HOW GROUNDED THEORY SUPPORTED MY RETHINKING OF MARKETING

ABSTRACT

This paper is about my personal journey in Marketingland with Grounded Theory as the vehicle.

Preferably the strategies for grounded theory should be adhered to in a strict and rigorous way. However, I have found that grounded theory can also inspire improvement in the procedure of generating theory – without being applied in a fundamentalist sense. This paper is about my ongoing efforts to develop grand, unifying marketing theory. Marketing theory today is an progressively growing string of scattered claims, deriving from fragmented research of detail, microeconomic theory, various social sciences, experience, observation, hype, and success stories. That’s what is presented in education through textbooks and courses. I call this type of theory “textbook theory.” It is well edited and often fascinating reading, but there is little context. Consequently marketing “theory” offers little guidance.

In an effort to create grand marketing theory I have been greatly inspired by the following strategies from grounded theory: inductive emergence of data and patterns; the core, subcore and other variables; constant comparison; saturation and theoretical sampling; the focus on theory generation rather then testing; and the need to go from description of substantive detail to abstraction and generalization. Following the battle-cry “All is data!” the theory development efforts use everything: original and raw empircial data, extant theory, experience, and whatever seems relevant.

The paper is a travel account, both commenting on methodological issues and tentative outcomes.