Prioritising a sustainable development has never had as much attention as it has today. After being widely accepted in the food sector, sustainable focus has been expanded into the fashion industry. For sustainable fashion to become a lasting way of doing business a gathered and clear definition of sustainability is crucial along with a better knowledge base in the fashion market and reporting of transparent and honest supply chain operations.

As the concept of sustainability has a rather wide scope in both definition and focus, it is a complex matter to understand. Existing literature and field studies define sustainable fashion to incorporate the following keywords: fashionable clothes, designed for a longer lifetime use, produced in an ethical production system (childfree, sweatshop-free, not harming workers), locally produced, little or no environmental impacts, eco-labels (e.g. Fair Trade), eco-friendly materials (recycled, biodegradable, organic cotton) and no animal cruelty. Several actors predict sustainable fashion to become a noticeable and important value for the customer in the future, which is why it is highly relevant for organisations in the fashion business to get closer to sustainability criteria. It contains benefits that go beyond just keeping a client satisfied, since evaluating operations in the business network can lead to efficiency, less negative environmental and social impacts, cost-cutting initiatives and a good reputation, to mention a few.

In the master thesis The Impact of Sustainability as a New Trend in the Fashion Industry, the author used the supply chain as a framework in order to investigate how to use the concept of sustainability in the fashion business context. The advantage of the supply chain is that it defines and map out the different actors and flows that are involved in delivering a product or service to the market. In the thesis, three perspectives are used to generate an overview and to describe the meaning of sustainability in different parts of the supply chain. The three perspectives the customer, the product life cycle and corporate social responsibility are illustrated below in Figure 1 related to what part of the supply chain each perspective corresponds to. As the ending life stage in the product life cycle has a significant role of the total environmental impacts, an emphasis has been placed on how recycling and reusing activities contribute to keeping products or materials alive as long as possible with less environmental impacts.
To evaluate how the concept of sustainability is used, valued and applied in the fashion business, three case companies were studied out of the three perspectives. H&M, Stella McCartney and Gucci were evaluated through website analysis, mystery shopping and interviews. In order to get into the mind of the customer, surveys regarding interpretation of sustainable fashion were distributed to customers within the fashion industry.

The customer
Contributing to a more sustainable world is something most of us want to strive for, but in reality the idea of it is often stronger than actual actions. This is known as the attitude-behaviour gap among customers, which means that someone is stating one thing but not acting accordingly. In the research of the thesis it was found that the gap exists in fashion because of customers’ lack of knowledge, as it is a sensitive area of research that may generate politically correct statements rather than accurate opinions, and since sustainable fashion is not in general considered as stylish, which affects the final buying decision and demand of the customer. Diminishing the attitude-behaviour gap is possible to achieve by educating both customers and sales associates. In the website analysis of the thesis if was found that an educational approach towards a more sustainable way of living was present on the websites of H&M and Stella McCartney.

The most important customer needs to target in order to gain trust and demand from the customer will be durability, quality, style and fair pricing. Fair pricing does not necessarily mean lower prices in general, but fair prices compared to the other collections of the brand. The customer segment to target would be younger generations, as they are proven to be more positive towards sustainability topics than older generations and also due to the fact that they will be next generation of making ethical purchases.

The product life cycle
The risen awareness of climate change makes environmental impacts a highlighted matter for companies. There are tools, e.g. the LCA tool, to evaluate and keep track of the environmental impacts the operations contribute to. As mentioned before, recycling and reusing activities have significant roles in this perspective and are considered the best-case alternatives to dispose a product. Careless consumption is commonly known as a negative behaviour, wasting resources of the planet. To simply
halt the consumption of products would be considered a good approach to achieve a more sustainable society and planet, but for companies this could cause loss of sales that is not aligned with the financial interest. Finding innovative ways of earning a profit without contributing to careless consumption or unnecessary use of resources would in this case create a higher value for all levels. For instance, companies can develop new services for customers to update an old product that will generate sales in a sustainable way.

**Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR**
Many companies use the concept of CSR in order to declare what responsibilities are taken within the business, initially with the purpose of not contributing to any negative impacts on society. However, the term corporate social responsibility is somewhat misleading as it nowadays often covers other dimensions of responsibility than exclusively social ones. Instead, another denomination of responsibility issues would be in place, without the use of the term social, as CSR is usually applied to a larger extent. However, when focusing on social issues, organisations need to take on responsibilities of children welfare and workers’ conditions, as it is most important to customers regarding social impacts.

Responsibilities across the supply chains are often declared by sustainability reporting, which is a practice executed by the use of widely accepted guidelines making the process easy to follow and for others to compare and evaluate. If the whole supply chain is on board and actively sharing responsibilities, there are financial benefits with a sustainable strategy as well.

**The commitment of creating real value**
Prioritising a sustainable development in the fashion industry means evaluating sources of supply and proactive contributions with a holistic approach, which requires commitment on many levels. Commitment from the customers is possible when these are aware of the choices they can make and also by providing the right tools to enable these choices, such as recycling or reusing programmes. In-store commitment of sales associates transmitting knowledge to the customers will appear significant as well, as face-to-face conversations are appreciated to be the most efficient way of spreading information and values to the customers. Commitment of the board is crucial for the decision-making process of an organisation and commitment in research of new technologies will enable the development of sustainable technologies and materials to grow further. Commitment expands also to higher associations as the EU, who plays a powerful and necessary role in setting gathered criteria for the sustainability concept. Commitment from suppliers and other actors in the supply chain will be critical as well since organisations have an increased pressure on declaring transparent and honest operations.

Once all these commitments are made, a holistic point of view is achieved throughout the whole supply chain, and only then the fashion business can be considered as sustainable and create real value for the people, planet and profits of companies.