes grounded theory applicable across a spectrum of social science disciplines (Charmaz 2000; Glaser

1992). Within marketing the use of grounded theory is limited although its application has been advocated by for example Lowe and Glaser (1995).

GTM has two main methodological commitments, namely 1) 'comparative analysis' a general method for the systematic selection and study of comparable phenomena and 2) 'theoretical sampling' a process of collecting data for comparative analysis. There are six main analytical commitments many of which will be familiar to qualitative researchers. First, is the **collection of data**. Second, is **coding** or the affixing of labels to data. These codes are then grouped under abstract conceptual headings and the concepts clustered under further abstracted conceptual categories. Third, is **memo writing** to catalogue emerging thoughts and ideas (including hypotheses) about the development of codes and concepts. Fourth, is **constant comparative methods** for comparing diverse and/or similar evidence to elucidate concepts. This may be in the form of 'comparison groups', i.e. comparing different aspects of the phenomenon of interest such as different population groups or products. Fifth, is **theoretical sampling** or data collection with the express purposes of developing and refining concepts, categories and their potential linkages. Sixth, is **integration** of the categories into a theoretical framework. The data analyses are based upon the 'simultaneous' collection and analysis of data. In practice this means generating data and deriving key categories and hypotheses from the data. Further data will then be generated to develop the key categories (by theoretical sampling) until **theoretical saturation** of the category has been achieved, i.e. no further data is necessary to explain the concept or property.

A grounded theory based upon the secondary analysis of qualitative data has an entirely different point of departure to that based on primary data collection. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p71) suggests the researcher "*engages in theoretical sampling of the previously collected data, which amounts to collecting data from collected data*". The data set must therefore be sufficiently large and robust to enable theoretical saturation, a potentially critical limitation of a grounded theory based upon secondary qualitative data.

Example: A Grounded Theory of Consumer Acceptance of Novel Foods

This example of a secondary analysis of qualitative data arose from the author's involvement with six separate though related externally funded food consumer research projects (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Food Standards Agency, Department of Trade Foresight Programme Food Chain for Crops and Industry (FCCI), European Commission DGXII Scientific Studies on the Socio-Economic Impact of Biotechnology). These projects were linked by the common use of the focus group technique to generate data and their coverage of a broadly similar subject matter. Study 1 aimed to understand the extent to which consumer attitudes and perceptions of genetically modified foods might impede the adoption of the novel technology. Study 2 aimed to extend the findings of Study 1 by focusing specifically on consumer attitudes and perceptions of fish and various piscine genetic modification applications. Study 3 aimed to examine public conceptualisations of uncertainty and determine the extent to which lay consumers both understand and express concerns about the uncertainties linked with different food hazards. Study 4 aimed to investigate consumer attitudes towards six FCCI determined hypothetical foods. Study 5 aimed to examine the impact of increased consumption of wholegrain foods on cardiovascular disease and participant acceptability of whole grain foods in the diet. Study 6 aimed to examine changes in Study 5's participants' dietary habits and attitudes at 6 and 12 month intervals post intervention. The author was involved

with the focus group data generation in the role as moderator assistant and moderator in Study 1, and moderator in Studies 2-6.

If considered together, these projects contained detailed data relating to contextual food issues (Study 3), a blend of self-reported food perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and experiences relating to abstract 'novel' foods (Studies 1, 2 and 4) and the incorporation of new food ingredients into the diet (Studies 5 and 6). Collectively these projects could be termed 'food acceptance' studies. However, acceptance is not a concept that is fully explained within marketing or behavioural food choice literatures and this provided the impetus for pursuing theoretical development of the term. In total, 43 transcripts drawn from the 6 studies were used as the basis of the 'supra analysis'.

The grounded theory was conducted using NVivo7. NVivo is one of a number of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software package (CAQDAS), whose main functions are to manage qualitative data by providing a system for data storage and facilitating analysis through coding and text retrieval capabilities (for a review see Lewins and Silver 2007). NVivo also incorporates functions that support theory building but can also be used by non-grounded theorists (Bazeley 2007). CAQDAS has investigative advantages of time savings and increased accuracy in the coding process (Tesch 1991), encourages analytic rigour (Seale 2002), improves transparency in the analytic process (Fielding and Lee 1998) and provides an evidential audit of the analytic process enabling the quality of evidence to be more easily judged (Crowley *et al* 2002). Concerns about CAQDAS include the researcher being forced to adopt certain analytic procedures and alienation from rather than immersion in data.

The grounded theory analysis followed a 3 stage process. The first stage involved the theoretical sampling of a food issue or event from within the transcripts. These issues were drawn from within studies, e.g. hypothetical products from Study 4 such as 'anti-cancer broccoli' and across studies such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy mentioned in Studies 1 to 4. Within NVivo7 this involved block coding all the information relating to that food issue under a 'node'. Then detailed or focussed coding, requiring intensive immersion in the data at this node began (referred to as 'coding at the node'). This inductive process was followed by mentally 'stepping back' from the data and through a process of abduction asking 'what are the relationships of the codes to acceptance' and placing them into categories. Ideas about the data and hypotheses were catalogued in individual memos supporting each food issue. The second stage of analysis involved 'constant comparison' of key conceptual categories relating to 'acceptance' for each food issue. Thus the categories and hypotheses with supporting memos for each food issue were compared to one another and integrated to produce a conceptual interpretation of acceptance emerging from, or grounded in, the attitudes and experiences of individuals towards novel foods and technologies. Five acceptance states were derived from the data 1) 'conceptual acceptance', 2) 'connective acceptance', 3) 'evaluative acceptance', 4) 'trial acceptance' and 5) 'dietary acceptance'. In this way, the food issues were used as a vehicle for understanding the factors contributing to 'acceptance' at a more 'abstract' conceptual level. The third and final stage of the analysis was to refine the concepts associated with each acceptance state through further iterations of theoretical sampling and constant comparison of the concepts relevant to each acceptance state. In the case of 'connective acceptance', the secondary data set did not support full theoretical sampling. A supplementary in-depth interview was sufficient to address this deficiency.

Reflections

The GTM provided the logical methodological approach to the 'supra analysis' of my data set. Although there are a number of grounded theory methods texts, including those of the co-originators who evolved the method in different directions, there was much less assistance on the approach using secondary data. Without an intimate knowledge of the data sets and their potential, in particular the range of food related issues within and between the studies, analytical progress would have been slower.

In approaching my analysis I adopted a pragmatic approach by familiarising myself with the central tenets of the methodology without feeling compelled to commit to either Glaser or Strauss's evolved perspectives. Prior to the analysis I was attracted to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) version because of the concreteness of the procedures offered. In practice, the analysis was most closely aligned to the original 1967 *Discovery of Grounded Theory* and Glaser's further explications of the text (Glaser 1978, 1992). This however does not discount the contribution of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research* in terms of its accessibility in explaining key analytical procedures. However, it was the prescriptiveness of the axial coding model that was problematic. My focus on food incidents as phenomena did not 'fit' the model's categories. Although I experimented with my data by attempting to place it within this framework the activity was 'forced' (echoing Glaser's (1992) concerns about the model).

There are both opponents (e.g. Charmaz 2002) and proponents (e.g. Fielding 2000) to the use of CAQDAS in grounded theory studies. Personally, NVivo made the large data set relatively easy to manage, facilitated the theoretical sampling of food issues by enabling all the data relating to the issue (drawn from within and across a number of transcripts) to be lodged in one accessible area (a node of its namesake), enabled the analysis to be approached systematically and enabled thoughts and ideas on the analysis to be lodged under NVivo's memo function. If I contrast the manual alternative to qualitative data analysis with the use of NVivo7, I believe NVivo probably saved time and increased accuracy in the coding process as suggested by Tesch (1991) and encouraged rigour and a thoroughness as noted by Seale (2002).

Conclusions

The secondary analysis of qualitative marketing data has the potential to generate theory through a 'supra analysis' and enrich the existing body of marketing knowledge, a process that can be facilitated by CAQDAS packages. The question is will many researchers adopt both approaches? Although an example is given in this paper, Fielding (2000) suggests this is likely to be rare. He postulates it is young and more novice researchers, namely PhD candidates who are likely to adopt CAQDAS because it is considered 'new' and 'cutting edge'. However, in the context of a doctoral thesis where a researcher needs to demonstrate full research competency, a secondary analysis implicitly means the non-generation of data (Fielding 2000), an important part of the research process. However, it is surely possible to use secondary data as a springboard for theory development and supplement it with primary data collection where the existing data set may be insufficient to achieve theoretical saturation?

The secondary analysis of qualitative marketing research, grounded theory and CAQDAS are acknowledged as peripheral activities within marketing research. However, together they can yield a fruitful admixture and qualitative marketing researchers are encouraged to reflect upon their own existing data sets and consider if there is some merit in developing marketing theory by 'working at the margins'.

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