

Trends in qualitative research in the Fashion Universe

Tendências da pesquisa qualitativa no universo da Moda

Tendencias de la investigación cualitativa en el universo de la Moda

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Resumo

Este artigo discute a relevância dos métodos qualitativos nas pesquisas em Moda, destacando sua escolha pela capacidade de aprofundar a compreensão das dinâmicas, percepções e significados que permeiam esse campo do conhecimento. Para isso, foi realizado um levantamento das metodologias adotadas — considerando suas naturezas, abordagens e objetivos — em um Programa de Mestrado da área. Inicialmente, apresenta-se um panorama da pesquisa qualitativa e de suas principais abordagens, como narrativa, fenomenologia, teoria fundamentada, etnografia e estudo de caso, evidenciando suas aplicações em investigações no contexto da Moda. Embora o foco do texto seja a pesquisa qualitativa, a metodologia adotada neste estudo é de natureza quantitativo-exploratória. Os resultados indicam que a abordagem qualitativa tem se destacado entre as dissertações analisadas, contribuindo de forma expressiva para estudos de natureza básica e aplicada, ao mesmo tempo em que amplia as possibilidades investigativas.

Palavras-chave: Moda. Metodologia. Pesquisa qualitativa.

Abstract

This article discusses the relevance of qualitative methods in Fashion research, highlighting their selection for the capacity to provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics, perceptions, and meanings that permeate this field of knowledge. To this end, a survey of the methodologies adopted—considering their nature, approaches, and objectives—was conducted in a Master's Program in the field. Initially, it presents an overview of qualitative research and its main approaches, such as narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study, demonstrating their applications in investigations within the context of Fashion. Although the paper's focus is on qualitative research, the methodology adopted for this study is quantitative-exploratory in nature. The results indicate that the qualitative approach has been prominent among the analyzed master's theses, contributing significantly to both basic and applied studies while expanding the scope of research possibilities.

Keywords: Fashion. Methodology. Qualitative Research.

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Resumen

Este artículo aborda la relevancia de los métodos cualitativos en la investigación en Moda, destacando su capacidad para profundizar en la comprensión de las dinámicas, percepciones y significados que permean este campo del conocimiento. Para ello, se realizó un relevamiento de las metodologías adoptadas —considerando su naturaleza, enfoques y objetivos— en un Programa de Maestría del área. Inicialmente, se presenta un panorama de la investigación cualitativa y de sus principales enfoques, como la narrativa, la fenomenología, la teoría fundamentada, la etnografía y el estudio de caso, evidenciando sus aplicaciones en investigaciones en el contexto de la Moda. Aunque el foco del texto es la investigación cualitativa, la metodología adoptada en este estudio es de naturaleza cuantitativo-exploratoria. Los resultados indican que el enfoque cualitativo ha ganado protagonismo entre las tesinas analizadas, contribuyendo de forma significativa a estudios de naturaleza tanto básica como aplicada, al tiempo que amplía las posibilidades de investigación.

Palabras clave: Moda. Metodología. Investigación Cualitativa.

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1 Introduction

Fashion, as a sociocultural phenomenon, exceeds the materiality of clothing to constitute itself as a complex system of meanings (Lipovetsky, 2009, p. 25). Far from being a mere reflection of fleeting trends, Fashion operates as a non-verbal language that articulates the spheres of the individual and the collective, the aesthetic and the political (Barthes, 2009). It is precisely within this domain of subjectivities and narratives that academic research finds the challenge of employing methodological approaches capable of investigating the essence of its dynamics. In this context, this article analyzes the centrality of qualitative research for the advancement of Fashion studies in the Brazilian context, through a survey of dissertations produced within the Graduate Program in Fashion at the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC)."

The consolidation of Fashion as a scientific field exposes distinct challenges that arise from the gaps left by emphasizing cyclical rather than continuous changes, unlike other sciences (Godart, 2010). The ability to map consumption patterns or trends, though valuable, does not answer some of the deeper questions about Fashion (Araujo; Oliveira; Rossato, 2017). Fashion research is not limited to materialized clothing but encompasses its symbolic system and social process (Kawamura, 2005), a crucial distinction that demands analytical depth, positioning qualitative methodology and its approaches as a fundamental tool for the development of the field (Trindade; Carvalho; Paletta, 2021).

By prioritizing analytical depth over statistical generalization, qualitative methodology mobilizes the researcher to construct a dense and multifaceted understanding (Guerra et al., 2024), emerging as an indispensable approach for advancing knowledge in the field (Júnior; Prodanov; Schemes, 2023). The growing adherence to this choice may signal the maturity and deepening of scientific investigations in the field.

Thus, the present study analyzes the application of qualitative methods in the dissertations made available in the dissertation library of the Graduate Program in Fashion at the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC) from 2019 to May 2025. To

this end, this work employs quantitative analysis, that is, an overview based on numerical data of the works published by the aforementioned Program. In this way, the data presented in this article reveal the prevalence and sophistication of qualitative research and its approaches within this specific Program, which may reflect a broader movement of academic maturation. Through this analysis, it is reinforced that understanding Fashion in its entirety requires a perspective that is, at the same time, rigorous, empathetic, and profoundly human.

2 Qualitative methodology: brief contextualization

Methodology refers to the analysis of methods, consisting of the set of norms and procedures defined for the conduct of research. The term *scientific*, in turn, is related to science, understood as a system of knowledge organized in a precise and methodical way within a specific field of knowledge (Gerhardt; Souza, 2009, p. 11).

With just over a century of existence, qualitative research has established itself as an alternative methodology, adopted mainly by the social and human sciences, which, in their initial process of consolidation, followed the paradigms of the natural sciences (Ramires; Pessôa, 2013). The introduction of qualitative methods in the human and social sciences emerged as a reaction to the "dictatorship of method" predominant in the natural sciences (Demo, 1998, p. 91).

Qualitative research occupies a recognized position among the various approaches to the study of phenomena related to human beings and their complex social relationships, established in different contexts (Godoy, 1995).

The difficulty in defining qualitative research stems from the diversity of theoretical-methodological strands and affiliations originating from sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, among other fields (Ramires; Pessôa, 2013). According to Minayo (2001, p. 21-22):

Qualitative research addresses very specific questions. In the social sciences, it is concerned with a level of reality that cannot be quantified. In other words, it works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes, which corresponds to a deeper space of relationships, processes, and

phenomena that cannot be reduced to the operationalization of variables (Minayo, 2001, pp. 21–22).

Researchers who choose qualitative research focus more on the process than solely on the results, using the natural environment as a direct source of data and attributing great importance to the interpretation of the meaning of social actions (Ramires; Pessôa, 2013).

The qualitative approach, as a research practice, is not configured as a rigidly structured proposal, allowing the imagination and creativity of researchers to guide the exploration of new approaches (Godoy, 1995). The choice of qualitative research by beginning researchers is often associated with false motivations, such as: low proficiency with numbers and statistical procedures; the belief that it is a simpler methodology; the desire to use a methodology considered more advanced; and a preference for poetic or literary aspects (Ramires; Pessôa, 2013).

Despite its contributions, qualitative research presents limits and risks that require attention, such as excessive reliance on the researcher as the instrument of data collection, the attempt to encompass the totality of the object studied, the observer's influence on the phenomenon, the lack of transparency in analytical processes, the limited approach to different perspectives, and the researcher's subjective involvement with the field or participants (Silveira; Córdova, 2009, p. 32).

The focus of qualitative research on specific social units—such as individuals, communities, groups, and institutions—raises questions about the representativeness of the cases studied, as it is debated to what extent these units reflect broader reality (Martins, 2004). Another recurring critique concerns the inevitable proximity between researcher and research object, which could compromise the neutrality and objectivity of the results (Martins, 2004). Gil (2008, p. 6) states that in the social sciences, it is not possible to conceive of an investigation that establishes a rigid separation between subject and object. This premise is fundamental, as it shows that the researcher, upon entering a field of study, is not a neutral, external figure, but rather a social actor who interacts and becomes involved with the observed phenomenon, corroborating that one of the pillars sustaining research in the social sciences is the complex relationship between those who research and those who are researched.

Beyond conceptual critiques, there are disagreements regarding the processes of data collection, processing, and analysis. The large quantity and diversity of information obtained in qualitative research make analysis a complex process, whose effectiveness depends directly on the researcher's competence and discernment (Souza, 2004).

According to Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010, p. 498), qualitative research allows for a certain degree of subjectivity, which raises questions about the reliability of the researcher's observations, interpretations, and conclusions. For these authors, it is the researcher's responsibility to represent the participants' reality as accurately as possible and to provide assurances that this responsibility has been fulfilled.

This care is especially relevant in the field of Fashion, which frequently presents a superficial knowledge of facts, with a limited understanding of the originality of the phenomenon and its insertion in the historical context and social dynamics. The ability of qualitative research to access subjective experiences, capture individual narratives, and interpret cultural contexts offers the researcher appropriate tools to explore the phenomena that characterize Fashion—a field that demands methods sensitive to the multiple layers of meaning attributed by different social actors (Lipovetsky, 2009, p. 26).

2.1 Main approaches to qualitative research

Qualitative research focuses on an in-depth analysis of social processes at both the individual and collective levels, treating the studied units as complex totalities. It prioritizes closeness to the data and the contextual understanding of reality, standing out for its flexibility in the selection and adaptation of data collection techniques (Martins, 2004).

Qualitative studies are generally associated with interpretative research grounded in a constructivist perspective. Their focus is not on data quantification or the application of statistical techniques but rather on using texts, discourses, images, observations, and audiovisual records in their natural form as the primary material (Siena et al., 2024, p. 54).

Qualitative research understands individuals as active social agents in the construction of their own realities, a process mediated by social interactions in which meanings are continuously produced, negotiated, and re-signified (Valentim, 2005). In the field of Fashion, this understanding becomes fundamental, considering that the production and circulation of information are shaped by historical, subjective, and contextual factors. These factors directly influence the construction and interpretation of knowledge in the area, which is characterized by its multidimensional, symbolic, and socially situated nature.

Heterodoxy in data analysis is a characteristic of qualitative research, requiring from the researcher an integrative approach that articulates analytical, creative, and intuitive skills to deal with data diversity (Martins, 2004). In this sense, Siena et al. (2024, p. 54) explain that:

Data analysis in qualitative methods involves a deconstruction of texts or speech, followed by a reconstruction based on the researcher's own conception. This reconstruction represents the work of re-signifying the collective view of reality brought forth in the research corpus through the intervention of the researcher's perspective. In this act, the researcher interprets the participants' interpretation of the world—or that conveyed by texts, images, and other materials (Siena et al., 2024, p. 54).

According to Creswell (2014, p. 26), although there is no consensus on the number of qualitative approaches, five stand out as the most recurrent in the social, behavioral, and health sciences literature: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. The choice of approach is directly related to the nature of the research problem and the proposed objectives (Martins, 2004).

The narrative approach focuses on one or a few individuals, collecting data through life stories and descriptions of individual experiences, organized chronologically according to the meanings attributed to these experiences (Creswell, 2014, p. 68). A central aspect of this approach is the collaboration between researcher and participants, since the construction of the narrative takes place interactively and dialogically (Creswell, 2014, p. 69).

Narrative designs may encompass different slices of lived experience, including the complete trajectory of an individual or group, a specific period of life, or

even particular episodes that are significant for understanding the phenomenon under study (Sampieri; Collado; Lucio, 2013, p. 510).

Phenomenology, in turn, is a qualitative research approach that seeks to describe the shared meaning of experiences lived by different people in relation to a concept or phenomenon. Whether with a single individual or several participants, this approach aims to analyze the values, rituals, and meanings attributed by a given social group. The focus is on identifying the essential elements common to the reported experiences (Sampieri; Collado; Lucio, 2013, p. 406; Creswell, 2014, p. 72).

Grounded in discourse analysis and the identification of significant themes, phenomenology uses intuition, imagination, and universal structures to apprehend the essence of lived experiences, considering their temporal (when they occurred), spatial (where they took place), bodily (who experienced them), and relational (the bonds established) contexts (Sampieri; Collado; Lucio, 2013, p. 520).

Grounded theory is characterized as a qualitative approach in which the researcher develops a general explanation — a theory — from a process, action, or interaction, built upon the perceptions of a significant number of participants (Creswell, 2014, p. 77). Although the theories generated are applicable to specific contexts, they offer interpretive richness and new perspectives on the phenomena analyzed (Sampieri; Collado; Lucio, 2013, p. 497). Strauss and Corbin (2008, p. 25) emphasize that grounded theory is systematically constructed from the simultaneous collection and analysis of data, reinforcing the connection between the investigative process and theoretical development.

Ethnography, traditionally linked to anthropological studies in culturally distinct communities, is based on the prolonged immersion of the researcher in the social environment under study. This approach involves direct and participant observation, enabling an in-depth analysis of the behaviors, interactions, and symbolic practices of a given group (Godoy, 1995, p. 27; Fonseca, 2002, p. 36). The ethnographic researcher seeks to understand the meanings that the members of a specific culture attribute to their actions, languages, and forms of social organization,

using strategies such as interviews, field notes, and document analysis (Creswell, 2014, p. 82).

Finally, the case study is characterized as a qualitative approach that investigates, in depth, a bounded system from real life over time, which may involve one or multiple cases (Creswell, 2014, pp. 86–87). It is a thorough and exhaustive study of one or more objects, allowing for a broad and detailed understanding of them (Gil, 2010, p. 54). Data collection is diversified, including observations, interviews, documents, audiovisual records, and reports. This approach enables a detailed description of the case and the identification of emerging themes. The unit of analysis may be a single context (intralocal study) or encompass multiple settings (plurilocal study), with the aim of understanding how and why a given phenomenon occurs, considering its uniqueness and complexity. The case study is widely recognized as a suitable strategy for answering questions that involve a deep understanding of specific processes (Godoy, 1995, p. 25; Fonseca, 2002, p. 34).

In order to systematize the main qualitative approaches discussed in this section, Table 1 presents a comparative framework summarizing the main characteristics of the types mentioned. It indicates the focus of the investigation, the type of problem they aim to address, and the predominant unit of analysis in each approach, providing a strategic overview for selecting the approach according to the research objectives.

Table 1: Summary of the main approaches to qualitative research

Approches	Characteristics
Narrative	Focus: Investigating a person's life story; Problem type: Demand for reporting personal experiences; Unit of analysis: Study of one or more individuals;
Phenomenology	Focus: Understanding the essence of the experience; Problem type: Requirement to explain the essence of an experience that occurred; Unit of analysis: Investigation of multiple people who share the

	same experience;
Grounded theory	Focus: Development of a theory based on field data; Problem type: Development of a theory based on field data; Unit of analysis: Investigation of a process, action or interaction involving several individuals;
Ethnography	Focus: Descriptive and interpretative analysis of a culturally common group; Problem type: Understanding and explaining cultural patterns shared by a group; Unit of analysis: Study of a group that shares the same culture;
Case Study	Focus: Detailed construction and in-depth analysis of one or more cases; Problem type: Gain an in-depth understanding of a specific case or multiple cases; Unit of analysis: Investigation of an event, program, activity or group of individuals;

Source: Adapted Creswell, 2014, p. 92

Regarding their nature, research can be classified as either basic or applied. According to Nascimento (2016), basic research aims to produce new knowledge that contributes to scientific development, seeking provisional and relative truths of a broad and general nature, without focusing on specific contexts. Applied research, on the other hand, is intended to generate knowledge directed toward solving concrete problems, aiming at practical application in specific situations.

With respect to objectives, research can be divided into exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory studies. Exploratory research has the initial purpose of gathering basic information about the topic under study, clearly defining the scope of the investigation and identifying the circumstances in which the phenomenon occurs. This type of research serves as a preliminary stage for more detailed analyses (Severino, 2013). Descriptive research, in turn, focuses on detailing the characteristics of populations or

phenomena, as well as investigating possible relationships between variables. Finally, explanatory research goes beyond simple observation and description of phenomena, seeking to understand the factors that give rise to them, using experimental methods, quantitative analyses, or interpretations grounded in qualitative approaches (Severino, 2013; Nascimento, 2016).

3 Fashion as an object of research in the academic environment

Fashion, in general, still faces resistance regarding its recognition as a field of knowledge within academia. For a long time, it was not considered a legitimate area of scientific investigation, as the prevailing idea was that its apparent superficiality already defined its content and nature (Debom, 2020; Silva, 2012).

However, from a semiotic perspective, clothing can be interpreted as a text in which discourses intertwine, expressing individual desires, subjective constructions, sociocultural influences, and political positions (Debom, 2020). According to Knauss (2020, p. 264), “fashion is a field of research and inquiry approached through disciplinary intersections.”

In Brazil, the inclusion of Fashion in academia occurred through the framework of industrial product studies. For a long time, these studies were conducted and taught predominantly by architects, only later being recognized and regulated as part of the designer’s work. This trajectory directly influenced the structuring of higher education programs in Fashion in the country. In this context, it is evident that there is still no full recognition, within Brazilian academia—formally initiated in 1988—of Fashion as an academic field (Martins, 2018), as there is still no specific area for Fashion among the fields of knowledge recognized by CAPES (CAPES, 2020).

Nevertheless, Fashion, as an object of study, had already gained prominence. The main milestone in Brazil was, undoubtedly, the thesis *A Moda no Século XIX* [Fashion in the 19th Century], defended by Gilda de Mello e Souza in 1950, in which the author presented Fashion as a social act, drawing on a sociological and aesthetic theoretical framework to interpret clothing. This thesis resulted in the book *O espírito das roupas* [The Spirit of Clothes], published in 1987, which became a landmark

for Fashion studies in Brazil. Thus, Fashion was already a fertile field for cultural analysis, breaking with the notion of superficiality and establishing a precedent for robust scientific investigation. However, the construction of Fashion as an academic field in Brazil did not follow a linear path, due in part to its multifaceted history marked by the influence of art and design (Almeida, 2022).

According to Gilbert (1993, p. 175), the nun Sister Eugénie played a fundamental role in introducing Fashion to the Brazilian university setting. A native of Switzerland, she was the first, in 1964, to teach the discipline of Fashion Design within the Industrial Arts Initiation module of the Licentiate in Drawing and Plastic Arts program at Faculdade Santa Marcelina, in São Paulo.

Until then, the field of Fashion lacked relevant courses, tending to prepare professionals without a critical and reflective profile. This scenario began to change in the last two decades of the past century, with still incipient publications in scientific outlets from areas related to Fashion. The major breakthrough, however, came at the turn of the century, when academic publications on Fashion expanded significantly, particularly after 2001, through the initiative of Universidade Anhembi Morumbi (São Paulo) with the special issue No. 9 of the scientific journal *Nexos*, dedicated to “Communication, Fashion, and Education,” and with the publication of the book *Moda Brasil: Fragmentos de um vestir tropical* [Fashion Brazil: Fragments of a Tropical Dress] (Silva, 2012; Puls; Rosa; Batistela, 2013). Since the beginning of this century, there has been a significant increase in scientific publications in Brazil and worldwide that use Fashion as an object of investigation, exploring a wide variety of questions across different fields of knowledge (Silva, 2012).

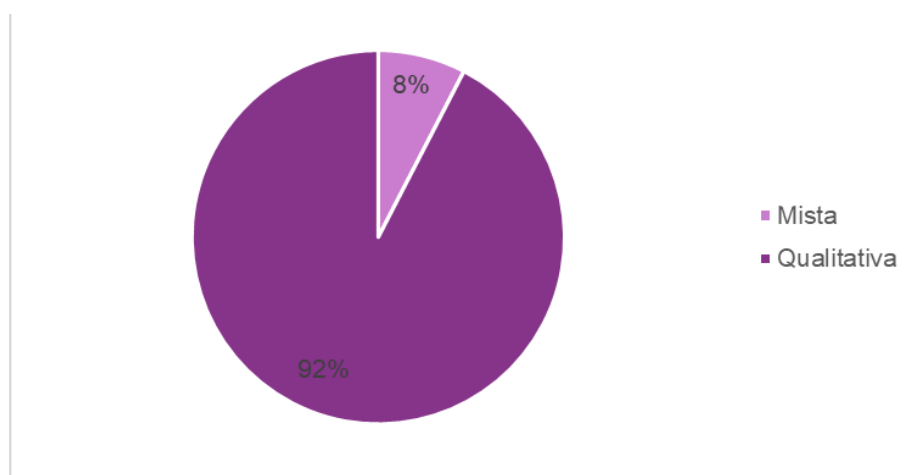
3.1 Evaluating the types of research used in a Master's Program in Fashion

With the aim of understanding the relationship between scientific research in Fashion in Brazil and qualitative research, the types of research used in dissertations defended in the Graduate Program in Fashion at the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC) from 2019 to May 2025 were examined. During this period, 92 dissertations

were identified, distributed as follows: 14 in 2019, 15 in 2020, 10 in 2021, 16 in 2022, 17 in 2023, 19 in 2024, and 1 up to May 2025.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of dissertations defended in UDESC's Graduate Program in Fashion between 2019 and May 2025, according to the methodology used. The data highlight the predominance of qualitative research, adopted in 92% of the dissertations. To a lesser extent, there is the presence of the mixed type (quantitative–qualitative), that is, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, representing 8% of the total. This distribution reinforces the preference for qualitative research in academic investigations in Fashion during the analyzed period in the Program.

Figure 1: Methodologies used in the dissertations of the PPGMODA of UDESC (2019 to May 2025)

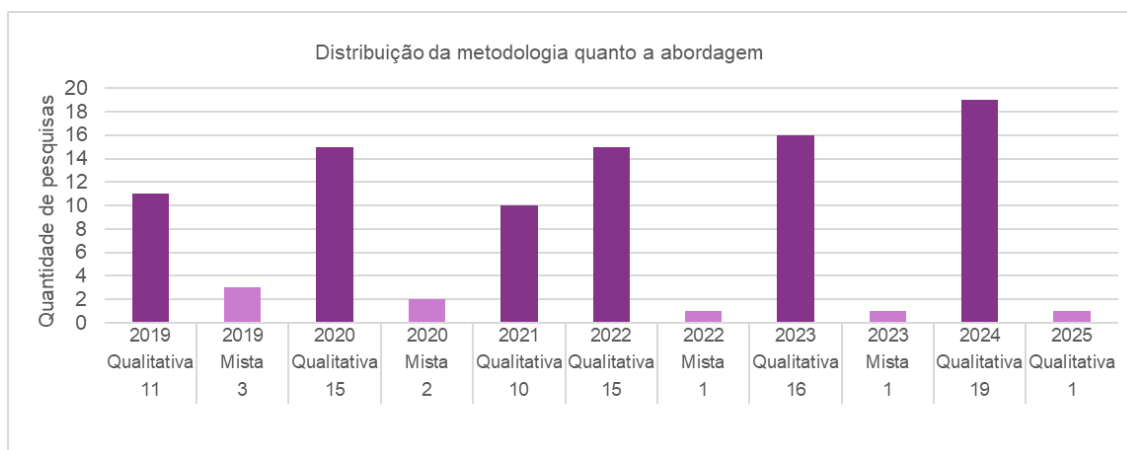


Source: Website of the Graduate Program in Fashion. Available at: <https://www.udesc.br/ceart/ppgmoda/dissertacoes/dissertaçõesconcluídas>. Accessed on: June 7, 2025.

Figure 2 illustrates the temporal distribution of dissertations defended in the UDESC Graduate Program in Fashion between 2019 and May 2025, according to the adopted method. A consistent predominance of qualitative research is observed throughout all years, with emphasis on the years 2024 (19 dissertations) and 2023 (16 dissertations). The mixed method, in turn, appears sporadically and with low representation, varying between 01 and 03 works per year, depending on the respective authors' theme. The year 2025, up to May, had only one registered dissertation, also of qualitative research. These data reaffirm the consolidation of qualitative research as a

preference in the program's scientific production, with the mixed approach being used in a complementary and insignificant manner in the period analyzed.

Figure 2 - Distribution of the method used in the PPGMODA of UDESC by year - 2019 to May 2025



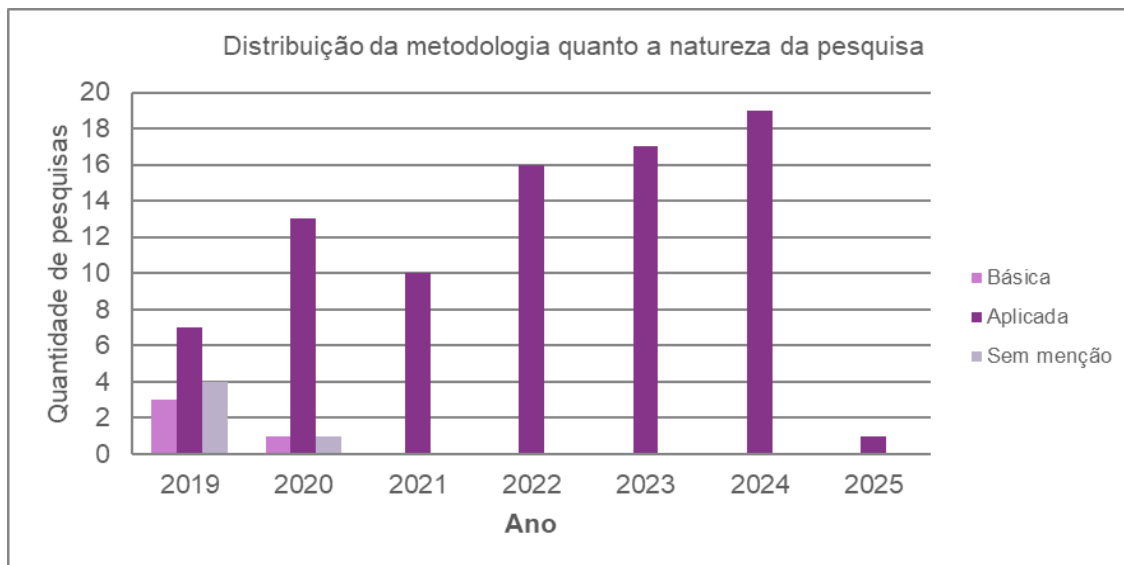
Source: Website of the Graduate Program in Fashion. Available at: <https://www.udesc.br/ceart/ppgmoda/dissertacoes/dissertaçõesconcluídas>. Accessed on: June 7, 2025.

This distribution is not merely a statistical preference; it represents a statement regarding the research field. It is clear that the research questions considered most relevant by UDESC graduate students and their advisors in the Graduate Program in Advanced Studies (PPGMODA) require a depth of study that purely numerical methods cannot provide, considering the topics chosen by their authors.

The predominance of qualitative research, therefore, signals a path toward the field's maturity, recognizing itself as an applied human and social science, and not merely as a technical or market research field. The absence of purely quantitative dissertations is particularly telling, suggesting that the academic community understands the importance and effectiveness of qualitative approaches in multidisciplinary research.

Figure 3 demonstrates the distribution of UDESC Graduate Program in Advanced Studies (PPGMODA) dissertations by the nature of the research conducted, whether qualitative or mixed, revealing the predominance of those that opted for an applied approach.

Figure 3 - Distribution regarding the nature of research in the PPGMODA of UDESC – 2019 to May 2025.



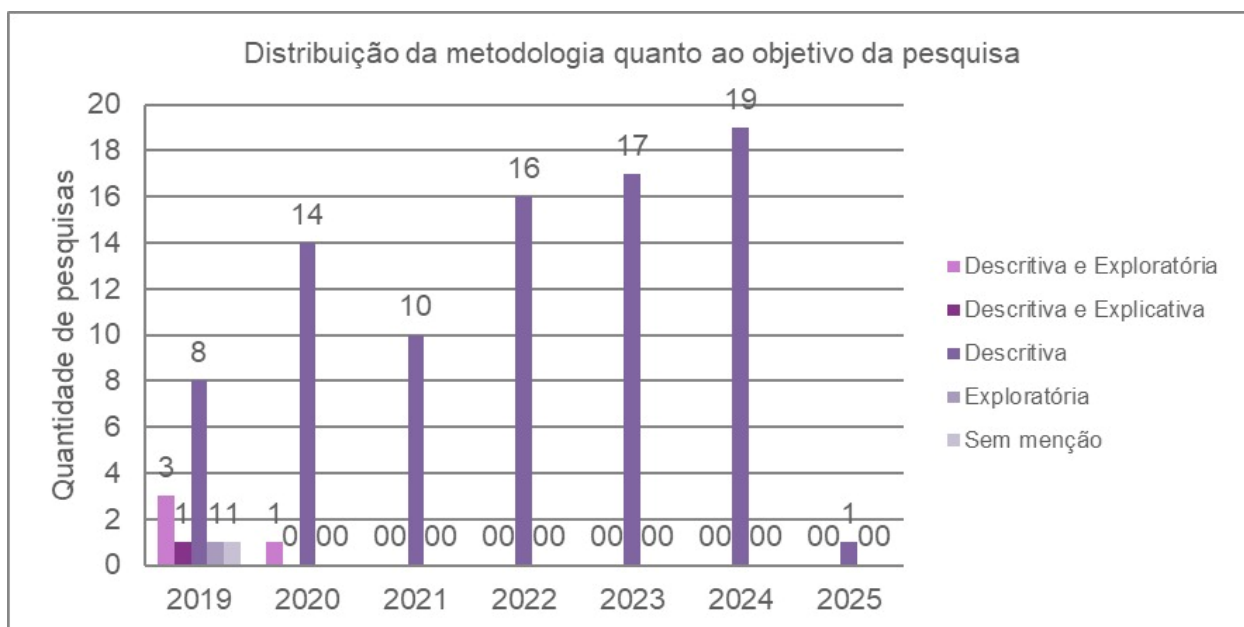
Source: Website of the Graduate Program in Fashion. Available at: <https://www.udesc.br/ceart/ppgmoda/dissertacoes/dissertaçõesconcluídas>. Accessed on: June 7, 2025

Considering the total of 92 dissertations defended in the Graduate Program in Fashion at UDESC between 2019 and May 2025, Figure 3 reveals a clear predominance of applied research, which accounts for most of the work produced during the period. This type of approach shows continuous growth over the years, with particular emphasis on 2023 and 2024, which together comprise more than one-third of all studies. The predominance of applied research in the Program can be explained by the fact that UDESC's PPGMODA is characterized as a Professional Master's Program rather than an Academic one. Thus, research conducted in academic programs may differ from the choices made in the studies under review.

Basic research occurred only sporadically, especially in the early years (2019 and 2020), disappearing entirely from 2021 onward, which indicates that the Program has embraced its professional orientation. It is also worth noting that dissertations without reference to the nature of the research appear in small numbers and are limited to the first two years, when the Program was possibly still being consolidated. These data point to a growing emphasis on investigations aimed at the practical application of knowledge, consistent with the Program's objectives of meeting the demands of the Fashion sector and society.

Finally, Figure 4 shows the dissertations classified according to their objectives, namely descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory.

Figure 4 - Distribution according to research objective at UDESC – 2019 to May 2025



Source: Website of the Graduate Program in Fashion. Available at: <https://www.udesc.br/ceart/ppgmoda/dissertacoes/dissertaçõesconcluídas>. Accessed on: June 7, 2025.

Thus, complementing the methodological analysis of the dissertations defended in the PPGModa/UDESC, Figure 4 shows a marked predominance of research with a **descriptive** purpose. This approach accounts for more than 80% of the studies, appearing consistently throughout the analyzed years and showing visible growth from 2021 onward. These are, therefore, investigations dedicated to describing phenomena or social facts in detail, seeking to understand their causes and consequences.

The combination of descriptive and exploratory characteristics appears only marginally, limited to 2019 and 2020, while studies with exploratory, descriptive–explanatory objectives, as well as those without explicit mention, are isolated cases and virtually absent in the following years. This scenario reinforces a methodological preference focused on the systematic analysis of Fashion, aligned with the applied nature of the dissertations and with the aim of understanding existing practices, processes, and contexts in the field.

In summary, the case study of the academic production of UDESC's Graduate Program in Fashion serves as an example that reflects a broader trend in Fashion research in Brazil. Fashion, as an object of study, is investigated through its symbolic, contextual, and human complexity, consolidating its academic legitimacy.

Thus, the data presented here not only quantify a preference but also validate the central objective of this article: to establish qualitative research as a prime tool for unveiling the multiple meanings that weave the universe of Fashion. This section, therefore, functions as a crucial bridge, connecting the theoretical discussion on research to its practical application, demonstrating that the future of the field lies in an approach that is, at the same time, rigorous in its method and sensitive in its interpretation.

4 Final Considerations

This research began from the premise that Fashion, as a scientific field of knowledge, transcends its material dimension to act as a complex symbolic system. With the aim of demonstrating the centrality of qualitative research for rigorous investigation in this field, an evaluation of the works produced by UDESC's PPGModa confirmed the central idea of understanding clothing beyond its practical function, since advancing into its other functions requires specific and rigorous research methods. The choice of these methods is not merely a matter of researcher preference, but a necessity arising from the very nature of Fashion, which is a phenomenon imbued with symbols and cultural meanings.

The results revealed an expressive predominance of qualitative research, present in 92% of the dissertations defended between 2019 and May 2025, in contrast with 8% of mixed approaches and the notable absence of purely quantitative studies. This finding, more than a statistical preference, constitutes robust evidence of the path toward maturity in research tied to this field. The massive methodological choice indicates that the respective academic community understands that relevant issues in Fashion demand analytical depth that quantitative methods alone cannot achieve (Trindade, Carvalho, Paletta; 2021).

The analysis of the PPGModa case corroborates the overcoming of an instrumental view of clothing, one that requires specific methodological rigor. The choice of a qualitative approach is not presented as an alternative, but as a direct consequence of the nature of the object of study.

Based on these findings, further studies are suggested, such as comparisons including other Graduate Programs in Fashion and related fields in Brazil, aiming to map a broader national panorama. Such an initiative would make it possible to understand the evolution and consolidation of the methodological trends identified. The analysis of the 8% of studies adopting a mixed approach also proves promising, as it enables investigation into how the interaction between quantitative and qualitative methods (quanti–quali) can generate new understandings of Fashion.

For future qualitative research, artificial intelligence emerges as a promising ally, particularly because of its ability to identify and simulate linguistic patterns. Natural language–based models can provide valuable support in analyzing large volumes of textual data, often generated by qualitative techniques such as interviews, ethnographies, and focus groups (Cardoso Sampaio et al., 2024). Moreover, there is an opportunity for in-depth analyses of how these qualitative approaches are applied, investigating innovation in data collection and analysis techniques (Araújo; Oliveira; Rossato, 2017).

It can thus be concluded that the consolidation of Fashion as a rigorous and relevant field of knowledge, as a science, is intrinsically tied to its ability to employ methodologies that match its complexity. The prevalence of qualitative research is not a symptom of a lack of objectivity, but rather a demonstration of its commitment to investigating Fashion and its interfaces. The future of Fashion research lies, among other aspects, in an outlook that is at once methodical in its rigor and sensitive in its interpretation.⁶

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Material suplementar/ Supplemental material

Todos os dados necessários para reproduzir os resultados estão contidos no próprio artigo.

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