# METHODS AND METHODOLOGY OF A DISSERTATION

## Aim and objectives

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the principle factors that affect women to reach senior job positions in high-end fashion retailing industry in the U.K. However, the research will need to explore and find out if alterations have to occur in retail senior job positions so as to understand the principle factors affecting women in reaching senior jobs positions in the retail industry in the U.K.

## Reasons for this research

There still exists a larger gap in the literature concerning the link between women and the whys and wherefores so many of them are not in high senior jobs in retailing, even with dynamic number of modernized studies in the field of women in management. In literature, gaps (factors) related to networking and childcare, glass ceiling, and family life are evident, and several researchers have highlighted them (DeNisi and Pritchard, 2006, 255).

Nevertheless, this research will solely focus on **qualitative approach**. From an academic perspective, this is the best approach as it will help collect data from different sources. Sharan (1998, p. 1) argues that when studying women qualitative method is the best. Several researchers focusing on women in leadership such as Susan Vinnicombe have used several qualitative approaches like books, interviews, and journals. However, the sole reason this method is applied, it is important in uncovering significant developments in organizations, teams, and individuals, as well as comprehend how these developments unfold over time (Simmons 2016, p. 1). Bluhm *et al*. (2010, p. 2) notes that qualitative research is very important as it helps understand what people experience and how such individuals interpret their experiences.

Since there are time constraints when carrying out this research, one approach is better. In this case, a qualitative approach is far better as previous case studies and interviews will assist to comprehend progression of women in the retailing industry compared to surveys which might not fully answer the questions presented (Ghauri and Gronhaug 2010, p. 200). Regarding the semi-structured interviews, qualitative approach will yield more information.

Comparison between quantitative research and qualitative research

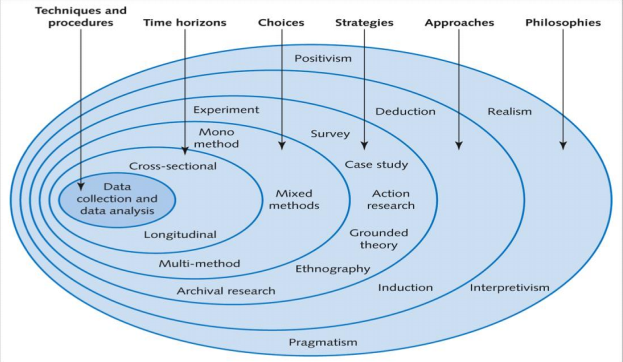
| Qualitative research | Quantitative research |
| --- | --- |
| * The sample design is a non-probability * Focus is on interpreting and understanding * Main purpose is in-depth understanding to build theory * Researcher is fully involved and participates fully | * The sample design is a probability * Focus is on predicting, explaining, and describing * Main purpose is to test, predict, and describe theory * Researcher stays away to avoid bias |

For this research, the target group is women in the retailing industry, even though the focus will be on both women and men; target age group is 25 to 35 because this is considered the age group many individuals apply for senior job positions. The main focus is to investigate the principle factor that affects women to reach these positions. By exploring both men and women’s perceptions and opinions of the factors affecting women in high end fashion retailing industry will help the researcher in closing the gap as to the reasons women are affected in attaining senior positions in retailing.

This research will use the research process suggested by Saunders *et al*. (2012). This research framework takes into account the approach of studies stated in the collected works as justification for the approaches that have been useful to this research. This chapter is divided into (a) philosophy (b) approach (c) strategy (d) methodological choices (e) time horizon, and (f) techniques and procedures. However, the most suitable are discussed.

Figure 1

The Research Onion (Saunders *et al*., 2012)



## Research philosophy

When dealing with philosophical questions, there are two classes: positivist/interpretivist research philosophies and ontology an epistemology (Saunders *et al*. 2012, p. 129). As a matter of fact, interpretivism is connected to qualitative research while positivism is connected to quantitative research. According to Saunders *et al*. (2012, p. 130), as a study, Ontology is focused on the nature of certainty, and can be distinguished amid subjectivism and objectivism and in the end the individual perspective is far essential than impartiality. On the other hand, epistemology is ‘apprehensive with what makes suitable information in a field of study’ (Saunders *et al.* 2012, p. 132).

This study applies **interpretivism philosophy** because of its empirical nature. Besides, the philosophies, the views, and the principles of the scholar have played a critical part in determining the suitable questions for the interviews and the topics to be discussed. Nevertheless, Saunders *et al*. (2012, p. 140) notes that interpretivism philosophy promotes an in depth investigation and minor samples into qualitative research which fits the challenging investigation of the principle factor affecting women to reach senior job positions in fashion retailing industry. Fitzpatrick (2012) argues that interpretive researchers comprehend they will instigate and be prejudiced by the study motion they are convoluted with and that a link amid the two will certainly mature.

## Research approach

This section debates on the approach of induction and that of deduction. This is after obtaining the needed choice of executing the interpretive philosophy. However, to achieve this, it is important for the researcher to be familiar with the structures of an explorative study and the concepts of the differing approaches. There is a break in the reason dispute between the end and the principles perceived, the inference being ‘judged’ to be reinforced by the clarifications made’ in inductive reasoning (Ketokivi and Mantere (2010), (cited in Saunders *et al*. 2012, p. 143). The same researchers on the other hand, argue that deductive rational occurs when a hypothesis is derived logically from a set of properties, the hypothesis being true when all the premises are true.’ Besides, it is crucial to pinpoint the important of the context in inductive approaches (Sanders *et al*. p. 146).

Conversely, Anderson (2011, p. 147) argues that induction is a method of “constructing theory” with the objective of finding reliable interpretative actions that have been perceived. In this study, I apply an **inductive approach** as it fits within the interpretivist philosophy and also because of the nature of the explorative study regarding the principle factors that affect women in senior positions in high-end retailing industry in the U.K. Inductive research is moving to broader theories and generalizations from specific observations. By its very nature, inductive reasoning is more exploratory and open-minded, particularly at the start (Research Methods Knowledge Base 2016, p. 1). For this research, inductive reasoning the right approach. Crossman (2016, p. 1) notes that it is easy to articulate an assumption to discover and finally develop some general theories or conclusions with this approach once the scholar has recognized trends and patterns among a set of data.

## Research strategy

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as cited in Saunders *et al*. (2012, p. 173) notes that a procedural strategy in education is important because it is the methodological connection amid the researcher’s philosophy and ensuing choice of approaches to gather and analyze data, and also for the reason that it is a plan of action to realize an objective. Explorative studies in nature involve open questions which help the researcher to understand and surge information regarding a given subject. Sanders *et al*. (2012, p. 173) argues that while conducting a qualitative study there exists the desire to have adjustable and flexible strategies. **Grounded theory** approach is applied in this study because the theory has characteristics which are much better and appropriate with the objective of this study of investigating and exploring new extents of glass ceiling, networking, and women as they moved towards senior positions. When the exact emphasis of research is on configuring theory from data, grounded theory methodology is applied (Quinlan 2011, p. 183-184). This methodology is also significant when researching something which is less known.

## Research choices

Because of time constraints, this research has used a **mono-method choice** based on exploration of recognizing the confines of not applying a multi or mixed approaches, and on qualitative data collection. The grounds of embracing semi-structured interviews and qualitative data approach is centered on Anderson (2011, p. 188) claim that it is possible to probe questions, allowing interviewees to build or clarify what they have understood. This allows the researcher to gather rich quality information. However, mono-method choice has a lot of drawbacks, especially because it is time consuming in terms of conducting interviews, recording, and analyzing those interviews. But, these worries are overruled by the productivity of the process (Anderson 2011, p. 188).

To answer the research questions presented in chapter one, the researcher uses a non-probability judgmental sampling technique. This technique is also significant as it will also help the researcher focus his attention on a small group of female and male employees. Small groups are quite beneficial, especially when conducting interviews because the researcher is able to meet one on one with the interviewees. Also, as Sanders (2011, p. 287) notes, small groups are important as the researcher is able to choose interviewees who have different features and this can result to different views and perceptions. But, there always exists the challenge of the interviewees not giving honest replies. The people interviewed for the purpose of this research understood the issues linked to gender and were able to critically examine the development of leadership within the retail profession.

## Limitations:

Even though the objective and purpose of this research is acquire answers of the principle factors affecting women in reaching senior job positions in retail profession, there also exist limitations when researching previous journal articles and when conducting interviews. For instance, limitations because of people upbringing and personal lives and how they should behave at workplaces. The people being interviewed might feel uncomfortable and biased, especially when referring to discrimination and gender inequality as some of the principle factors. As Simon and Goes (2013) argues, because of time constraints is very challenging for a researcher to get every individual in the fashion retail industry to voice their opinions regarding the issue. Time constraint as a limitation confines both qualitative and quantitative data.

**Data analysis:**

To obtain all information from the interviews, the researcher will record the interviews. However, this will be done with the interviewee consent. This will help analyze the data from group and individual perspective. The individual perspective in this case is what the researcher gathers from the interview from each person interviewed while group perspective is finding out if the opinions and perceptions of the people interviewed match or differ. However, in this study, interviews, plus research from existing journal articles and websites will help understand the group perceptions.

## Ethical concerns:

Ethical concerns can always arise in every research like interviewing work colleagues; employees might feel and think the information they share will be shared – but in this study, every information given will remain confidential. This will be communicated before the interviews began. Another ethical concern might arise regarding the interview recordings and files. However, in this study, after the completion of the research, all files and recordings will be locked away and any soft copy will only be accessed by the researcher.

## Time horizon

There are two ways of designing a research according to Sanders *et al*. (2012, p. 190-191) – (1) a series or diary of the snapshot, and (2) a snapshot taken at a given moment, which lead to a longitudinal or cross-sectional research perspective. Nonetheless, the choices are highly influenced by time constraints. Longitudinal studies take more time to be carried out, but they have the main strengths to study development and change of a phenomenon. On the other hand, cross-sectional research is frequently used using qualitative or quantitative (or mixed) research approaches. In this study, a **cross-sectional horizon** was used considering the time constraint. Rivers (2003) point out the advantages and disadvantages of cross-sectional horizon as follows;

Advantages

* Captures a specific point in time
* Data can be used for several types of research
* Used to prove/disapprove hypothesis
* Has several variables at the time of data snapshot
* It is not costly
* Easy to perform

Disadvantages

* Does not assist determine the effect and cause
* Putting together the sampling pool might be challenging
* The effectiveness of the snapshot is not certain to be illustrative
* Cannot be used to analyze behavior

## Techniques and procedures

The following techniques and procedures were applied in this research:

* Open questions were prepared from the most suitable topics. Some of the questions included in the interviews were as follows;

# Section A Background

1. What is your age?

2. What is your current marital status?

a. Single

b. In a relationship

c. Married (Do you have kid(s)?)

d. Divorced 1) with kid(s) 2) without kid(s)

# Section B Current Career State

1. How long have you been in the current position?

2. How did you get the job?

3. What’s your employer’s gender and position?

4. Who is your direct boss right now? What is the boss’s gender and position?

# Section C Future Career Concerns

1. If the interviewee is single, in a relationship or married without have a kid or children

a. What is your 3-year career plan? (If the interviewee wants to get promotion, ask her about her ideal job position and the gender of)

b. How will you do to get promotion?

(What skills are you going to achieve or improve?)

c. Is it harder for a female to get promotion rather than a male even if she does the same thing or much better than her male colleagues

Since this research used the qualitative approach, it was important to point out that qualitative approach involves several methods such as interviews, observations, questionnaire, participation, and photographs. Some of these methods were analyzed and compared before choosing interview to be the best option for the study.

1. Interview

This is face to face contact between the researcher and the interviewees. One of the major advantage of interviews is that they allow the researcher to research his or her topic in-depth as the researcher is able to structure questions to fit to interviewees’ needs and comfortability. Sanjeev (2010, p. 102-103) notes that to complement the quality of information obtained, group discussions might be heartened. However, interviews have their own drawbacks such as they are time consuming and expensive especially if large samples are needed. But, for this study, small sample was used (21 employees from 11 luxury brands were interviewed) making this interviewing technique suitable.

1. Observation

Saunders *et al*. (2009, p. 288) notes that if research objective is focused on what people do, then the best way to obtain data is by observing them. This includes observation, description, analysis, and interpretation of people’s behavior. In other words, observations gives the researcher the precise picture of the respondents’ behavioral aspects. However, this is attained through the hypothesis that the researcher is trained. But, Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008, p. 160) argues that this technique might get the observer into problems since many people view it like snooping. This affects the extent of openness and trust between the researcher and the respondents (Day 2001, p. 600). This technique does not suit this research because the researcher has to obtain opinions, perceptions, and experiences from respondents.

1. Questionnaire

Brace (2004, p. 3) claim that questionnaires define an isolated conversation amid respondents and researcher. Through questionnaire, one is able to obtain psychological and factual information. This is because this technique gives participants flexibility (Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad 2010, p. 125). However, in many cases, this technique is appropriate where the researcher has a large sample. In this study, this method is not suitable because opinions and perceptions of participants are required. Also, this method does not necessarily require the researcher to meet with the participants hence the information might be inaccurate.

* Based on current research gaps, this study was able to draw its objectives and aims from literature
* All interviews were transcribed and recorded, hence, through the categories and literature the researcher was able to draw a thematic analysis. Themes were then defined. And a constant comparative method was used to group the main emergent arguments.
* The scholar informed the applicants about the purpose and scope of the study and asked them for their consent. This was important for ethical reasons.

In conclusion, the most suitable methodology research was applied to the investigative study of the principle factors that affect women to reach senior job positions in high-end fashion retailing industry in the U.K and has been elucidated and vindicated based on research philosophy (interprevetism), the approach (induction), the strategy (grounded theory), the methodological choice (qualitative mono-method), and time horizon (cross-sectional).

Qualitative research was used in this study as it helped make research by selecting, using books, journals, and information from websites, and gather relevant information. Several researchers have found that qualitative method is very important in making analysis of research information, answering research questions, and in bringing out relevant findings.

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