

# Comparison and Contrast in the Dimensions of Two Selected Fashion Studies with Different Methodologies

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**ABSTRACT:** *To have better understanding of qualitative research methods, this research paper aims to compare two fashion studies with different qualitative research approaches. The first selected study is based on grounded theory and the second selected research study is based on phenomenology both of them belong to same paradigm i.e. interpretive paradigm. This research study analyses presentation, stylistic, substantive, theoretical, methodological, ethical and interpretive dimensions of both the articles. After thorough comparison and contrast, the researcher has concluded that the study that belongs to the grounded theory gives lots of importance to the data and theory, whereas the study that belongs to phenomenology emphasizes more on the events. The study further concludes that proper selection of the research methodology and the research design is important before carrying out a study as it gives a guideline to the researchers and helps them in carrying out their selected research study in a proper way.*

**Keywords:** Qualitative research, grounded theory, phenomenology, comparison, fashion studies, methods.

## Introduction

Research in marketing plays central role in the expansion of new products, developing new ways of advertising and promoting new strategies. Along with this after the implementation of these strategies, research plays a vital role in monitoring their performance. It also helps in measuring the effectiveness of pricing, product, and distribution and promotion activities (Kotler & Armstrong 2008). Research in the field of marketing is conducted both through qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Qualitative research method uses group discussion, individual in-depth interviews, observations and projective techniques and the data collected try to find out “how and why of the situation” (Easey 73). In contrast quantitative research studies “emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes” (Denzin & Lincoln 13). So qualitative research is the one that provides the opportunity to the research to “study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. (Denzin & Lincoln 5) and is dominated by set of beliefs known as paradigm (Solomon & Rabolt). This research article compares and critically analyse two qualitative research approaches in the field of fashion merchandizing to get insight into the two different approaches of qualitative ways of inquiry.

The first selected qualitative research study was based on grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss 1990) by Helepete, Hathcote and Peters (2005) (Appendix A). Grounded theory methodological approach belongs to interpretive paradigm and therefore it helps in knowing how a qualitative research deals with issues that relate to micromarketing merchandising. The second selected research study by Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) was an exploratory study it again belonged to interpretive paradigm and the methodological approach was phenomenology. The power of the studies that belong to phenomenological approach is on “lived experiences” (Grant & Stephen 459). The present study also analyses the lived experiences of tweenage girls in their purchasing decisions of fashion clothing.

## **Underpinning of Research Approaches**

In qualitative research, there are four major paradigms (Grant et al. 2002). These paradigms are “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Denzin et al. 245) and includes four concepts: “ethics (axiology), epistemology, ontology, and methodology” (Denzin et al. 245). Both the selected research studies share same paradigm i.e. interpretative paradigm.

The interpretative paradigm assumes contingent ontology, a subjectivist epistemology and methodology is naturalistic in nature e.g. phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory etc. (Denzin & Lincoln). In this paradigm, the researchers come very close to the participants, so that they can understand the experiences of the participants and the importance of those events in the life of the participants. Both researcher and participant are involved in the process of data collection but the researcher is in the dominant position as during analysis the interpretations depend upon the researcher (Grant & Giddings).

Methodologies in interpretative paradigm vary in their theoretical aspects, as well as the in their way of data collection and analysis. Both the selected research studies used different research approaches in order to come out with their findings respectively. Helepete et al (2005) (Appendix A) used grounded theory as their research approach, as they were interested in studying the variables that controlled the micromarketing merchandising in the apparel industry and were interested in building some theory. Therefore, they preferred theoretical sampling during the process of data collection. After carrying out interviews, the data was transcribed, analysed and interpreted. This corresponds with the development of a theory called “grounded theory” that “can be viewed as a specific form of ethnographic inquiry [...] through a series of carefully planned steps, develops theoretical ideas” (Crotty 78). In contrast, Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) studied the major corresponding factors that influenced 12-13 year old girls while making decision during the purchase of their fashion clothing. In this research, the researcher conducted focus groups to collect the data and nature of the questions in these focus groups was open ended. Later on, multiple respondents’ cross-analysed and confirmed interpretations and finally data analysis was done in the form of narrations and emphasis was given to the lived experiences, as it was a phenomenological study. This is because phenomenological research uses the interview method

and plans to remain close to the person by capturing stories, writing, and rewriting them to understanding of the experiences of the subject (Grant & Giddings 2002). The comparison and contrast of both qualitative research studies with different approaches is as under:

### **Comparison and Contrast of Qualitative Research Approaches**

This research article, critically analyses two published research papers that belong to two different qualitative research approaches.

### **Presentation and Stylistic Dimension**

#### **Title**

The titles of both the studies adequately summarize the research problem and the population under study. Although in the title only Helepete et al (2005) (Appendix A) described that, their study was qualitative study. However, neither of the two has described the research design in their title.

#### **Abstract**

The abstract of both the studies clearly described the purpose, design, findings, limitation, practical implications, value, keywords and paper type of the study concerning their respective research approaches.

### **Substantive and Theoretical Dimensions**

Helepete, et al (2005) (Appendix A) aligned their research problem with grounded theory. They clearly explained the research design and identified each concept and the importance of micromarketing merchandising in introduction. The literature review discussed all the variables that influenced micromarketing merchandising, with reference to the previous studies. The authors clearly point out the limitations of the research problem. In short, this article appears to be a significant study in micromarketing merchandising especially for new retailers as pointed out in the literature review and its theoretical dimensions seem to be fairly comprehensive in order to carryout a research study with ground theory as its research approach.

The research design of Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) is described as interpretative and they outlined their research problem with

its focus on “tweenage girls” which according to them is a “relatively new in the marketing terminology” (Grant & Stephen 2005) and therefore they had explained this new concept in the introduction. The literature review of this study was quite comprehensive. Each concept was explained separately hence they theoretically explained different factors which influenced the purchasing decision of tweenage girls. This approach is in contrast with the act of “the phenomenologist or interpretive” who “is committed to understand social phenomena from the actor’s own perspective and examining how the world is experienced” (Taylor & Bogdan 3). Therefore, they identified the main point of focus in their study at the end of literature review that became the basis of their findings after interviewing the focus groups. Hence, Grant & Stephen’s study (Appendix B) substantively contributes to an understanding of the behaviour of teenage girls.

Both the studies at the end came out with some factors that helped them to initiate their study. The literature in the Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) study left some questions unanswered in the end, from which they picked only one question as focus of their research so that they had better understanding on this social phenomenon. Whereas, Helepete et al (2005) (Appendix A) identified several variables which influenced micromarketing merchandising and were also able to prepare a flow model at the end of the literature review, as their main interest was to generate a theory at the end of the study for micromarketing merchandising. Hence, both the studies are qualitative and have some contributions to the consumer and market research.

## **Methodological Dimensions**

### **Setting**

After randomly selecting stores from the different parts of United States, as visits were not possible due to the financial, time and geographical constraints in-depth telephone interviews of the retailers were carried out and tape-recorded by Helepete, Hathcote and Peters (2005) (Appendix A). In contrast, Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) provided a controlled setting of business school but allowed the participants to feel relaxed and unthreatened. A moderator conducted these interviews and then tape recorded, while the others observed and took notes and remained with the person’s story. However, both the selected studies did not describe the background and geographical location.

## **Research Sample**

Helepete et al (2005) (Appendix A) developed criterion for the selection of the stores. They initially compiled a list of 50 stores then randomly selected 20 stores; a significant number to support their grounded theory. On the contrary, Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) concentrated on only four focus groups. Each group consisted of six teenage girls from different schools in the city. Hence, the researchers of both the studies selected an adequate number of samples. However, both the studies had not fully explained the sampling strategies.

## **Research Design**

The authors of both the research studies followed flexible research design based on the on-going data collection followed by analysis. Helepete et al (2005) (Appendix A) developed their research according to their chosen methodological approach i.e. grounded theory. They carried series of well-planned steps and extensively clarified the limitations of the study and later on, they generated a theory regarding micromarketing merchandising.

In contrast, research conducted by Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) clearly identified their study as interpretative research, and they limited it to exploratory although it had not clearly identified its research approach. The construction and preferences in their research design including methods of data collection, analysis and its emphasis on “lived experiences” (Grant & Stephen 459) clearly aligned it with phenomenological approach.

## **Procedure**

Theoretical sampling was utilized by Helepete et al (2005) (Appendix A) for the collection of data as “in theoretical sampling, the actual number of studied cases is relatively unimportant. What is important is the potential of case to aid the researcher in developing theoretical insight into the area of social life being studied” (Taylor & Bogdan 93). Therefore, the development of theories was the base of the grounded theory and the data collection was preferably through theoretical sampling. In contrast, Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) relied mainly on group interviews and observations of series of four structured focus groups. A “phenomenologist seeks understanding through

qualitative methods such as observations, in-depth interview and others, that yield descriptive data” (Taylor & Bogdan 4). Although both the research studies selected different methods of data collection but they were quite appropriate for their selected research approaches.

### **Data Quality**

Helepete, et al (2005) (Appendix A) clearly described method of data collection and analysis in their study. The data collection was through in-depth telephone call of 15 and 30 minutes in length. Interviews were taped recorded, transcribed and analyzed using open, axial and selective coding, as “in qualitative research, coding is the way of developing and refining interpretation of the data” (Taylor & Bogdan 150) and is mostly done in grounded theory. The presentation of the results and findings were very clear. Finally, the researcher develops a conceptual model to represent the theory of micromarketing merchandising, as theories are the essence of the grounded theory.

On the contrary, Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) in their interpretative phenomenological study selected focus groups to have an in-sight into the lived experiences. Observations and interview were examined, transcribed by multiple respondents, cross-analysed and completed in words. Although both the studies adequately interpreted the data, conceptualized the themes and clearly presented their results but were clearly different in their approach of conducting their research study. As Crotty believes for the purpose of the research sometimes, it is suitable to link methodology with established line of thought (Crotty 1998).

### **Ethical Dimensions**

Both the research studies have given due consideration to the ethical issue concerning their respective studies. As the study of Helepete et al (2005) (Appendix A) was dealing with adults so they took oral consent and made telephone calls to collect the data for the study (Taylor & Bogdan 1998). In contrast, Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) gave a brief description about their study to tweenage girls and their parents. However, they mentioned that the environment they provided to the participants was relaxed and secure.

### **Interpretative Dimensions**

Helepete et al (2005) (Appendix A) working with the grounded theory after analysis and interpretation of the data, developed a conceptual model to represent their theory. They discussed their findings and made suggestions in their discussion section. Due consideration was also given to limitations of the study. They also explained the constraints and recommendations about the future research. While Grant & Stephen (2005) (Appendix B) clustered their findings around five related themes after interviewing and observing in order to get in-sight into the lived experiences of the tweenage girls as phenomenology helps in understanding the intricate world of human experiences and accommodates that data which is not directly observable e.g. beliefs, values and feeling (LeVasseur 2002). They also discussed conclusions and supported their conclusion with quotations to express internal ideas and feeling of tweenage girls. They also discussed limitations and further research suggestions. Therefore, both the selected studies being different in their research approach presented their interpretations in different ways.

### **Conclusion**

After thorough comparison and critical analysis of the selected studies, this research study concludes that in qualitative research, the selection of proper research approach gives direction to the researcher. It is also reflected from the above critical analysis that the key difference in both the studies lies in the research approach as the study which is based on grounded theory emphasizes on inductive theorizing process. However, the study based on phenomenology is more concerned in finding out the meaning, which people attach to things in their life. Lastly, this research study recommends that a comparative study on the studies based on between grounded theory and the feminist theory should also carried out.



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## APPENDIX A

### **A Qualitative Study Of Micromarketing Merchandising In The Us Apparel Retail Industry**

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Cara Peters (Winthrop University, Rock Hill, South Carolina, USA)

#### **ABSTRACT**

##### **Purpose**

– To examine the variables that influence micromarketing merchandising in the apparel industry in order to help new retailer understand the importance of micromarketing merchandising.

##### **Design/methodology/approach**

– A model was developed showing the different variables that influenced micromarketing merchandising. General merchandising managers of 20 US-based apparel retail chains were interviewed using a questionnaire developed after analyzing the available literature. A qualitative method of data analysis was conducted and the model was revised based on the findings of the research.

##### **Findings**

– A qualitative analysis of the transcribed interviews indicated that assortment, demographics, pricing and customer loyalty were the primary variables that effected micromarketing merchandising in the apparel retail industry. The sub-variables in the study included lifestyle, ethnicity, store size and location, and customer service.

##### **Research limitations/implications**

– The research was limited to US-based apparel retailers. Future research could be directed towards in-depth quantitative analysis of each variable influencing micromarketing merchandising.

##### **Practical implications**

– The results of this study could be used by managers of retail chains to understand the various variables that need to be considered while micromarketing merchandising for their store. Based on the area the store is located in, the importance of each variable can be adjusted to best suit specific stores.

**Keywords:** Merchandising, Customer loyalty, Pricing, Demographics

## Appendix B

### **Buying Behaviour of “Tweenage” Girls and Key Societal Communicating Factors Influencing their Purchasing of Fashion Clothing**

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Graeme R. Stephen ,The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK)

#### **ABSTRACT**

##### **Purpose**

– To examine the key communicating factors which influence 12-13 year old girls in their purchasing decisions for fashion clothing.

##### **Design/methodology/approach**

– A series of four, structured focus group interviews, consisting of six girls, with questions developed after analysing the available literature. A qualitative method of data analysis was conducted based around five related themes and the “reflective stage”.

##### **Findings**

– This stage is highly fashion-sensitive. The findings show the key decision factors when buying are parental and peer group approval, and the purchasing of fashion items is strongly influenced by brand name and its associations. The findings revealed the respondents were prepared to pay a premium for branded clothing, placing a high emphasis on the product being deemed *cool*.

##### **Research limitations/implications**

– The study utilises purely qualitative methods to explore the role of branding and purchasing influences from the perspective of these girls in order to gain a richer and deeper understanding of their behaviour. The findings provide the basis for further research into the buying behaviour of older girls.

##### **Practical implications**

– The results of this study could be used by fashion retailers, marketers and their advertising agencies when planning a media campaign targeted at 12-13 year old girls.

**Keywords: Fashion, Buying behaviour, Communication, Brands, Girls, Adolescents**