

Research Proposal

**SUSTAINABLE
FASHION
INSTITUTE**

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tables)**

1. Academic Focus and Research Rationale

1.1 Chosen topic of research

The chosen topic of research is to test and validate the business proposal of The Sustainable Fashion Institute. The researcher formulated the business idea after taking the prior modules of the MBA Sustainability Leadership. The researcher is a lecturer at the London College of Fashion within the Fashion Business School and identified that some of the students were asking for some form of sustainability accreditation specific to the fashion industry, the researcher aims to utilise the business models of other institutes and membership bodies such as Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) and Chartered Management Institute (CMI) to support the business plan with the aim of launching for the September 2024 intake of students.

1.2 Define the context, boundaries and ethical considerations of your topic

The context of the dissertation is to explore a solution to accredit UK-based fashion students with sustainability membership, this is to enhance and contribute to the wider sustainable development of the fashion industry. The fashion sector is responsible for roughly 92 million tonnes of garbage created each year. The need for major adjustments in the fashion business model, including slowing the industry's growth, needs urgent systemic responses (Niinimäki, K. et al, 2020).

Contextually the Sustainable Fashion Institute is in response to the detrimental effects of the fashion industry. The garment industry's environmentally harmful supply chain practices are coming under increased scrutiny around the world. Despite the well-publicised negative effects on the environment, the business continues to thrive, thanks in part to the rise of fast fashion, which relies on low-cost materials (Niinimäki, K. et al, 2020).

Ethical considerations are noted as the context of the detrimental effects of the fashion industry may have an impact on participant's mental wellbeing, the research will be focused on solutions and the context of the study will be given prior to the interviews taking place.

1.3 Provide a justification for your topic choice based on a review of previous research in the topic area.

According to Kelsey Lawrence (2022), The recently proposed Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act in New York, if passed, will be the first of its kind in making the fashion industry's supply chains more sustainable. New York joins a growing number of initiatives aimed at reducing fashion's impact on climate change, including similar legislation being considered in the European Union. These initiatives could have an impact on major fashion purveyors' global supply chain strategies, particularly popular fast-fashion brands that rely on low-wage labour and have large carbon footprints. Students are expected to discuss the proposed legislation's urgency and its potential influence on the industry as a whole (Lawrence, K., 2022).

As Niinimäki, K. et al, (2020) states "Slow fashion is the future. However, we need a new system-wide understanding of how to transition towards such a model, requiring creativity and collaboration between designers and manufacturers, various stakeholders and end consumers. We need new system-level understanding on how to make the transition towards better sustainable balance in the fashion industry". The Sustainable Fashion Institute aims to be part of the solution to understanding new systems-wide understanding, circular business models, slow fashion and degrowth.

1.4 Define the concepts and theory(theories) that will inform your research

The main **Concepts** that will inform the research will be;

(Context) Institutes - What makes an institute, how to gain credibility as an institute, planning for chartership.

(Business plan) Membership - What membership bodies do & don't do well, what value is perceived from memberships, the origins and future of memberships.

(Action) Accreditations and PRSB's - What do Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies do? As external bodies they accredit and set standards, how do they work alongside universities and map to course outcomes for students to show skills and knowledge required by employers (De Montfort University, n.d).

The main **Frameworks** that will inform the research will be;

Theory of Change - ToC is a critical thinking method to programme design, monitoring, and evaluation that has gained significant traction in international development. Described as “a roadmap, a blueprint, an engine of change, a theory of action and more” (Stein and Valters 2012). The researcher will utilise free open-access Theory of Change software and training manuals.

Lean Business Model Canvas (BMC) or Social Enterprise Model Canvas (SEMC) will be supporting frameworks.

The Social Enterprise Model Canvas (SEMC) is a Lean Business Model Canvas (LBMC) designed to help social companies create their organisational settings, solve the mission measurement paradox, and address strategy, legitimacy, and governance issues. Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship (2014) provides insights into innovative social enterprise models and frameworks, including adaptations of the Business Model Canvas tailored to social enterprises. This research highlights how these models can address specific social and governance challenges (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, 2014). Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) introduced the Business Model Canvas in their book *Business Model Generation*, which provides a visual framework for designing, describing, and pivoting business models. The LBMC adapts this framework to focus more on lean principles and startup dynamics (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Ries (2011) further develops these ideas in *The Lean Startup*, where he emphasises continuous innovation and customer validation as core components of successful startups. The LBMC incorporates these elements to help startups efficiently test and refine their business models (Ries, 2011).

Visual plan to combine the ToC to inform the LBMC output as a business proposal formed from the preliminary literature review.

Lean Business Model Canvas (LBMC)	Theory of Change (ToC)	Details and Examples
1. Market Problem/Opportunity	Situation Analysis	- Context: Challenges in fashion education regarding sustainability. - Example: Lack of comprehensive sustainability training and accreditation in UK fashion education.
2. Customer Segments	Target Groups	- Stakeholders: Fashion students, educators, industry professionals. - Example: Students seeking sustainability accreditation; educators needing resources.
3. Value Proposition	Impact	- Long-Term Goals: Improved sustainability in fashion education and industry. - Example: Achieve greater adoption of sustainable practices and higher industry standards
4. Key Activities	Outcomes	- Intermediate Results: Increased awareness and knowledge of sustainability. - Example: Students and educators integrate sustainability into curricula and practices.
5. Key Activities	Activities	- Implementation Actions: Develop platform, create accreditation criteria, host events. - Example: Design membership platform, establish sustainability workshops.
6. Value Proposition (Mechanisms)	Change Mechanisms	- Pathways to Change: Accreditation drives motivation; networking facilitates knowledge sharing. - Example: Accreditation provides credibility; events foster collaboration.
7. Timeline and Milestones	Sequencing	- Implementation Timeline: Plan and sequence activities. - Example: Platform launch, criteria rollout, event scheduling.
8. Visual	Theory of Change	- Diagram: Visualise inputs, activities,

Representation	Diagram	outputs, outcomes, and impact. - Example Diagram: Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impact.
9. Key Partners	Stakeholders and 'Enabling Factors'	- Support: Identify key partners and resources. - Example: Collaborations with educational institutions, industry experts, and sustainability organisations.
10. Risk Assessment	Assumptions	- Validation and Testing: Examine assumptions and risks. - Example: Assumptions about stakeholder engagement, resource availability, and feasibility.

1.5 State the primary research question(s)

Q1 How can accrediting students and professionals within the fashion industry contribute to sustainable development as a whole?

Framework and theories to consider (THEORY OF CHANGE)

Q2 What do the future members of the proposed Sustainable Fashion Institute expect from the membership? *Framework and theories to consider (THEORY OF CHANGE)*

Q3 What managerial or strategic recommendations can be produced for the Sustainable Fashion Institute to drive success when launching with the first university partners?

Framework and theories to consider (THEORY OF CHANGE) & (LBMC)

1.6 State the aims and objectives of the research

Aim

The aim of the research is to provide a business plan that has tested and validated an accreditation membership institute called Sustainable Fashion Institute which will develop a Theory of Change to support a more sustainable future for fashion students, brands and fashion professionals.

Objectives

- 1; To contextualise the current sustainability accreditations with a fashion industry focus
- 2; To critically review existing literature on the topics of Theory of Change, Fashion Change Models, accreditations, Memberships and Benchmarking.
- 3; To investigate what potential members and stakeholders of the proposed Sustainable Fashion Institute will expect and how they will benefit from the membership and accreditation.
- 4; To understand the business opportunity and viability for the proposed business Sustainable Fashion Institute
- 5; To provide strategic and managerial recommendations for the Institute of Sustainable Fashion ahead of the proposed launch.

2. Research Paradigm and Method

2.1 Identify the research paradigm you will use to research the topic

The research will be centred around exploring potential users' feelings and attitudes towards becoming a member of the Sustainable Fashion Institute, wider than that it will explore a Theory of Change for social impact in sustainable development, which means the interpretivism approach is most suitable for the research paradigm. Interpretivism is the subjective meanings and interpretations of particular social phenomena, due to the origins being rooted in feelings and attitudes, subjective meanings and social phenomena (Saunders et al, 2009) this links with the ethos of the proposed Sustainable Fashion Institute, where the members and prospective members will be encouraged to join due to their feelings, attitudes and values held regarding sustainability in fashion, the research conducted within the business plan will be related to the intrinsic values held by the participants.

Interpretivism is based on idealism and humanistic intellectual concepts. It asserts that our perception of the world is the result of our minds' construction. This is not to say that the world isn't real; rather, we can only experience it via our perceptions, which are shaped by our preconceptions, ideas, and values; we aren't detached spectators, but rather active

participants in society. Unlike the natural sciences, the researcher is closely linked to the human condition she is examining, rather than seeing occurrences from outside the system (Walliman, N., 2010).

2.2 Identify the research methods that you will use to gather the data and the advantages

A narrative enquiry will be used to support the utilisation of the enquiry of the participant's lived experience and the context of the participant's lives (Creswell, 2009). Semi-structured interviews and focus groups will be utilised to gain a perspective both from the partner university and the potential members. Students will actively work on collaborating on launching a pilot of the SFI, this will enrich the narrative enquiry for the findings within the primary research. This will be during an 8 week unit called collaborative challenge.

An Inductive Approach, The goals of employing an inductive approach are to, reduce a lot of raw text data into a small amount of time, to draw explicit linkages between the study aims and the findings and finally to construct a model or explanation concerning the conclusions gained from the raw data (Thomas, D.R., 2003).

A Multi Qualitative Method research will be conducted in a single study, the researcher blends quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language. Mixed methods research also aims to legitimise the use of several methodologies to answer research questions rather than limiting or constraining researchers' options. It is a sort of research that is both vast and creative, rather than one that is restricted (Esbjörn-Hargens, S., 2006).

A cross-sectional time horizon is the only option for this study due to the short time constraint. The researcher may wish to explore a longitudinal study when undertaking a PhD.

2.3 Critically evaluate and summarise the disadvantages of the chosen research methods

Interpretivism

The researcher is confronted with a reality that has already been interpreted, and his or her task is to expose it using the meanings made by people rather than discovering universal rules. As a result, there may be more of a phenomenon from more than one point of view and interpretation (Walliman, N., 2010)

Inductive

Induction has several flaws. The first is how many observations must be made before we can properly make a conclusion from which we can generalise; the second is how many scenarios and conditions must be seen before we can draw a conclusion that is dependable enough to generalise from (Walliman, N., 2010)

Multi Qualitative Methods

While traditional definitions of mixed methods often emphasise the integration of methodologies from different traditions, it is important to recognise that combining methods within a single methodological tradition can also be highly effective. Employing multiple qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, within a qualitative mixed-methods framework can provide comprehensive insights into complex research questions. Combining methods from the same tradition may offer just as much value and complexity as blending methods from different traditions, addressing specific research needs with greater depth (Fàbregues et al., 2021).

Cross-Sectional

Due to time constraints, the cross-sectional time horizon is the most suitable option for this research, the downside to that is not being able to measure one particular time frame in comparison with another to see if there are correlational effects such as the beginning or term times for student sign-ups or end of term times.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

3.1 Select the appropriate data collection techniques for your topic

Unit Participation - The researcher intends to utilise a unit called Collaborative Challenge that gives student research participants active consultative challenges to develop the SFI themselves. The narrative enquiry from this will inform a holistic approach to the business plan.

Interviews - The researcher will interview the lead University Business Development Manager at the London College of Fashion along with the Dean of the Fashion Business School, along with other influential key stakeholders.

Focus Groups - These are intended to gain a deeper understanding from the Theory of Change workshop with stakeholders at the London College of Fashion who will hopefully adopt the SFI as a launch partner.

3.2 Identify the respondent population and sample if required

The first sample will be self-selected (via signing up to a unit called Collaborative Challenge, where students can bid to work on the development of SFI) this will be a selection of current students studying at a fashion university (London College of Fashion).

The second sample will be fashion professionals based in the UK. Known to the researcher for ease of getting availability in their schedules.

The third sample will be university staff members at the London College of Fashion. Who will eventually be the key decision-makers in launching the SFI.

3.3 Explain how you will analyse the data collected

Qualitative

The researcher will use thematic analysis to develop codes and themes to inform and assist in generating some input for the LBMC business plan.

3.4 Specify the research limitations in terms of both reliability and validity

Participants may give false positives and researcher bias can negatively impact the validity of a study. Researchers should take back control of reliability and validity by employing verification procedures that are both integral and self-correcting within the study process. This provides rigour through tactics built into each method's design and shifts the burden of incorporating and maintaining reliability and validity from external reviewers' judgments to the investigators themselves (Morse, J.M, 2002), it is important to note that the students who are participants are bidding to work on the SFI as part of a consultancy project and therefore have an interest in sustainability, mitigating this limitation will be difficult but criticality will be explored as much as possible.

4. Resource and Time Management

4.1 Evaluate the resources needed

Resources will include access to a laptop computer, an internet source, a place to hold the interviews, and software tools to disseminate and collate primary and secondary research.

4.2 Produce a time plan for the research

The time plan will be September 21st 2023 to the 27th of July, 2024. This is not a longitudinal study, even though some of the research is done in parts, this is due to the academic calendar being pre-set. The study employs a cross-sectional approach. A short timeframe is the result of the researcher needing to prioritise a recent research funding bid and academic workload increase. If needed the researcher can utilise a submission date in September allowing for more of a relaxed approach, however, the researcher works well to tight deadlines and is confident in their abilities to conduct the research in this timeframe.

W/C June 21 - Introduction and context writing

W/C June 28 - Secondary literature review

W/C July 4 - Methodology chapter

W/C July 11 - Primary research conducted

W/C August 1 - Findings, analysis and Conclusions write-up

W/C August 25 - Final review and leading towards hand-in of the chapters and business plan

4.3 Budget considerations

Budget considerations are not applicable, and no financial implications are identified at the planning stage. Annual leave has been taken, and access to the online software is within the course inclusion.

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