DEPARTMENT OF Business and Management

THESIS IN Marketing Metrics

Collaborative marketing and customers' active participation into companies' marketing strategies: an examination of the main factors that predict customers' willingness to collaborate with firms

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Summary

Introduction

Nowadays, a new wave technology characterized by inexpensive computers and smartphones, low-cost internet and open source have enabled new marketing paradigms such as collaborative marketing and co-creation (Kotler et al., 2010). Indeed, technological changes and new marketing theories have brought to the so-called "age of participation", that refers to the possibility for clients to *"create news, ideas and entertainment, as well as consume them"* (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 7). According to this point of view, it is possible to consider that companies' *"superior values come not from the end products, but rather from the output of marketers' interactions with customers through joint activities or co-creation"* (Hidayanti et al., 2018, p. 18).

Moreover, it is evident that nowadays customers desire more and more to be directly and actively engaged into companies' marketing strategies, participating in the value creation process through co-creation and collaborative marketing approaches (Hidayanti et al., 2018). According to this point of view, companies should try to unlock customers' inner potentialities, involving them into companies' marketing choices and *"ensuring that products remain in accordance with the customers' needs and wishes"* (Hidayanti et al., 2018, p. 20). In other terms, "corporate culture should be collaborative, cultural and creative" (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 84). Accordingly, existent literature on consumers-brands relationship suggest that it is time to move from basic relationships to active collaborations between customers and firms, obtaining better insights on the reasons why marketing paradigms are moving toward a more collaborative approach (Kotler et al., 2010).

The present research specifically focuses on collaborative marketing, which refers to a particular marketing technique aimed at developing active collaborations and long-lasting bonds between customers and firms. Extant studies on collaborative marketing defines it as a fundamental solution for companies that want to stand out from competition and that aim at innovating their businesses. To illustrate, according to Bharti el al. (2014), a collaborative marketing approach is central for companies that desire to gain consumers' knowledge, taking advantage of customers' capabilities, gaining valuable feedbacks and generating positive word of mouth effects.

However, while extant studies on collaborative marketing have mainly focused their attention on providing a clear definition of it and its consequences in terms of benefits gained by companies, less attention has been paid on the possible factors that can explain what increase/decrease consumers' willingness to take part into firms' collaborative marketing campaigns. To exemplify, willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns is an important measure of consumer commitment to a brand; indeed, it indicates the level of consumers' involvement with a company and their disposition to promote branded items or services through co-creating contents, generating positive word-of-mouth effects or giving feedbacks about new products (Parent et al., 2011). According to these considerations, customers' willingness to participate in collaborative marketing campaigns is considered as an important indicator of the customers' willingness to take

part into the creation of their preferred brands' personalities (Parent et al., 2011). Thus, it is possible to consider that the importance of customers' willingness to collaborate with companies resides in the fact that it denotes the level of customers' dependence on and commitment to a brand (Parent et al., 2011). Anyway, according to Lazarus et al. (2014), one of the most important gaps concerning the academic literature regarding the collaborative marketing context is related to the lack of a clear study aimed at explaining the main features of consumers' willingness to co-create and collaborate with brands. Indeed, while most of the literature has already focused the attention on the main features of relationship marketing, little is known about the main drivers and characteristics of collaborative marketing. Thus, aiming at filling this gap, this research will focus on investigating which are the most relevant antecedents of customers' willingness to engage into collaborative marketing campaigns. Indeed, understanding which are the main drivers that affect customers' disposition to collaborate with firms will help companies in developing successful collaborative marketing initiatives aimed at unlocking the hidden potentialities of customers.

Therefore, a new conceptual framework will be developed and hypothesis concerning collaborative marketing will be tested.

In order to reach this objective, I will develop a careful literature review concerning the relationship and collaborative marketing contexts; then I will provide a model based on the current relationship and collaborative marketing literature aimed at identifying which are the most important variables that influence customers' willingness to collaborate with companies. Then I will propose some research hypotheses that sheds light on possible positive or negative relationships between customer related, brand related and customer-brand relationships related factors and customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns. In order to reach these objectives, I will test the influence of anticipated benefits, inconvenience, involvement, brand love, brand trust and privacy concerns on customers' willingness to collaborate with firms.

These research hypotheses will be tested using a multiple linear regression approach. Empirical results along with theoretical and practical implications will be illustrated. Finally, I will shed light on the limitations of this research and I will propose possible suggestion for future research aimed at advancing knowledge into the success of collaborative marketing and specifically their campaigns.

Chapter 1- Relationship Marketing and Collaborative Marketing; Definition and Relevance of the Topic of Interest

1.1 Customer relationship marketing: definition and main pillars

Relationship marketing is a modern marketing practice that focuses on the development of relationships between companies and clients: "*it is seen as relationships, networks and interaction. It requires at least two parties who are in contact with each other*" (Gummeson, 1995, p. 113). Hence, relationship marketing can be defined as "*the ongoing process of engaging in cooperative and collaborative activities and programs with immediate and end-user customers to create or enhance mutual economic value, at reduced cost*" (Parvatiyar et al., 2000, p.8) and it is about developing networks that let companies directly communicate with customers, giving the possibility to clients to actively interact with brands and participate to firms' marketing strategy (Gummeson, 1995). Indeed, the essential focus of relationship marketing consists in the creation of dialogues between companies and customers. These dialogues should be personalized for each cluster of clients; moreover, they should give the possibility to customers to expres\s their own opinions, sharing feedbacks with the company and with other clients. Obviously, these interactions have long-term implications since they produce effects especially in the long-term period, as it takes time and real efforts to build real, loyal and long-lasting connections with customers. Indeed, the scope of the collaborations between companies and clients is to generate value for the parties, maximizing the efficiency of companies by creating strong and emotional connections between customers and brands that should lead to the development of positive "word-of-mouth" effects and by increasing customer loyalty, rather than promoting one-time sales (Rouse, 2014). Similarly, Gummeson (1987), suggests that "*in the new theories of services marketing relationships and interactions are of central importance. The emphasis is on person-to-person interaction*" (Gummeson, 1987, p. 10); it is also essential to consider that "*building and maintaining relationships have significant long-term implications and therefore affect the strategic and long-range planning of the firm's marketing*" (Gummeson, 1987, p. 12). It is important to consider that, according to the relationship marketing approach, building long-lasting relationships with customers implies focusing on the client before, during and after the process of purchasing, thus sales should not be the primary objective of a company, but just the direct consequence of a well-constructed relationship between the firm and the buyer. Based on this line of reasoning, it is possible to argue that relationship marketing is about forming long-term relationships and focusing on customer loyalty, standing in contrast to more traditional transactional approaches. In order to maintain the customer base over time, it is essential for companies to focus on customer retention and satisfaction, which are considered as two important milestones of relationship marketing, since

they are key-factors to ensure the success of a business in the long-term period. Hence, considering the impact of customer retention and customer satisfaction on the connections between customers and brands, these variables could be considered as essential elements for the creation of a successful, long-term oriented relationship marketing strategy. According to Alshurideh (2016), there is not a specific definition of customer retention. Anyway, it is commonly accepted that customer retention refers to long-term relationships and to the customer willingness to rebuy a specific item or service over time. Specifically, customer retention is defined as the "*deeply held commitment to rebuy a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior*". (Alshurideh, 2016, p. 383). Moreover, since one of the most important features of relationship marketing is represented by the long-term orientation, it is important to notice that the process of engagement between customers and brands does not finish with the sale or the supply of a service; on the contrary, it continues also after the transaction. For this reason, it is important to retain customers assisting them also during the post-purchase phase, obtaining valuable after-purchase feedbacks from customers and stimulating positive word-of-mouth effects with a relationship marketing strategy that focuses on the clients' needs during the whole customer buying experience. Furthermore, it has been suggested that acquisition costs are usually from six to seven times higher than retention costs; therefore, companies that aims to reduce marketing costs should focus on this variable, instead of trying to acquire new customers (Patel, 2016). Thus, customer retention represents one of the most important focuses of relationship marketing campaigns, since it focuses on the long-term period and aims to develop stable and solid relationships with customers, minimizing costs and maximizing companies' efficiency. Another important role in the development of relationship marketing strategies is given to customer satisfaction, which can be described as the difference between customer expectations about a product and the real post-purchase value of that product (Kotler, 1994). According to Mittal et al. (2005), there is a positive association between customer satisfaction and long-term performances; this positive association also lets companies achieve high level of efficiency in the long period. Indeed, it is vital for companies to guarantee high level of satisfaction within their customer base since customer satisfaction is considered as one of the most important and effective way to gain profits in the actual hyper-competitive business environment (Lewis, 1993). Moreover, it is commonly believed that satisfaction reduces price elasticity; thus, it is suggested that satisfied customers are more tolerant to eventual price increases leading them to avoid switching to other companies, since they would not be sure about the possibility to reach the same level of satisfaction in the long-term period (Athanassopoulos, 2000).

1.1.1 Customer relationship marketing strategy

To develop concrete and long-term relationships with clients, with the final goal of creating real bonds, increasing loyalty and customer satisfaction, it is vital for firms to define a customer relationship marketing strategy.

Indeed, these strategies should help the company to discover which are the most effective ways to recognize which different clusters of clients are in the company's customer base, how to interact with them and how to gain their confidence and trust. According to Cristiano (2005), to create real bonds with customers and to develop a winning customer relationship marketing strategy, relationship marketing campaigns should be developed following different phases. First, the client should be identified according to his personal characteristics. Second, the company should assess how profitable the customer would be for the brand. Third, the firm should identify different customers' clusters and for each cluster a specific strategy should be created. Then, possible channels of interaction with the client should be identified. Finally, the firm should define an overall strategy aiming to guarantee a high level of satisfaction for the client. To carry on these steps, it is fundamental to use instruments of database marketing which allow obtaining data about clients, evaluating the environment where to operate and defining coherent strategies.

These steps are fundamental to build a winning, long-term oriented relationship marketing strategy; even before the very beginning of the campaign, companies should consider that the future success of the plan will be strictly linked to a well-defined identification of different segments of clients, to avoid wasting of resources and to maximize the efficiency of the marketing strategy.

In addition, Kolodynska (2016), suggests other necessary factors that are considered central to create a successful customer relationship marketing strategy. First, this author posits that it is essential to implement a customer-centric culture into the whole company. Thus, employees should be trained in customer service and should be able to handle with customers and with difficult situations. Second, it is crucial to listen to the critical opinion of the customers, to gather feedbacks and to improve the overall services quality. Indeed, even after the purchase, it is essential to continue to communicate and to interact with clients to get their feedbacks and opinions, since in this way it would be possible for companies to understand what customers really appreciate and which are the features that need to be improved to completely satisfy the actual and future customer base. Indeed, this author focuses on another central characteristic of relationship marketing campaigns, that is the capability of creating emotional connections between the company and the consumer. Certainly, "emotion" is the key-word of a marketing strategy focused on the role of customers: to develop solid and long-lasting bonds, firms should focus on the creation of emotional links with their clients. Through the development of emotional bonds, relationship marketing

produces many different long-term results, helping companies to reach many specific goals that are useful to maintain the business successful and profitable over time (Olenski, 2013).

Accordingly, Smith (2016), states that one of the main benefits of a relationship marketing strategy is that it can be useful to make the brand stand out from competitors. Indeed, when a company decides to focus on emotional aspects to build relationships with clients, that company will undoubtedly reach a strategic advantage in comparison with its competitors, since customers will probably remain loyal to the company to which they are emotionally linked. To get this goal, it is essential for firms to be always available when clients try to contact them. Companies should choose which are the main platforms where to have a presence on and they should find out when, during the day, customers are active, since one of the principal aspects that generate loyalty within the companies' customer bases consists in the firm's capability to always be active and available for each customer's need (Smith, 2016).

Moreover, it is important to remember that there are many financial factors that companies should take into consideration when they are developing a relationship marketing strategy. Indeed, according to Ciotti (2016), there are several factors that could increase the profitability associated with relationship marketing. First, it is important to consider that when firms build long-lasting bonds with customers, clients usually have low willingness to switch to other companies. Thus, they are less price-sensitive and more focused on value than on price, since they know the brand they have a relation with and they are focused on the performances offered by that brand. For this reason, engaged customers usually prefer to avoid switching to other firms, especially when switching costs are high and when they are satisfied with the services offered by a brand. Therefore, using relationship marketing as a mean to develop strong links with customers could be a winning choice since engaged customers are more profitable: they are quality-driven so they do not focus on price but on value. For this reason, they are willing to pay more for a more valuable offer, without switching to other companies even if competitors' offers are cheaper.

Moreover, when companies develop deep relationships with customers, clients usually buy more and more often; also, they are less expensive to serve because of their familiarity with the business. Similarly, longstanding customers are likely to buy other products of the same brand through upselling and cross-selling.

Then, it is important to take into consideration that happy engaged customers can introduce a brand to new prospects; in this way, it will be possible to reduce the investments in costly marketing campaigns. Indeed, strong relationships are essential to reach a high NPS (Net Promoter Score): the chance that a customer will happily refer your business to a friend will be higher and with this also the probabilities of positive word-of-mouth effects will increase, generating low-cost advertising for the company. (Ciotti, 2016)

1.2 Collaborative marketing: definitions and pillars

During the last years, consumers' necessity of being always more involved into companies' marketing campaigns is getting stronger; brand users want to express their opinions and they are showing their willingness of being the main "ambassadors" of their preferred brands (Davis & Risenmay, 2013).

Indeed, nowadays we are living in a period during which innovative companies are shifting from basic "relationship marketing" to "collaborative marketing", that is defined as "*the process of working together with customers to create value in marketing exchanges*" (Sawhney, 2001, p. 44). Moreover, it is possible to state that collaborative or participatory marketing could be considered as one of the most relevant forms of relationship marketing, which help companies engaging clients in an innovative and proactive way. Indeed, while "*relationship marketing requires firms to think about relating to customers*", collaborative marketing, on the contrary, "*requires firms to think about collaborating with customers and making customers an integral part of the firm's marketing activities*" (Sawhney, 2001, p. 44). According to the author, it is important to consider that one of the main characteristics of collaborative marketing is that this marketing technique has the purpose of stimulating reciprocal interdependence between firms and customers, to reach the maximization of mutual benefits.

According to Edelmann (2014), 80% of customers think that companies should pay more attention to customers' thoughts and beliefs while just 13% of customers think that company truly listen to clients' needs. It is evident that clients expect more attention from firms: to listen properly to customers, companies should limit traditional questions, focusing on what customers really want and the only way to do this is listening to what customers need to say spontaneously, during their collaboration with their favorite brands.

Indeed, companies should find some effective ways to start conversations with targeted people offering them the possibility to actively participate in the brand marketing strategy and to share their messages and thoughts with the brand and with other customers (Creative Conversation, 2017) According to De Filippo & Lonati (2016), collaborative marketing can be considered as the perfect solution to stimulate reciprocal interdependence between firms and customers, being always involved inside the decision processes of clients and remaining always focused on the ongoing cultural and behavioral transformations. People love to express their opinions or judgements especially about products, firms or about their own experience with a brand; collaborative marketing focuses on the clients' willingness of being part of their favorite brands, collaborating to the marketing campaigns of their preferred firms through the diffusion of their opinions within their network of contacts online and offline. For these reasons, the development of collaborative marketing campaigns leads to the maximization of firms' and customers' benefits since companies

can use customer opinions and suggestions to improve their offers collecting clients' feedbacks and taking advantage of the WOM effects generated by the campaign. Indeed, collaborative marketing techniques aim to promote the development of spontaneous, self-generated dialogues not only between a firm and its customers, but also between customers and other customers. First, clients become an active part of the whole process of creation and development of products and services; then, they become also "co-marketers", since they have the possibility to actively help companies to promote the product within the targeted market.

Thus, within the collaborative marketing context, customers actively participate to the marketing campaign, cooperating during the production, giving feedbacks to the company, helping the firm to improve goods and services and sharing feedbacks and opinions (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000). Importantly, these collaborations between companies and clients lead to a greater value for both parties. On the one hand, companies get helpful feedbacks from customers while taking advantage from positive WOM effects. Specifically, it is important to notice that there is a hidden potentiality that companies need to unlock for gaining the highest level of benefits from them. This potentiality especially resides in the customers' capability of creating dynamic and original contents that can be useful to reach many different targets of clients with low costs and great impact (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000). Indeed, engaged customers will be likely to produce User Generated Content, which will enrich companies' content marketing and help developing the products of the future through co-creation: thanks to the collaborative marketing approach, companies can use customers as a great marketing resource to increase awareness and transactions (Asknert, 2016). In other terms, collaborative marketing allows companies approaching clients in a revolutionary way, by making them try new products and services, while inviting them to create "user-generated contents" that can be useful for engaging other clients, and minimizing the marketing campaign's costs.

On the other hand, customers are actively involved in marketing campaigns, they can get discounts, express their opinions and participate to the production of new items, test pre-views products and they can become "ambassadors" of their preferred brands, developing a strong sense of belonging to the brand. According to Sawhney (2001), there are different fields in which companies should count on the collaboration with clients to construct a winning strategy. First, it is important to cooperate with clients when a company needs to decide about the design of an item. "collaborative design" refers to the participation of customers in the design development processes; it is essential since in this way companies can guarantee that the design of a product matches customers' needs, enhancing customers' sense of belonging to the brand. Second, one of the most interesting field in which a collaborative approach could be profitable is in defining prices. Indeed, "collaborative pricing" refers to the participation of clients in prices decisions; customers actively participate expressing which amount of money they would pay for a given amount of services. In this way

companies will be able to adapt prices and quantities to specific customers' needs, generating flexible offers.

The personalization is even deeper with the "collaborative segmentation". With this approach, not only prices are suggested by customers, but also other characteristics are chosen by clients. In this way, companies do not need to analyze the market to assign each client to a specific cluster since customers will self-select into segments in which other similar buyers will identify. Since customers know their needs more accurately than companies can do, collaborative segmentation lets companies improve the quality of their segmentation, minimizing costs.

Moreover, it is important to consider that a collaborative approach could be used to minimize customer service costs. In particular, "collaborative support", which refers to the development of real time conversations between customers and firms, is useful to reduce customer care expenditures letting customers dialogue with the firm or between themselves to resolve troubles. In this way, also customer satisfaction will increase, since customers will receive detailed and accurate answers immediately.

Finally, in order to assess the practical importance of collaborative marketing, it is important to consider that nowadays customers' preferences are changing fast, so companies should find new ways to identify and to satisfy customers' needs immediately. For this reason, companies should collect clients' ideas about innovative items that are going to be launched on the market, since customers' opinions are essential for companies to reduce costs and to maximize profits. Collaborative marketing is useful to get these goals, since it lets companies acquire data, feelings and trustable beliefs about innovative products at reduced costs and, in this way, firms can easily test their new items and refine marketing plans according to customers' opinions continuously over time. Indeed, even though companies may have many instruments to analyze data, sometimes it is costly to acquire statistics from external sources; collaborative marketing could be the perfect option to easily collect data, studying consumers' habits and improving the firm's offer, discovering actual or future trends and trying to forecast future tendencies and consumers' behaviors. Collaborative marketing represents the future of marketing since it creates a direct bond based on reliability between clients and brands and since it helps companies to predict customers' future needs at lower costs. (De Filippo & Lonati, 2016)

1.2.1 Collaborative marketing: customer support and when to collaborate

The process of creating bonds with customers is not always easy; often, it takes time to develop solid relationships with customer and to gain their loyalty. Therefore, collaborative marketing strategies should be planned with a long-time focus and each step that the company must reach should be clearly defined. It is important to develop significant connections with clients focusing

on what people are and on what they do. Bonds should be personalized for each cluster of clients and should last over time.

With targeted marketing programs, it is easier to reduce the time needed to interact with people and to engage with clients; in this way, it is possible to mature more qualitative relationships, developing collaborations with clients and directly involving them in companies' marketing strategies. (Marketo, 2015).

Thus, Marketo (2015), outlines five guiding principles that should be the basis for a well-structured campaign aimed to engage customers and to develop strong relationships and bonds with them.

First, it is important to connect with people as individuals. It is essential to personalize every message. Companies that decide to develop one-to-one marketing programs recognize that durable success of a business is accelerated when services are customized according to the needs of each group of customers. Indeed, as suggested by Colombini (2005), even when companies involve clients into the development of new products or into the marketing campaigns, sometimes they decide not to interact with the single client but, on the contrary, with the "average" client: this could be a big mistake in the development of collaborative marketing strategies. On the contrary, one-to-one marketing is essential to build tangible bonds with customers, gaining their loyalty and fidelity. In this way, companies have also the possibility to discover which are the most profitable clients, focusing on them to maximize profits and to avoid waste of financial resources. Second, companies should engage people based on their interests, which can be known thanks to technologic instruments that allows collecting data for identifying trends and consumption habits. It follows that, after having detected tendencies and consumers' behaviors, companies have the possibility to personalize offers according to different customer' preferences, maximizing the efficiency of their campaigns. Third, it is essential to consider the engagement with clients as a continuous process. Conversations with customers should last over time: this is the only way to know more about your customers and to create deeper relationships with them; each interaction should be part of a longer series of contacts. Indeed, the engagement process should be felt by customers as a continuous dialogue, with no interruptions; in this way, clients will consider the conversation as a natural and unbroken process and relationships will last over time. Fourth, it is essential to dedicate time to the conversations with customers, because this is the only way to acquire knowledge about customers' behaviors and to increase their loyalty and devotion. Finally, companies should offer to customers an omni-channel marketing experience, where the omni-channel approach is defined as a sales-oriented approach that has the purpose of offering to the clients an innovative and long-lasting customer experience wherever they are, even if they are buying online or in a traditional shop (Rouse and Goulart, 2014).

Nowadays, there are many ways to reach a customer, and companies should focus on how to deliver to customers an integrated customer experience across each channel, in an integrated way. Indeed,

the most valuable asset of a company is composed by its customers: for this reason, it is important to connect with people, to create long-lasting relationships and to collaborate with clients, satisfying each customer need in the most efficient and effective way (Marketo, 2015). Collaboration with customers is vital for companies that aim to offer superior value gaining a competitive advantage within the market in which they are operating.

1.2.2 Relevance of collaborative marketing

Collaborative marketing focuses on these possibilities: companies that want to unlock the hidden potentialities of customers should try to motivate clients to participate in their marketing campaigns, offering them the possibility of being the real protagonists of each campaign (Moisio & Arnould, 2005).

Companies are beginning to enjoy the collaborative marketing approaches: collaborative marketing campaigns are useful for those companies that aim to build long-lasting bonds with their customer base, increasing brand awareness, brand engagement, customer loyalty and purchase intention in an innovative and more dynamic way. Indeed, taking advantage of the customers' collaboration to gain feedbacks about products and to spread the company's messages is a perfect option for companies that want to approach clients in an original manner gaining the most value as possible from the relationships with them. More specifically, relationships with clients are useful to let customers "co-create" with the company, designing new products, services or marketing campaigns. For this reason, according to Bhalla (2016), collaborative marketing is convenient for firms that want to forecast which are the main economic trends and customers' interests, aiming to innovate their business and to develop a competitive advantage based on customers' real interests. Indeed, when companies decide to collaborate with customers for the development of new products or services, they get new ideas or suggestions that are useful to improve the brand offer accordingly with the new tendencies and trends of the market environment. Moreover, collaborative marketing is appropriate for data-driven companies that focus their businesses on the analysis and exploration of data with the aim of discovering actual and future trends to build winning business strategies. Indeed, according to Park (2014), nowadays companies are shifting the focus from a "push marketing" approach, based on sending mono-directional, unappealing messages to clients, to a "pull marketing" approach, aimed to attract the spontaneous interest of new customers. To define a winning collaborative marketing strategy based on the "pull marketing" approach, companies need to focus on data: they should collect insights, analyze them and understand when and where to try to capture the interest of customers. For these reasons, collaborative marketing is a good option for data-driven companies that have the possibility to gather insights about customers; indeed, elaborating available data, those companies will be able to define winning collaborative

marketing strategies, understanding when to approach new clients and how to dialogue with their customer bases in order to satisfy their needs continuously over time. Additionally, as stated by Uptmor (2017), collaborative marketing is the perfect choice for firms that aim to engage with customers through social media channels. Thus, rather than using social media as platforms where to simply communicate with customers, companies are beginning to solicit feedbacks about items and new services. Indeed, nowadays the relevance of collaborative marketing is boosted by the increased presence of Internet and social media platforms in the everyday life of customers. To illustrate, according to Moisio & Arnould (2005), social media allows customers actively participating in companies' strategies. Indeed, through social media consumers can participate in the value production process of their favorite brands. Thus, from a corporate perspective, it seems that social media allows company involving customers in companies' marketing strategies, by giving them the possibility to freely express their opinion, to participate to the story of a brand by actively contributing to the development of products and services, and to the creation of additional value (Davis & Risenmay, 2013).

A powerful example is given by Procter & Gamble's program named "P&G Advisors", with whom the company aims to collaborate with customers in developing new products. As reported by Sawhney (2001), before the use of the Internet, P&G was spending on average $25,000 to try a new item, with testing processes that used to last around two months to be completed.

The same author suggests that nowadays P&G tests products at a cost of $2,500, with results that are usually available after two weeks, thanks to collaborative marketing techniques. A concrete example is given by "Physique hair care" products by P&G; in launching this product, P&G encouraged clients to register on Physique.com website to sample the new items. The website has been visited by more than five million customers in less than twelve weeks, so the product gained a lot of visibility even before its official launch.

Another important case is represented by the Spanish marketing agency Kuvut, whose objective is to develop participatory marketing campaigns for many multinational companies within the Spanish, Italian and French market.

More specifically, Kuvut is a Spanish company that is considered as one of the collaborative marketing communities with the highest rate of engagement in Europe. Working for a lot of multinational firms, Kuvut aims to develop innovative marketing campaigns taking advantage of modern collaborative marketing techniques, with the purpose of increasing consumer engagement taking advantage of a consolidated community of users. Kuvut is specialized in collaborative marketing campaigns through which companies can easily engage with customers increasing their loyalty and satisfaction. Looking at one of the latest campaigns developed by this company within the Italian market for the Swedish-based brand Tena, it is possible to notice how collaborative marketing campaigns engage well-defined targets of population accordingly to the company's

specific needs. According with its client, Kuvut was searching for a maximum number of 250 "Brand Ambassadors" who were going to receive Tena products to be tested for free. In particular, for this campaign the company defined a selective target of participants, since it comprised only women with more than fifty-five years. But the campaign was a success, with posts on Kuvut's website that received 13719 comments and more than 970 shares on social networks, even if the specific target of this campaign promoted by Tena was not composed by "digital natives" but, on the contrary, by people that are not completely used to post contents on social networks. Indeed, results could be even more surprising when the target comprise also younger users. Thus, another important campaign developed by Kuvut has been the one for "Vernel Supreme Perfume Pearls", a new item launched on the market by Henkel in 2018. The campaign was aimed to people between twenty-five and sixty years old, with different objectives: to increase brand awareness and market penetration, to collect insights about customers and to educate people about the product, since it was a completely new item. Results show that the initiative has been a real success: 15.068 people have shown interest about the product, going through the different phases of the campaign. Between them, 2.000 have been selected as brand ambassadors, so they have had the possibility to test the product and to talk about it with their network of friends. Outcomes have been optimal: according to what has been declared by participants, there have been 184.800 declared and potential conversations, with 1.759.624 people reached through offline and online channels. After the campaign, 93% of participants declared that they are willing to purchase the product after the test, with the 89% of participants asserting that that the product became their "best choice" after the test. Also, 75% of participants defined themselves as "promoters" of the brand, declaring that they would like to recommend the product to their friends. The campaign has also produced more than 800.000 views to the webpages of Kuvut and Vernel, with optimal results also for the SEO parameters of the brand. These results show the practical importance of collaborative marketing in generating brand awareness, purchase intention and in generating positive WOM effects online and offline. Moreover, people who tried Vernel Supreme Perfume Pearls through the Kuvut's website declared that the most appreciated characteristics of this item are the "perfume intensity" and the "duration of the perfume", while something can be improved according to the variety of the fragrances or the "quality-price relationships".

Other available data that are useful to highlight the actual relevance of collaborative marketing regards a campaign developed by Kuvut for the Fisher-Price's brand "Mega Bloks". In this case, there were two main objectives: to increase product and brand awareness and to collect customer insights about a completely new item. In this example, the number of final "ambassadors" was limited to 250 participants, so the KPIs of the campaign are smaller; anyway, with this example, I would like to highlight how these campaigns are adaptable to different kinds of products or people, and how they can lead to great results even when the number of participants is small.

In the case of MegaBloks, Kuvut developed a collaborative marketing campaign that has conducted to 6.768 participants, with 250 final product ambassadors; moreover, 1.379.261 people have been impacted by the campaign online and offline, with more than 20.000 comments online written by participants on blogs and websites. The campaign lets the company collect also important feedback about the product; users declared that the item is really appreciated since it is a positive stimulus for creativity and since it is safe, while the price/quality ratio should be improved. Also, customers showed a high purchase intention (95%), with 94% recommendation rate and 89% who, after the test, believe that Mega Bloks is better than competitors. Moreover, these campaigns are useful to show to customers many important features about the product or the brand: specifically, in this case customers after the test they declared to have a knowledge about the brand of 4,72 point out of 5.

These data and results evidence the relevance of collaborative marketing as the perfect choice for those companies that want to stand out from competition building real bonds with clients, gaining their feedbacks and opinions to solve mistakes or improve the product quality minimizing, at the same time, testing costs and time and generating positive word-of-mouth effects within the selected target of consumers. Thus, this research would be useful for companies that aim to unlock the hidden potentialities of customers; indeed, as stated before, nowadays customers are willing to participate to the implementation of companies marketing campaigns, generating positive WOM effects, creating web contents or helping companies in the development of new products. Therefore, collaborative marketing is a relevant topic for companies that focus on data to build their own relationships with customers; coordinating a collaborative marketing approach to a huge data analysis, it will be possible for innovative companies to personalize dialogues with customers on a one-to-one level, standing out from competition and providing unique customer experiences to their clients. Indeed, according to a Manyika et al., 2011, big data for marketing could expand profits by 10-30% using micro-segmentation of customers and personalized approaches; to increase profits, after having divided the population into different segments, companies should analyze data and insights for each cluster of clients and then select which are the most relevant approaches to collaborate with each segment focusing on the most important drivers of collaborative marketing.

Accordingly, the main focus of this research is to understand how to unlock customers' potentialities, identifying which are the main drivers of collaborative marketing and indicating to companies on which factors they should focus to increase the profitability of their collaborations with customers.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Collaborative marketing: literature review

Nowadays, one of the most effective relationship marketing technique consists in the development of collaborative and productive bonds with customers; meaning that companies let clients actively participate in the development of their marketing strategy. This form of relationship marketing is referred to the so-called collaborative marketing, which seems to be a fruitful strategy for increasing consumers' loyalty and obtaining productive feedbacks (Kotler et al., 2010).

Most of the literature about collaborative marketing is based on the thought that a strong connection between relationship marketing and collaborative marketing exists. Indeed, according to Sheth (1996), "*the domain of relationship marketing should be limited to include only those collaborative marketing activities that are focused on serving the needs of the customer*" (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000, p. 7) Thus, this author suggests that the main focus of collaborative marketing resides in the mutual interdependence between customers and firms, which leads to the creation of mutual benefits. Nowadays, marketers are becoming aware of these possibilities and are starting to enjoy the collaborative marketing approach aiming to increase customers' brand awareness and engagement in an innovative way.

Moreover, as stated by Muñiz & Schau (2011), "*marketing is evolving into true participatory conversations. Once-tidy, controlled marketing communications with distinct, identifiable corporate spokes-people are giving way to a messy tangle of market-based communications consisting of multiple authors including customers, competitors, observers, employees, and interested collectives*" (Muñiz & Schau, 2011, p. 209). It follows that, customers' collaborative participation is becoming essential for companies that want to develop winning strategies aiming to create long-lasting relations with clients, in a highly competitive business environment where it is difficult to differentiate from rivals. Overall, it is possible to argue that collaborative and participatory marketing could be seen as the key to develop winning strategies. Indeed, one of the main possibilities offered by the collaborative marketing approach is the long-term orientation of the relationships created with customers. According to Muñiz & Schau (2011), "*many marketers still prefer to solicit consumer-generated contents only for occasional advertising campaigns*" (Muñiz & Schau, 2011, p. 210). At the same time, other companies prefer to schedule long-term programs to create collaborations with customers that should last over time. These collaborations aim to help companies in spreading their messages, understanding customers' opinions about products or services and using consumer generated contents to engage people (Muñiz & Schau, 2011).

2.1.1 From Marketing 1.0 to Marketing 3.0 and collaborative marketing

The actual business environment and the related marketing communications paradigms are completely different from the mid-1990s conditions, when marketing techniques were based on a one-way communication system (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). At that time, companies' marketing messages were aimed to communicate with customers in a unidirectional way and there were not interactions between companies and clients. According to Berthon et al. (2008), during mid-1990s reciprocity between people and companies within the communication system was basically limited to their acceptance or rejection of marketing messages. More specifically, Erragcha & Romdhane (2014), indicated that the first marketing approach could be identified in the so called "Marketing 1.0", based on the "Web 1.0", whose basic principle was "*to provide products and services of offline businesses*" (Erragcha & Romdhane, 2014, p. 138). Basically, in this case the customers were seen as passive actors aimed at surfing the net to find products or services that satisfy their needs. Indeed, "Marketing 1.0" resided on a unidirectional communication system, based on vertical spreading of contents, messages to customers, stationary banners and newsletters. At the core of this marketing approach there were products and mono-directional messages from the company to its clients: marketing 1.0 could be considered "*anonymous, intrusive and focused on mass transactions*" (Erragcha & Romdhane, 2014, p. 138).

In contrast with the previous one, Web 2.0 is identified with a clear shift from unidirectional messages to a bidirectional communication system. This shift became possible with the rise of new platforms such as blogs, social networks or wiki that offer the possibility of services production, diffusion and consumption (Poynter & Lawrence, 2008). One of the main possibilities offered by Web 2.0 is represented by crowdsourcing processes, that are indicated as "*continuous and interactive dialogues between users who become true collaborators and producers of good and services*", with the aim of "*using the intelligence and innovation of many people to create contents*". (Erragcha & Romdhane, 2014, p. 138). This new paradigm is strictly connected with the clear revolution that occurred to the marketing communication processes and that affects the relationships between marketers and customers: not monologues, but dialogues; not just communication, but participation (Mazurek, 2009). More specifically, Hoffman & Novak (1996), identified three different communication models that are useful to keep track of how marketing communications systems have been changing over years. The first model proposed by the authors is defined as a one-to-many communication model used by the firm to deliver contents to clients: it is the "mass media model". Furthermore, the authors suggest a model based on "*interpersonal and computer-mediated communications*" between two actors that offers to the parties the possibility to interact between them (Hoffman & Novak, p. 52). Finally, the third model proposed by these authors is based on the possibility to actively interact with the interaction media: "*the

primary relationship is not between the sender and the receiver, but rather with the mediated environment with which they interact" (Hoffman & Novak, p. 53). This last model is strictly connected with the rise of a new form of marketing: "Marketing 3.0". This modern marketing paradigm is defined as the direct consequence of the actual consumers' behavior transformations: customers want to collaborate with firms, so companies need sophisticated customer-oriented marketing activities (Kotler, 2012).

Moreover, according to Muñiz & Schau (2011), the reason of these changes should be identified in the context in which these transformations are taking place: the global telecommunications' revolution. People from all over the world can connect between them using internet, they can share opinions, thoughts and feedbacks about a product, a brand, a company, influencing concretely other people thoughts about a single item. More specifically, this marketing revolution is taking place during the age of Web 3.0, that is defined as an intuitive web model, individualized and focused on the active role of users. Indeed, while "*web 2.0 was based on participation, web 3.0 is based on users' cooperation*" (Erragcha & Romdhane, 2014, p. 140). Using available data and monitoring customers' habits, during the age of Web 3.0 companies can always satisfy customers' needs, offering them revolutionary brand experiences; clients are not just customers to be served, but they are humans with whom firms should collaborate in a cultural as well as in an economic perspective (Kotler, 2012). Fittingly, Kotler et al., 2010, state that "*the era of Marketing 3.0 is the era where marketing practices are very much influenced by changes in consumer behavior and attitude. It is the more sophisticated form of the consumer-centric era where the consumer demands more collaborative, cultural, and spiritual marketing approaches*" (Kotler et. al, 2010, p. 21). According to these considerations it is possible to find a clear parallel between marketing 3.0 and collaborative marketing; indeed, one of the main features of marketing 3.0 consists in customers' participation and in consumers' ability to co-create with companies. Similarly, collaborative marketing is defined as a marketing technique in which consumers are active characters in the co-creation of values (Bartoletti & Paltrinieri, 2012). Thus, according to Erragcha & Romdhane (2014), collaborative marketing could be considered as the foundation of Marketing 3.0, wherein collaborations with customers are the direct consequences of a shift in the marketing models.

2.1.2 Collaborative marketing: co-creation and creative customers

Nowadays, modern society is becoming progressively more conscious that companies' marketing strategies should be defined focusing on customers' willingness to collaborate with firms (Kotler et al., 2010). Indeed, consumers not only desire to support companies in producing innovative items, but they also contribute in the development of new ideas for marketing (Kotler et al., 2010). This tendency is explained by the fact that "*consumers are no longer isolated individuals, rather*

they are connected with one another; they are no longer passive, but are active in giving useful feedback to companies" (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 11).

Consumers' capability to communicate and to co-create with companies is explained by the recent improvement in global communication technologies: the emergence of new technologies and the development of internet, computers and social media radically transformed the way information is distributed and commercial advertisement is produced (Warrink, 2015). Indeed, *"improving technologies increased the communication among consumers, but also between consumers and companies radically in recent years*" (Warrink, 2015, p.1). Thus, consumers' are now able to easily communicate with firms, expressing opinions and sharing feedbacks. For these reasons, creative consumers prefer cultural and collaborative brands while they criticize companies that tend to interiorize marketing decisions without collaborating with people (Warrink, 2015). Consequently, nowadays firms do not have the total control of their brands, since they need always to compare their ideas with customers' opinions. In other terms, to get the most value out of their marketing strategy, companies have the extreme necessity to collaborate with customers, otherwise they would be out of the business: this is the most powerful example of collaborative marketing (Kotler et al., 2010). Surely, a unique feature of collaborative marketing is represented by the possibility of taking advantage of original and distinctive customer-generated contents. Indeed, *"the concept of collaborative marketing stimulates the desire of consumers to interact with the brand and other consumers in order to be more involved into marketing activities by forming creative content themselves*" (Warrink, 2015, p.6). Customers' contents creation is described as an expression of the willingness to be active participants in the process of value creation: this is a clear reflection of our creative society and of the social media diffusion in our everyday life as means to express ideas, thoughts and beliefs with no geographical boundaries. Moreover, Muñiz & Schau (2011), suggest that the creation of customer generated contents is inspired by personal brand attachment and that customers are usually strongly able to create engaging contents with elevated resonance among their networks of contacts. As stated by Brown et al. (2003), it is important to notice that members of brand communities are usually capable of great creation of brand content. Companies have a new possibility: to take advantage of these contents using them into the marketing strategies and, at the same time, make customers more loyal, creating long-lasting relationships. We are living in a boundaryless world, where there is a dynamic and interconnected environment in which companies are operating and businesses are growing. The 21st century gave us many opportunities and many challenges: many of them are strongly connected to the development of creative consumers and social media. According to Berthon et al. (2012), the evolution of the web and the diffusion of social media platforms can be thought as *"the technical infrastructure that enables the social phenomenon of collective media and facilitates consumer-generated content*". One of the main effect of the web revolution has been the "*shift in locus of value production from the firm to*

the consumer” (Berthon et al., 2012, p. 262). Indeed, we can consider this revolution as one of the most important way to “*facilitate content creation, interaction and interoperability*” and “*to put the lay user⸺rather than the firm⸺center stage in terms of design, collaboration, and community on the World Wide Web*” (Berthon et al., 2012, p. 262). Nowadays, customers have the possibility to use websites with user-friendly interactive interfaces to communicate with brands and to share opinions about a product or about experiences with a brand. These customers are considered always more important by companies, because their contents are shared with other people and potential clients, who decide to buy or not to buy items considering also the opinions shared online. For these reasons, “*creative customers*” are considered the new source of values in the actual hyper-competitive business environment. “*Creative customers*” is an expression that refers to those customers that generate value-added content in social media. In these cases, the network of contacts is referred to friends and associates that they have on their social media. It is important to highlight that social media should be considered as the vehicles through which contents are carried. But, which is the real value of social media in companies' marketing strategies? With the increasing number of social networks available on the internet, dialogues between companies and clients are becoming numerous and more structured. We shifted the focus from "one-to-many communications" to real "social media dialogues". Nowadays, companies have the possibility to take advantage of the conversations between customers that usually take place on the internet: firms can intervene in these dialogues to improve the visibility of the brand and to stimulate positive word-of-mouth effects. Contents that are shared on these vehicles are created by millions of users around the world. Indeed, from a marketing perspective, this contents' creation should be inspired by a company to stimulate users to create contents that could fit the marketing strategy of the brand. According to Berthon et al. (2012), contents created by customers can differ a lot between them and they usually follow a specific cycle. The cycle typically begins with informal discussions about products and services. Then, it continues with consumers that decide to write and to share organized reviews and evaluations in text or video. Next, consumers become personally involved “*in the promotion or demotion of brands through self-created advertising videos*”. Finally, “*consumers become involved in the modification of proprietary products and services and the distribution of these innovations*” (Berthon et al., 2012, p. 263). These changes in technologies, web infrastructures and customers' needs have direct marketing implications that are leading to the development of marketing 3.0 and collaborative marketing: marketers need to understand how new technologies work and how they will evolve in the future. But, even more important is to understand how customers' needs will change in the future, since customers are evolving: “f*rom traditionally passive consumer into a major source of creative talent*”. (Berthon et al., 2008, p. 269)

2.1.3 Collaborative marketing concerns

After having considered which are the main features of collaborative marketing, it is important to identify the principal concerns and doubts about our topic of interest. Indeed, many firms are still suspicious about the real customers' capability of collaborating with a company for the creation of its brand image and for the implementation of official and long-lasting marketing programs. So, the literature on collaborative marketing and on consumer-generated contents is evaluating if collaborations with customers could really be integrated into larger firms' perspectives, with co-production of contents and active clients' participation into these marketing campaigns (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Indeed, Thompson & Malaviya (2013), hypothesize that proposing to customers an advertisement created by customers could lead to two different reactions: skepticism about the real quality of that advertisement and of the company itself or, on the contrary, identification with the creators of the ad and admiration toward the firm. Moreover, "*although co-creation of advertising provides marketers important benefits from the involved customers, such as authentic content and deeper customer insights, engaging customers who were not directly involved in the co-creation effort requires the commitment of additional resources*" (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013, page 33). Therefore, part of the skepticism toward collaborations between firms and customers is due to the doubts about the real possibility to extend the marketing efforts to those people who have not actively participate to the campaign. Moreover, other doubts are linked to the effective marketing campaign's perceived quality, since most of the customers are not professional marketers and their participation to the campaign development could affect its effective value positively or negatively. Moreover, another issue related to collaborative marketing is represented by "*brand hijacking*", that is described as "*the consumer's act of commandeering a brand from the marketing professionals and driving its evolution*" (Kevyin et al., 2018, page 74). Now that collaborating marketing is becoming a growing trend chosen by many companies, marketers need to focus on the identity of their businesses with more attention. Indeed, "*marketers today no longer have full control over their brands because they are now competing with the collective power of consumers*" (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 10). It means that collaborations with customers could turn into problems when they lead to the company's loss of its brand identity; the challenge for marketers is to collaborate with customers, listening to them and gaining insights and feedbacks, remaining always focused on brand identity and on the main financial and strategic objectives of the firm.

2.1.4 Relationship marketing and parallels with collaborative marketing

After having discussed about the main features and weaknesses of collaborative marketing, it is important to focus on the main relationship marketing techniques, aiming to discover which are the origins of collaborative marketing and how marketing practices are evolving over time. Thus, even if they share many common features, relationship and collaborative marketing are different techniques and the first one could be considered as a basis for the development of the second one. Indeed, one of the first academic text-book on relationship marketing was published in 1991; it was already clear that the customer's perception of 'value' and 'quality' is the core aspect on which marketers should focus (Christopher et al., 1991). Indeed, according to the authors, relationship marketing focuses on letting companies put customers at the core of their marketing strategies. Accordingly, the authors suggest that relationship marketing accentuates both quality and customer service aiming to reduce the distance between what customers imagine and what they obtain (Christopher et al., 1991) Therefore, relationship marketing is considered as a fundamental technique aimed to let companies better communicate with customers, with the final goal of maximizing the quality of services, aiming to completely satisfy customers' needs and expectations. Consequently, relationship marketing is considered as a revolutionizing marketing technique since it lets companies create real bonds with customers, involving them into the most relevant firms' initiatives. According to Parvatiyar et al. (2000), there are many different perspectives about the real definition of relationship marketing and on which are the main goals of this marketing technique. An important point of view is offered by McKenna (1991), who suggests that the focus of relationship marketing is on considering the customer as the core of every business. Indeed, relationship marketing aims to actively involve clients into the most relevant companies' marketing decisions instead of just manipulating them. More specifically, Vavra (1991), focuses on the long period: according to this author, relationship marketing is especially about using different "after-marketing" techniques to create solid bonds with customers; indeed, the author suggest that the core aspect of relationship marketing resides in the after-purchase phase as a mean to conserve the relationships with customers over time. Accordingly, Rouse (2014), suggested that relationship marketing focuses on customer loyalty and long-term customer engagement rather than shorter-term goals like customer acquisition and individual sales. Then, the main goal of relationship marketing is to develop solid and emotive customer connections to a brand that can lead to word-of-mouth promotion and spread of information from customer to customer. Olenski (2013) offers an overall perspective on relationship marketing, arguing that relationship marketing can be seen as a strategy aimed at promoting customer reliability, communication and commitment in the long period. The main focus is to deliver information to customers directly connected with their main interests (Olenski, 2013). Accordingly, relationship marketing could be considered

essential for those companies that aim to achieve important results in the long period; indeed, to be sustainable and profitable over time, companies need to improve the quality of their offers, since *"one of the most important aspects of a successful competitive strategy is to provide superior value to customers"* developing long-lasting relationships with them and maximizing benefits for both parties (Ravald & Grönroos 1996, p. 19). The development of relationship marketing activities directly leads to a significant shift in the axioms of marketing: from independent choices to mutual interdependence between parties, aiming to maximize marketing productivity through efficiency and effectiveness (Sheth & Sisodia, 1995). Moreover, different perspectives have been developed about which is the main target of relationship marketing campaigns. On one hand, according to Parvatiyar & Sheth (2000), relationship marketing campaigns should aim to satisfy the requests of customers, to build long term relationships, focusing exclusively on customer needs. Indeed, the author suggests that other aspects of the relationships, such as relationships with suppliers or internal relationships should not be considered as main parts of the relationship marketing campaign (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000). In contrast, Morgan et al. (1994) proposes that relationship marketing takes into consideration also other stakeholder groups. Their more inclusive definition of relationship marketing suggests that relationship marketing indicates all those marketing actions aimed to develop and conserve positive relations (Morgan et al., 1994). Nowadays, with the development of engaging collaborative marketing techniques that incorporate a broader range of interested individuals, marketers are shifting the focus from a smaller target to a larger group of stakeholders, considering all the actors involved in the relationship and aiming to offer to customers an even more appealing brand experience (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000). Focusing on the main relationship marketing characteristics, it is interesting to notice that there are many common features that characterize both relationship and collaborative marketing. Indeed, according to Parvatiyar et al. (2000), one of the most important features of collaborative marketing consists in its emphasis on cooperative relationships between the company and its clients (Parvatiyar et al., 2000). Indeed, aiming to analyze the existing parallels between collaborative and relationship marketing, it is essential to focus on the active collaboration and participation of customers into the companies' marketing strategies that characterize both collaborative and relationship marketing techniques. Moreover, according to Ganesan (1994), one of the most positive features of relationship and collaborative marketing consists in the reliability of the long-term relationships that are created between the brand and its customers. Indeed, both of the marketing techniques focus on developing strong bonds with customers aimed to last over long periods. Since these bonds are long-lasting, it is believed that customers will not engage in opportunistic behavior; so, the long-term orientation of collaborative relationships is the basis for a real and sincere cooperation between all the marketing actors (Ganesan, 1994). Indeed, collaborative and relationship marketing techniques share many common features such as the active role of customers, the long-term

orientation and the possibility to develop long-lasting bonds with customers. More specifically, according to Ravald & Grönroos (1996), it is possible to consider relationship and collaborative marketing as complementary strategies. Indeed, characteristics such as security, protection and credibility can be developed only with long-lasting relationships. But, in order to create real trust, companies should go deeper in the relationship with their clients by developing active collaborations (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996).

Chapter 3. Research question & Conceptual development

3.1 Research question

Different studies have introduced the concept of collaborative marketing and how this revolutionary marketing paradigm is affecting companies' marketing strategies. However, while several research studies have shed light on the elements that drive customer engagement in relationship marketing programs, it seems that not adequate attention has been paid on understanding the main drivers of collaborative marketing success. Indeed, few studies have tried to describe collaborative marketing features, relating this phenomenon with relationship marketing or co-creation (Lazarus et al., 2014; Kotler et al., 2010; Thompson & Malaviya, 2013), but none of them came up with a structured model able to identify the main drivers of collaborative marketing and to suggest to companies how to develop collaborations with customers efficiently. Aiming at satisfying the need of understanding what drives customers' willingness to collaborate with companies, my research study has been developed choosing the main collaborative marketing drivers basing on the way collaborative marketing has been conceptualized by the existent literature and starting from what has been theorized about relationship marketing. The choice of analyzing the relationship marketing context to start this collaborative marketing research has been determined by the fact that researches about collaborative marketing shows a clear affinity between collaborative and relationship marketing techniques. Indeed, relationship marketing is defined as *"the ongoing process of engaging in cooperative and collaborative activities and programs with immediate and end-user customers"* (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000, p. 8). Similarly, the main focus of collaborative marketing resides in the capability of involving consumers into long-lasting collaborations with companies. Indeed, when collaborations between clients and firms are created, "*the outcome of this engagement is not necessarily an exchange of values; it is instead a process of value creation through cooperative and collaborative effort*" (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000, p. 414). Despite these clear affinities, while in the last years marketing techniques have been mainly based on relationships with clients, nowadays marketing focus is changing quickly; currently, *"corporate culture should be collaborative, cultural and creative"* (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 84). Considering that the marketing environment is shifting the focus from relationship to participatory marketing, it is time to move from basic relationships to active collaborations between customers and firms, obtaining better insights on the reason why marketing paradigms are moving toward a more collaborative approach. Indeed, companies could benefit a lot from understanding which are the main drivers on which they should focus in order to maximize customers' participation to their collaborative marketing campaigns. Moreover, customers' collaborations are essential for companies that aim to stand out from competition, actively involving clients into their marketing strategies; according to Payne & Frow (2017), over the past twenty years, companies are starting

to move from seeing clients as passive listeners to active players. These transformations in the market ecosystem denote significant chances to shape and improve customer relationships throughout co-creation and collaborations (Payne & Frow, 2017). Because of these renovations, it is essential to study which are the main drivers of collaborative marketing and which are the most relevant motivations that lead customers to cooperate with brands, switching the focus from simple relationships to working collaborations between firms and clients. Accordingly, this work is different from the others in that it aims to develop a model able to define the collaborative marketing context and to intensify firms and researcher awareness about the motivations that induce customers to collaborate into marketing strategies, participating to branded initiatives, co-creating marketing materials with firms, giving feedbacks to companies and actively promoting brands. The choice of focusing on the collaborative marketing context has been encouraged by the willingness to help firms to increase the effectiveness of their marketing strategies and by the scientific relevance of this topic. Nowadays, companies are facing new challenges connected with reaching consumers using innovative marketing approaches: firms increasingly trust collaborative marketing strategies to renovate the way they reach customers aiming to increase customers' involvement and willingness to collaborate. For these reasons, the identification of elements that foster or impede consumer commitment to collaborative marketing programs is central to marketing managers who are trying to make choices concerning investments in innovating their marketing strategies relying on the collaborative marketing context (Ashley et al., 2011). Accordingly, focusing on the positive aspects related to the implementation of a collaborative marketing campaign, it is important to evidence that collaborative marketing techniques offer many different benefits to companies; for instance, collaborative marketing activities "*have the potential to yield important benefits for the firm, which include increased share of wallet and profitability*" (Ashley et al., 2011, p. 749). Moreover, collaborative marketing strategies are useful "*to gather information in order to help firms identify and retain their best customers and to maximize customer value*" (Ashley et al., 2011, p. 749). At the same time, despite the supposed remunerations, occasionally relationship and collaborative marketing obtain also disapproval for their failure to produce the promised returns (Rigby et al., 2002). Thus, understanding every facets of this phenomenon can provide companies huge positive returns and can help marketing managers to understand which are the main factors on which they should focus to reduce mistakes and to maximize their returns.

Particularly important is to understand which are those factors that shape consumers' willingness to take part to collaborative marketing campaigns. To illustrate, willingness to participate (i.e., WTP) is defined as the "*consumer engagement, or active involvement with a brand, product, service, or company through acts like creating contents*" (Parent et al., 2011, p. 220). According to this definition, it is possible to argue that customers' willingness to participate in collaborative

marketing campaigns is strictly connected with individuals' researches for "*greater engagement with their preferred brands, and involvement – with or without the company's approval – in creating brand personalities*" (Parent et al., 2011, p. 219). According to Parent et al. (2011), customers' dependence on a brand should be measured through the evaluation of their willingness to participate in branded initiatives and promotions. Actually, consumers search for more engagement with their favorite brands and contribution in the design of brand identities. For these reasons, customers' willingness to participate is gaining relevance as the most important factor within the collaborative marketing context; indeed, increasing customers' willingness to participate is the most relevant goal of collaborations between firms and clients. Thus, in order to develop a winning collaborative marketing campaign, it is essential for firms to consider all those factors that can affect customers' willingness to be engaged into collaborative marketing strategies. Aiming at defining "customers' willingness to participate", I would like to focus on a study developed by Lazarus et al., 2014, whose model is based on the thought that the degree of customers' willingness to co-create determines the level of interaction between firm and consumers; indeed, the authors assert that "*the greater the level of interaction between firm and consumers, the greater is the extent of co-creation*" (Lazarus et al., 2014, p. 217). Thus, according to the authors, when relationships between customers and firms are more numerous and deeper, customers are usually more willing to participate into collaborative activities such as co-creation; anyway, Lazarus et al. (2014) affirm that a clear gap exists in the literature concerning collaborative marketing: it consists in the absence of a well-defined model that delineate the main drivers of customers' "willingness" to cooperate with brands; consequently, it is essential to find out which are the main factors that affect customers' willingness to take part into companies' collaborative initiatives.

Indeed, the research question that this study wants to address is the following one:

Which are the factors that affect customers' willingness to participate in collaborative marketing campaigns?

In order to address this research question, a review on relationship marketing theories was indispensable, since relationship marketing techniques are considered as the basis for modern collaborations between organizations and consumers. In fact, according to Parvatiyar et al. (2000), the "*core theme of all relationship marketing perspectives is its focus on cooperative and collaborative relationship between the firm and its customers*" (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000, p. 5). Accordingly, it is possible to affirm that there is a strong connection between relationship marketing and collaborative marketing; but, while many research studies about relationship marketing have been already produced, there is no specific academic literature focused on collaborative marketing. Thus, based on the conceptualization that collaborative marketing may be

seen as a "sub-part" of relationship marketing, this study proposes to extend the analysis already made in the literature about relationship marketing, for developing a clear model aimed at identifying the main drivers of consumers' willingness to take part to collaborative marketing campaigns, which can be seen as a way of assessing collaborative marketing strategy success. More specifically, my work is aimed at identifying the factors that drive customers' willingness to participate to collaborative marketing campaigns by adapting the relationship marketing model developed by Ashley et al. (2011) to the collaborative marketing context and by shedding light on novel customer-brand relationship related variables that could shape individuals' willingness to take part to collaborative marketing campaign.

3.2 Conceptual model & Hypotheses Development

Collaborative marketing, together with relationship marketing, is considered an actual and interesting topic: many companies decide to join this marketing activity, letting people actively participate into their campaigns. This is due to the increasing number of challenges connected with the techniques that companies use to approach customers. Traditional methods are not effective anymore, so it is time for companies to rely on innovative methods to build solid and long-lasting bonds with customers. Nowadays customers' role within companies' marketing strategies is changing drastically; while "*from the early 1990s the majority of web users were consumers of content, created by a relatively small amount of publishers*" (Agichtein et al., 2008, p. 183), currently "*user-generated content has become increasingly popular on the web: more and more users participate in content creation, rather than just consumption*" (Agichtein et al., 2008, p. 183). Current studies have also defined collaborative marketing as the natural evolution of relationship marketing, shifting the focus from static relationships with customers to active collaborations between clients and firms (Kotler et al., 2010). An interesting point of view about relationship and collaborative marketing is offered by Ashley et al. (2011), who propose a model that "*predicts whether customers are willing to engage in different relational tactics offered by firms, measured by a formative, actionable Relationship Program Receptiveness (RPR) Index*" (Ashley et al., 2011, p. 749). Indeed, the authors' purpose is to identify which are the main dynamics that inspire or, on the contrary, impede consumer commitment in relationship marketing program. According to the model proposed by the authors, there are six factors that influence the "Relationship program receptiveness" of customers: these factors are divided into "Company controlled factors" and "Customer factors". Company controlled factors are "inconvenience" (that has a negative influence on relationship program receptiveness) and "anticipated benefits" (positive influence). Customer factors are identified with "variety seeking in sector" (negative influence), "privacy concerns" (negative influence), "involvement" (positive influence) and "shopping frequency" (positive

influence). The purpose of the authors has been to identify if there are positive or negative relationships between these variables and "relationship program receptiveness", that is an index used to measure the customers' willingness to engage in a relationship marketing campaign.

Likewise, with my analysis I would like to focus on some of the drivers previously proposed by Ashley et al. (2011), selecting the ones that, according to existent collaborative marketing literature, are more likely to have a relevant role in defining the most important collaborative marketing features. In particular, analyzing the existent literature concerning relationship and collaborative marketing, an important concept that must be taken into consideration consists into the "consumer empowerment", *that is commonly defined as "letting consumers take control of variables that are conventionally pre-determined by marketers" (Cova & Pace, 2006, p. 1090). Thus, agreeing with the collaborative marketing approach, brand managers are letting customers gaining more power over their brands; according to O'Guinn & Muniz (2005), one essential feature in current brand management is that firms can lose part of their power over a brand in favor of customers' empowerment with the scope of convincing customers to actively participate to brands' collaborative marketing strategies, planning to build long-lasting relationships with them.*

Thus, "*one key element in today brand management is that companies can lose part of their control over a brand, replaced by a consumer tribe trying to re-appropriate it*" (Cova & Pace, 2006, p. 1090). Moreover, another important collaborative marketing characteristics consists in the rise of a "creative society", with technologic platforms as the main drivers of this transformation. Kotler et al. (2010), state that customers are currently able to "*influence the overall society with their lifestyle and attitudes*", creating contents and sharing personal opinions in order to actively participate in the companies' value creation processes. Furthermore, consumers' motivation in cooperating with firms can be stimulated by offering achievable paybacks and remunerations to customers; thus, it is important for companies to focus on letting consumers know which are they main benefits that they are going to receive with their participation to the campaign (Lazarus et al, 2014). According to this collaborative marketing aspect, it is important to specify that, "*consumers are now not looking for products and services that satisfy their needs but also searching for experiences and business models that touch their spiritual side*" (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 20). Therefore, customers' desires are not just related to physical items, but they are more and more connected to immaterial and intangible benefits. According to these considerations, it emerges that consumers search for active collaborations with companies in order to be involved into companies' marketing programs, express their opinions, share their feedbacks and get rewards. Aiming at completely satisfying customers, firms should energetically involve them ensuring that the main benefits of the campaign are clearly exposed. Moreover, companies should reduce customers'

perceptions of inconvenience, that could be determined by different problems, such as privacy-related apprehensions.

Thus, based on these considerations, I suppose that "privacy concerns", "involvement", "inconvenience" and "anticipated benefits" can be relevant within the collaborative marketing framework. On the contrary, "variety seeking in sector" and "shopping frequency" seem as not relevant to my research's purpose. Indeed, as suggested by Ashley et al. (2011), "*consumers who want variety in their options and do not want to narrow their choice alternatives are likely to shy away from committing themselves to one organization*" (Ashley et al., 2011, p. 751). Moreover, purchase frequency "*is predicted to increase consumer receptiveness to relationship marketing tactics. Customers who buy from a firm more frequently get greater value from the benefits of relationship marketing programs*" (Ashley et al., 2011, p. 752). While these considerations could be considered useful to define customers' choices within the relationship marketing context, they seem as not applicable to the collaborative marketing framework. Indeed, relationship marketing is about building relationships with customers with the main objectives of convincing clients to buy the firm's products, increasing customers' purchase frequency, "*retaining their best customers and maximizing profitability*" (Ashley et al., 2011, p. 749); on the contrary, collaborative marketing has a broader scope: it is about "*giving consumers a sense of empowerment*" (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 63). Thus, consumers who enjoy collaborative marketing campaigns are driven by the desire of feeling that they have key-role in defining companies' marketing choices and in promoting their favorite brands: the act of purchasing the product is just a direct consequence of the established collaboration (Kotler et al., 2010). Consequently, "variety seeking in sector" and "shopping frequency" might not be so relevant within the collaborative marketing context. Moreover, I would like to include in my model other factors such as brand trust and brand love, that are considered as important consumer-related factors that express the customers' level of involvement with and reliance on a brand. Thus, based the idea that brand trust and brand love are long-term oriented items that are expected to be key-factors for the development of long-term relationships with clients (Larzelere & Huston, 1980), I suppose that they could strongly affect customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns.

Indeed, brand trust is defined as "*one of the factors that differentiate relationships from transactions*" (Hess & Story, 2005, p. 314). Thus, when trying to define the collaborative marketing context and what affect customers' willingness to collaborate with companies, it is essential to focus on brand trust, since every private relationship, both between different people or between an individual and a brand, is focused on trust (Hess & Story, 2005). Indeed, when clients decide to develop long-lasting relationships with firms, they need to trust the brand, being sure that the company will be able to satisfy their most personal and inner desires. Accordingly, the brand trust perspective suggests that "*the brand must possess some characteristics that go beyond its*

consideration as a mere product" (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera Alemàn, 2001, p. 1241). Thus, companies should offer to customers unexpected brand experiences, rather than just consumption products: in this way, they will be able to increase customers' brand trust and, consequently, they will enhance customers' disposition to cooperate with the brand (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera Alemàn, 2001). Moreover, reliance on a brand could also be the key to solve problems related to the collaborative marketing context, such as privacy concerns or perceptions of inconvenience, encouraging clients to participate to companies' collaborative marketing campaigns (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera Alemàn, 2001).

Moreover, it is important to consider the role of "brand love", which refers to the consumers' personal feelings toward a brand (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). Suitably, an interesting point of view concerning this topic is offered by Carrol & Ahuvia (2006), who sustain that consumers often have strong feelings for their favorite brands and that these love-like sensations are caused by the increasing development of intense consumer-brand relationships. Accordingly, Fournier (1998) affirms that brand love has an important role in the development of relationships between customers and firms' and in the stimulation of collaborations between them. Thus, basing on these considerations and after having carefully analyzed the existent literature, I suppose that it should be useful to consider brand love and brand trust as main drivers of customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns.

Furthermore, my model will also consider the effect of customers' satisfaction, that is defined as *"a cumulative, attitude-like construct that is composed of satisfaction with specific components, such as the people and the products"* (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999, p. 72). Since customer satisfaction has been considered during last decades as a fundamental paradigm for controlling actions and marketing choices within the relationship and collaborative marketing context (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997), I suppose that customer satisfaction will enhance the effect of my independent variables on customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns.

Therefore, based on these assumptions and after a careful analysis of the literature concerning collaborative and relationship marketing, I suppose that anticipated benefits, involvement, inconvenience, privacy concerns, brand love and brand trust have some positive or negative effects on customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns.
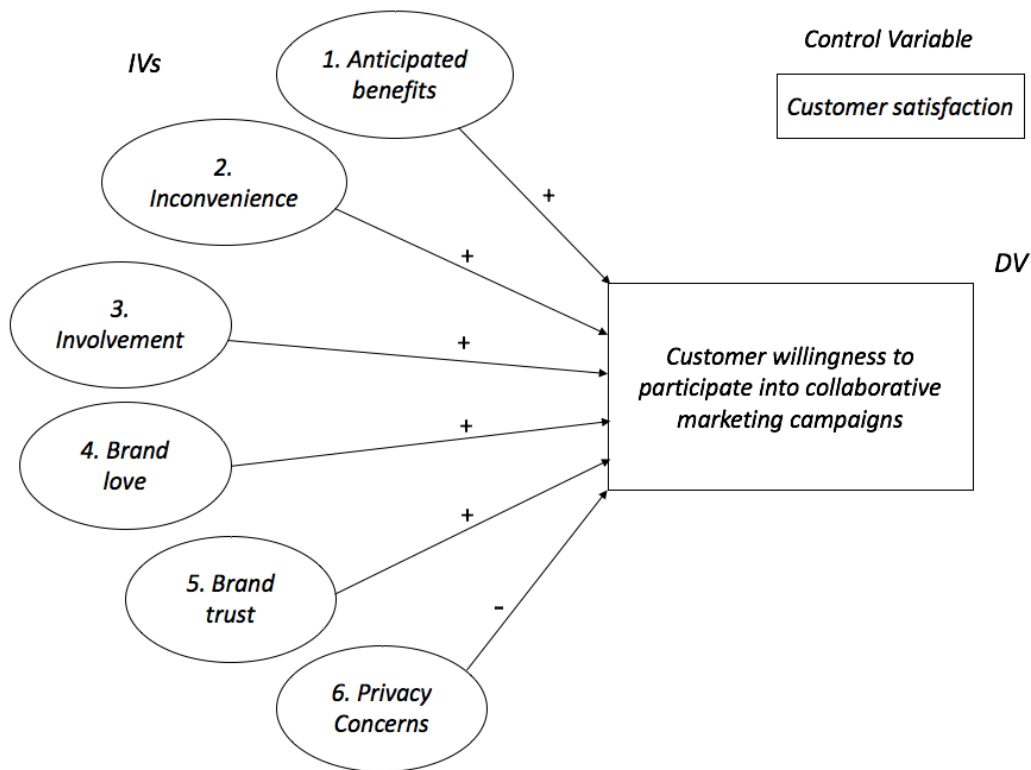
Graph1. Model

3.2.1 Anticipated benefits

One of the first things that came up into mind investigating about the collaborative marketing context is the evaluation of the main paybacks related to the customers' participation to a collaborative marketing program. More specifically, anticipated benefits refer to the customers' capability to recognize before the official beginning of the campaign which are the main benefits that they are going to receive through their participation to the collaborative marketing initiative (Ashley et al., 2011).

Indeed, one of the main reasons that lead customers to join collaborative marketing experiences refers to the customers' possibility to receive benefits, special treatments and remunerations (Ashley et al., 2011).

Thus, through the participation to a collaborative marketing campaign, consumers usually get different types of prizes and returns from the firm. More specifically, Gwinner et al. (1998), suggest that there are three distinct kinds of relationship and collaborative marketing benefits. First, customers may receive special treatment benefits from continued relations with a brand, such as economic or customization benefits. Second, clients may get social benefits, which refer to the human bonds that can be created between the service provider and his clients. Finally, confidence benefits are those that decrease anxiety levels connected with a service offering: they intensify trust toward the firm and enhance customers' familiarity with the brand (Gwinner et al., 1998).

Therefore, within the collaborative marketing context, it is possible to state that consumer-brand interactions are characterized by "*benefits that customers receive from long-term relationships above and beyond the core service performance*" (Kinard & Capella, 2006, p. 361). Thus, collaborative marketing benefits are both material and immaterial; for instance, material benefits refer to discounts, special offers or the possibility to try innovative products before the official launch on the market; differently, immaterial benefits refer to the customers' possibility of co-creating products, expressing opinions, giving feedbacks and becoming ambassadors and testimonials of their preferred brands (De Filippo & Lonati, 2016). Accordingly, especially for immaterial benefits, it is essential that companies strive to clearly communicate to customers even before the beginning of the campaign which are the main benefits that they are going to receive, otherwise their willingness to participate to the promotion will be lower (Ashley et al, 2011). Indeed, academic literature show that customers' capability to recognize in advance which are the main benefits of a campaign and the satisfaction of these benefits can help companies to create new collaborations with customers and to safeguard existing relationships (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). Based on this line of reasoning, I argue that the more a consumer is able to identify which are the benefits he/she will receive from participating to a collaborative marketing campaign, promoted by a particular brand, the more he/she will be likely to join this marketing program.

H1: The more a consumer is able to identify the main benefits of a collaborative marketing campaign before its beginning, the more he/she will be willing to participate in the collaborative marketing campaign

3.2.2 Inconvenience

One of the main determinants of the success of a collaborative marketing campaign resides in the possibility of easily subscribing to the promotion, which refers to the idea that if consumers think that the marketing program is easy to access, they will probably be more willing to join it (Smith and Sparks, 2009). According to Ashley et al. (2011), inconvenience is useful to measure how much a collaborative marketing campaign is perceived as accessible and easily manageable. Indeed, inconvenience is an indicator of the accessibility of a marketing initiative: the less a campaign is easy-to-access, the more it will be perceived as inconvenient (Ashley et al., 2011). Relatedly, according to Noble and Phillips (2004), relationships between consumers and retailers involve efforts on both parts; therefore, customers are used to compare costs associated with the campaign and future benefits in order to decide if the participation to the initiative is convenient or not. If costs associated with the participation to the campaign are too high, participants' impressions about the initiative will be negatively influenced, the campaign will be considered inconvenient and their willingness to collaborate will be lower (Goodwin & Ross, 1992). According to these

considerations, companies should reduce customers' efforts and time costs needed to create and to maintain a collaborative relationship over time, aiming to enhance customers' willingness to collaborate.

According to what has been previously stated, I argue that the more a consumer perceive that engaging into a collaborative marketing campaign is inconvenient the less he/she will be likely to join it. Formally,

H2: The more a consumer perceives that his/her participation to a collaborative marketing campaign requires high efforts on his/her part, the less he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign

3.2.3 Involvement

Involvement is considered as *"a motivating variable with a number of consequences on the consumer's purchase and communication behavior"* (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985, p. 42). Accordingly, the level of involvement has a great influence on the customers' purchase decision processes and on their willingness to communicate and to collaborate with a brand (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Indeed, highly involved consumers are usually more likely to show higher levels of interest toward companies' marketing efforts and they are usually more willing to engage in long-lasting collaborative marketing programs with their beloved brands to receive informs, rewards and any kind of special treatments (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984). More specifically, customers are usually involved with a specific firm not just because of the material items produced by that company, but because of the values promoted by that brand; it means that clients usually show higher levels of involvement toward companies that aim at developing emotional bonds with customers through the promotion of collaborative marketing initiatives (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Accordingly, it is possible to affirm that emotionally involved customers are more likely to perceive greater benefits from their participation to a collaborative marketing campaign; thus, they are usually more disposed to collaborate with brands with the aim of satisfying personal and inner desires (Ashley et al., 2011).

Therefore, I predict that highly involved consumers will be more willing to participate into a collaborative marketing campaign. Formally,

H3: The more a consumer is involved with the brand, the more he/she will be willing to participate in the collaborative marketing campaign

3.2.4 Brand Love

Brand love is defined as "*the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name*" (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). Accordingly, "*brand love includes passion for the brand, attachment to the brand, positive evaluation of the brand, positive emotions in response to the brand, and declarations of love for the brand*" (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). Thus, given that beloved brands are considered irreplaceable and unique by consumers (Albert & Merunka, 2013), it is possible to consider that brand love usually conduct to the development of positive customers' impressions about the brand and to a strong disposition to preserve long-lasting relationships and collaborations with firms (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006).

Moreover, analyzing the collaborative marketing context, it is also important to focus on more emotional aspects of brand love. Indeed, consumers' love feelings toward a brand are usually caused by the customers' willingness to relate with it and its products not just with the aim of experiencing its functional benefits, but especially for its symbolic values and beliefs (Albert & Merunka, 2013). According to this point of view, it is possible to affirm that customers usually develop brand love feelings toward those brands that are able to create strong emotional connections with clients based on the sharing of some common values and principles (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). Thus, it is important to evidence that brand love is so much more than simple esteem toward a brand; indeed, it expresses the "*customers' moral obligation to maintain the relationship with a brand even in the face of a much better alternative*" (Batra et al., 2012, p. 6) and it is about the customers' intention to be committed to a company for long-term (Batra et al., 2012).

More specifically, brand love is likely to lead consumers to engage into active and long-lasting collaborations with a brand, rather than one-shot contacts or passive connections (Batra et al., 2012). Thus, according to what has been said so far, I predict that the more a consumer feels love toward a brand that is asking his/her participation in a collaborative marketing campaign, the more the consumer is likely to respond positively.

H4: The more a consumer has a brand love feeling toward a company, the more he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign

3.2.5 Brand Trust

Brand trust is defined as "*the confident expectations of the brand's reliability and intentions*" (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005, p. 188). Theoretically, brand trust grows over long time periods, since its development is described as a knowledge expansion process that requires long time to be completed (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). More specifically, Delgado-

Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán (2005), suggest that brand trust is a long-term oriented item that leads to the creation of durable and enduring relationships and collaborations between customers and firms. Moreover, the development of brand trust is connected with the brands' ownership of features that go beyond the simple consideration of the brand as a mere products' manufacturer, such as brands' capacity to satisfy inner customers' needs (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001).

Analyzing the main benefits of brand trust, it is essential to consider that building a strong brand characterized by great brand trust levels "*is the goal of many organizations because it provides a host of benefits to a firm, including greater co-operation*" between clients and firms (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005, p. 188). Accordingly, focusing on the relationship and collaborative marketing context, Larzelere & Huston (1980) sustain that trust should be seen as a key-driver of every long-lasting relationship or collaboration. Indeed, when brand trust is high, customers are more likely to develop collaborations or long-lasting relationships with that brand (Hess, 1995). Moreover, the development of brand trust is connected with the brands' ownership of features that go beyond the simple consideration of the brand as a mere products' manufacturer, such as brands' capacity to satisfy inner customers' needs (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001). Thus, if managers need to develop long-term oriented marketing activities, they should complement their marketing campaigns with actions aimed at building brand trust, since enhancing brand trust is one of the main key-points to develop enduring partnerships with customers, stimulating their willingness to collaborate (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001).

According to what has been previously stated, I propose that the more a consumer trust a brand the more he/she will be likely to cooperate with it, thus for instance he/she would be more prone to engage into a collaborative marketing campaign promoted by the brand. Formally,

H5: The more a consumer trusts a brand, the more he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign

3.2.6 Privacy concerns

Privacy is a term that indicates the right to preserve personal information about an individual's body, behavior, personal communication and data. (Luo, 2002). Analyzing the collaborative marketing context, it is important to notice that many people hesitate to engage into relationship or collaborative marketing prográms because of personal worries related to the protection of their privacy and of their personal data (Luo, 2002). Indeed, according to Ashley et al. (2011), one of the main costs affecting customers' willingness to engage into a relationship marketing campaign

is represented by the loss of privacy that consumers usually face when they decide to join this kind of marketing promotions. Indeed, unsolicited emails or communications can lead to a reduction of customers' willingness to participate to relationship marketing campaigns (Ashley et al., 2011). Similarly, according to Lohse et al. (2000), worries about privacy are among the most significant reasons that lead to the decrease of customers' willingness to join collaborative or relational marketing promotions (Lohse et al., 2000). Indeed, marketing promotions based on the development of long-lasting collaborations between customers and firm usually implicate problems strictly linked to customers' willingness to protect their privacy. For instance, within the collaborative marketing context, *"invasion of privacy is commonly interpreted as the unauthorized collection, disclosure, or other use of personal information such as selling it to other e-marketers"* (Luo, 2002, p. 112). More specifically, consumer information gathered during customers' participations to collaborative marketing campaigns could be easily sold by firms to other companies' marketers with the purpose of sending unsolicited emails or communications to unaware consumers (Luo, 2002). Moreover, customers' privacy concerns are also related to the wide variation of privacy policies among different companies; indeed, according to Luo (2002), privacy regulations are often unclear, inadequate and unreliable: it is a problem that could negatively impact customers' willingness to engage into collaborative marketing campaigns (Luo, 2002)

More specifically, customers' tendency of being worried about a possible invasion of their privacy may vary according to different consumers' personal traits. Indeed, according to Luo (2002), *"some people will use the Internet to read news, look for job opportunities, and compare ticket prices"* while many other people will not provide their personal data online *"basically because of a shortage of trust and high privacy concerns"* (Luo, 2002, p. 111).

Thus, considering that customers' participation to collaborative marketing campaigns imply the customers' disposition to provide companies with personal information such as habits, preferences and individual attitudes (Kotler et al., 2010), I suppose that customers' privacy concerns could represent a problem for the development of winning collaborative marketing strategies. Building on this line of reasoning, I predict that the more a consumer is concerned protecting his/her personal data the more he/she will be less likely to take part to a collaborative marketing campaign.

H6: The more a consumer is concerned with protecting his/her privacy, the less he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign

Chapter 4. Empirical model

4.1 Research Methodology

In the context of relationship and collaborative marketing prior authors have used either qualitative, quantitative or experimental approaches for studying the causes and consequences of these marketing techniques (Neuman, 2013). In order to investigate which are the factors that determine consumers' willingness to participate to collaborative marketing campaigns I decided to undertake a quantitative approach. Indeed, the necessity of my work is to test a series of research hypotheses that postulate either positive or negative relationships between either situational factors or consumers' characteristics and customers' behaviors within the collaborative marketing context.

In order to reach these goals, an online survey has been produced through the website Qualtrics and then was distributed online to a pool of both Italian and non-Italian customers to gather useful information. Responses have been collected for one week for a total number of 296 answers. Anyway, after the data cleaning process, 184 out of 296 observations have been used for the final statistical analysis.

Then, aiming at identifying what drives customers' willingness to collaborate with companies, a multiple linear regression has been used. More specifically, regression technique is an analysis that is useful to identify causality relationships between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. More specifically, "multiple regression" is referred to the case in which more than one independent variable is employed (Janssens et al., 2008).

4.1.1 Survey Design

An online survey has been used in my research to obtain answers from participants and to discover which factors, both consumer and company related, affect individuals' willingness to participate to collaborative marketing campaigns. Specifically, the data for the analysis have been gathered through an online questionnaire developed by means of Qualtrics and it was distributed using different online tools such as social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and through direct contacts with respondents. The survey was both in English and in Italian, in order to enable an international base of people to participate and, at the same time, empowering also an Italian sample to respond. The questionnaire was composed by thirty-nine questions (demands about age, nationality and gender included), accordingly to the needs of the study, as described following.

First, I presented the main topic of the study and provided instructions to participants on how the survey was composed. Following, I asked demographic questions including gender, age and

nationality. Afterwards, the main part of the survey started. Indeed, each respondent has been asked to think about a specific brand in the food & beverage category that he/she patronizes. Importantly, participants were asked to think that this brand was trying to involve them in a novel collaborative marketing campaign. In order to ensure that every participant understand what it means collaborative marketing, during the introduction I provided an example of a collaborative marketing campaign promoted by a fictitious food brand, highlighting both the benefits and negative aspects of joining this kind of campaigns. Specifically, the example was about "Neko Sushi", a fictitious sushi company intentioned at involving customers into a collaborative marketing campaign. To participate into this fictitious collaborative marketing initiative, customers should have subscribed to the campaign, giving their personal data and telling the firm if they have ever tried a Neko Sushi's product before. After the subscription, customers would have received a Neko Sushi's product sample for free, in order to test the product, give feedbacks to the company and promote the brand. Finally, variables of interest were studied using measures adapted from past academic researches.

4.1.2 Measurement Development

Regarding the main constructs, all variables were measured using 1 to 7 Likert scales. More specifically, "anticipated benefits" was measured by asking participant to indicate on a 7 point Likert scale (1 strongly agree, 7 strongly disagree) the extent to which they agree with three statements related to the extent to which participants recognize that they could gain benefits from participating to a collaborative marketing campaign promoted by the brand they were thinking about. The items were adapted from Ashley et al. (2011).

The second variable, inconvenience, was measured with a two-item scale adapted from Ashley et al. (2011), aimed at evaluating to which extent respondents perceived that costs of participating to a collaborative marketing campaign were higher than the connected benefits. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate on a 7 points Likert scale (1 strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree) the extent to which they agreed with the solicited questions.

Then, three items were used for measuring respondents' involvement with the brand they were thinking about. Hence, involvement was measured through a 7 points likert scale (1 strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree) adapted from Ashley et al. (2011).

For measuring "Brand love", thus the extent to which customers have love feeling toward the brand they were thinking about during the survey, I adapted Barbara A. Carroll & Aaron C. Ahuvia (2006) ten item scale. Also, this variable was measured through a 7 points Likert scale where participants were asked to rate from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree") the extent to which they agreed with the asked questions.

Similarly, brand trust was operationalized by asking participants to indicate on a six item 7 points Likert scale (1 strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree) the extent to which respondents trusted the brand they were thinking about. The items were adapted from Elena Delgado-Ballester & Jose Luis Munuera-Aleman (1999).

Finally, individuals' privacy concerns was measured with three questions aimed at understanding to which extent customers are generally worried about providing their personal data. This variable has been measured through a 7 points Likert scale and the respondents have been asked to rate from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree") the extent to which they agreed with the asked questions. The items were adapted from Ashley et al. (2011). Focusing on the main dependent variable, customers' willingness to participate to collaborative marketing campaigns, it was measured through four questions adapted from Lazarus et al. (2015). Hence participants were asked to indicate on a 7 points Likert scale (1 Totally not, 7 Extremely) the degree to which they were likely to participate to a collaborative marketing campaign developed by the brand they mentioned during the survey. Moreover, customers' satisfaction, has been employed in my research as a control variable. It has been composed by four questions aimed at understanding the level of satisfaction that respondents have with the brand they were thinking about. The items were adapted by Ashley et al. (2011). A more detailed table about constructs will follow:

Variable/Construct	Source	Items	Items (Italian)
Anticipated Benefits	Adapted from Ashley et al. (2011)	- It would be beneficial for me to be committed to a collaborative marketing campaign developed by this brand/company - The benefits offered from engaging in a collaborative marketing campaign developed by this brand/company would not be enticing (reverse code) - I would gain valuable benefits from participating to a collaborative marketing campaign developed by this brand/company	- Mi creerebbe beneficio impegnarmi in una campagna di marketing collaborativo con questa marca/azienda - I benefici offerti dal partecipare ad una campagna di marketing collaborativo con questa marca/azienda non sarebbero allettanti (item inverso) - Riceverei benefici di valore dalla partecipazione ad una campagna di marketing collaborativo sviluppata da questa marca/azienda
Inconvenience	Adapted from Ashley et al. (2011)	- Keep on participating to a collaborative marketing campaign with this brand/company would be time consuming - Initiating a collaborative marketing campaign with this brand/company would be time consuming	- Mantenere la partecipazione ad una campagna di marketing collaborativo con questa marca/azienda richiederebbe molto tempo - Iniziare una campagna di marketing collaborativo con questa marca/azienda richiederebbe molto tempo
Involvement	Adapted from Ashley et al. (2011)	- I closely keep track of the services provided by the brand/company I am thinking about - I participate in many of the services offered by the brand/company I am thinking about - I have everything under control regarding the collaborations promoted by the brand/company I am thinking about	- Tengo attentamente traccia dei servizi offerti dalla marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando - Partecipo in molti dei servizi offerti dalla marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando - Tengo sempre sotto controllo le attività di collaborazione proposte dalla marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando
Brand Love	Barbara A. Carroll & Aaron C. Ahuvia, 2006	- The brand/company I am thinking about is wonderful - The brand/company I am thinking about makes me feel good - The brand/company I am thinking about is totally awesome - I have neutral feelings about the brand/company I	- La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando è meravigliosa - La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando mi fa stare bene - La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando è fantastica

		am thinking about (reverse code) - The brand/company I am thinking about makes me very happy - I love the brand/company I am thinking about! - I have no particular feelings about the brand/company I am thinking about (reverse code) - The brand/company I am thinking about is a pure delight - I am passionate about the brand/company I am thinking about - I am very attached to the brand/company I am thinking about	- Ho sentimenti neutri nei confronti della marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando (item inverso) - La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando mi rende veramente felice - Amo la marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando - Non ho particolari sentimenti nei confronti della marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando - La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando è una vera delizia - Sono appassionato della marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando - Sono davvero affezionato alla marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando
Brand Trust	Adapted from Elena Delgado-Ballester & Jose Luis Munuera-Aleman, 1999	- The brand/company I am thinking about offers me a product with a constant quality level - The brand/company I am thinking about helps me to solve any problem I could have with its products - The brand/company I am thinking about offers me new products I may need - The brand/company I am thinking about is interested in my satisfaction - The brand/company I am thinking about values me as a consumer of its product - The brand/company I am thinking about offers me recommendations and advices on how to make the most of its product	- La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando mi offre un prodotto di costante qualità - La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando mi aiuta a risolvere qualsiasi problema io possa avere con il prodotto - La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando mi offre nuovi prodotti che mi potrebbero servire - La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando è interessata a soddisfarmi - La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando mi valorizza come consumatore del suo prodotto - La marca/azienda alla quale sto pensando mi dà consigli su come ottenere il massimo dal suo prodotto

Privacy concerns	Adapted from Ashley et al. (2011)	- I dislike giving out my personal information to any brand/company - I am fearful about giving out my personal information to any brand/company - I get annoyed when a brand/company sends me unsolicited e-mails	- Non mi piace dare le mie informazioni personali a qualsiasi marca/azienda - Ho paura di dare le mie informazioni personali a qualsiasi marca/azienda - Mi infastidisce quando qualsiasi marca/azienda mi invia e-mail non richieste
Willingness to participate to collaborative marketing campaigns	Adapted from Lazarus et al. (2014)	How likely are you to: - collaborate with this brand/company for enhancing your overall experience - collaborate with this brand/company for enjoyment and entertainment - collaborate with this brand/company to develop yourself. - collaborate with this brand/company to get rewards	Quanto sei disposto a: - collaborare con questa marca/azienda per piacere personale e intrattenimento - collaborare con questa marca/azienda per una crescita personale - collaborare con questa marca/azienda per ottenere premi - collaborare con questa marca/azienda per migliorare la mia esperienza generale

Table 1. Measures

4.1.3 Sample

Theoretically, studies that aim at investigating about consumers' attitudes and preferences, should collect data from the whole population of interest. But, considered issues such as limited resources and time, the most common solution in these circumstances consists in the sampling method. Decisions about the sample involve different choices. First, it is important to reflect about the sample size. Usually, for conclusive research, such as this study, numerous samples are required. Accordingly, for my research I have decided to take into consideration a minimum number of 150 respondents. Moreover, it is important to take into consideration the replacement, that refers to the option of including an element twice within the sample; in this case, replacement has not been permitted. Furthermore, it is possible to focus on probability and non-probability sample. For this study, a probability sample have been used; indeed, with probability samples, sampling units are selected by chance and people have the same possibilities to be selected as part of the sample (Malhotra et al., 2012). In this way, bias related to the selection process are removed. Moreover, aiming at ensuring the perfect consistency of my research, some of the observations have not been used for the final analysis. In particular, respondents who did not fully complete the questionnaire

were excluded, as well as those who selected carelessly answers (i.e., provided always the same neutral or extreme values) and as those who indicated the name of a fictitious brands, uncomplete brands' names or companies such as Nike, Puma, Adidas or Apple that are not related to the food market.

4.2 Results

This part of my work will be focused on the central concepts examined in this analysis and will deliver the main outcomes resulting from the analyses conducted for testing my research hypotheses.

I obtained a total number of 296 respondents; after the data cleaning process, 184 observations were available for the analysis.

Out of a definitive number of 184 participants, 115 were male and 69 females, representing the 62,5 % and 37,5 % respectively. Nationality have also been asked to respondents; 32,6% of the participants were Italian; following, 31,5% of respondents were American. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 81 with a mean of 28.76 years old and a standard deviation of 8.83.

4.2.1 Reliability checks

Before conducting the main analyses aimed at testing my research hypotheses, I checked the reliability of the scales used for measuring my main constructs relying on Cronbach's Alpha and Correlation analysis.

Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of the internal reliability of a study. It is employed to provide an extent to which the elements of a research are aimed at measuring the same hypothesis (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). More specifically, the Cronbach's Alpha fluctuates from 0 to 1; in order to denote a satisfactory internal reliability, the coefficient should be higher than 0.6 (Malhotra et al., 2012). In my research, a Cronbach's Alpha analysis has been employed to check for the consistency of the multi-items scales (the ones composed by more than two items). Thus, Cronbach's Alpha has been used to check for the reliability of Anticipated Benefits, Involvement, Brand Love, Brand Trust, Privacy Concerns and Willingness to Participate.

In particular, focusing on the item "Anticipated Benefits", it has been initially studied as constituted by three items adapted from Ashley et al., 2011. Among these three items, one was reversed; including the reversed item within my analysis, the variable "anticipated benefits" showed a Cronbach's alpha lower than 0,6; thus, it was not reliable. On the contrary, dropping from the analysis the reversed item, the independent variable "anticipated benefits" became reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0,8219.

Thus, aiming at employing anticipated benefits within my analysis, the reversed item has not been considered for final evaluations and anticipated benefits has been calculated using the average values of the retained items.

In the following graph, results related to the Cronbach's Alpha analysis are shown.

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Anticipated Benefits	0.8219	2
Involvement	0.8755	3
Brand Love	0.8962	10
Brand Trust	0.8569	6
Privacy Concerns	0.8479	3
Customers' WTP into collaborative marketing campaigns	0.9047	5
Satisfaction	0.8911	4

Table2. Cronbach's Alpha

Thus, according to the graph it is possible to consider that all the scales are reliable since all of them show a Cronbach's alpha higher than 0.6.

Moreover, a correlation analysis has been also employed in my study. Correlation analysis is a numerical technique used to assess the intensity of a relationship between two elements. Accordingly, in my study, a correlation analysis has been used to check for the validity of inconvenience, that was composed by two items. This correlation analysis shows a p-value of 0.000; thus, it is significant, since the p-value is lower than 0.001 ($p < .001$). Moreover, the independent variable inconvenience shows a good correlation coefficient. Indeed, correlation analysis is based on values that fluctuate from -1 to +1: the more the coefficients are close to zero, the more the items of a variable are considered as not correlated. In this case, with a coefficient of 0.6544 ($r=.6544$), the items of the variable "inconvenience" are well correlated, so the variable is reliable.

4.2.2 Hypotheses testing

After having discussed about the reliability of the variables, is now central to proceed with a "multiple linear regression".

This kind of regression aims at evaluating the relationship between two or more independent variables and one dependent variable.

The formula that shows how multiple linear regression works is:

$$Y = \alpha\ \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 \ldots + \beta_n x_n + \varepsilon$$

Y represents the dependent variable; α, also indicated as β_0, is the intercept and it denotes the value of y if the xi (independent variables) are all equal to 0; the coefficient β_n represents the change in the dependent variable for each unit increase or decrease of the independent associated to that beta if the independent variable is significantly causally related with the dependent variable (i.e., p value $< .05$); ε is the residual or error, so the difference between observed and predicted values (Malhotra et al., 2012).

Within this study, a multiple regression analysis has been employed to test the association between the independent variables (anticipated benefits, inconvenience, involvement, brand love, brand trust and privacy concerns) and the dependent variable (customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns).

The overall model showed a good fit. The F-test has a value of 38.78 and the model can be considered significant according to P-value of 0.000, with a 95% confidence level.

Indeed, it is possible to reject the null hypothesis according to which all regression coefficients are equal to 0 (b1=0), while affirming that at least one regression coefficient is not equal to 0.

Similarly, the Adjusted R2 score shows that 55,33% of the variability of customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns is explicated by the explanatory variables anticipated benefits, inconvenience, involvement, brand love, brand trust and privacy concerns.

After having checked that the overall model fits, it is possible to present the main findings of the study.

According to the multiple linear regression's results, it is possible to argue that only anticipated benefits, brand trust and brand love are significant predictors of consumers' willingness to engage into collaborative marketing campaigns.

Specifically, main results show that anticipated benefits positively predict consumers' willingness to engage into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.333; t=5.02; p=.000). Indeed, this result lends support to H1.

Focusing on inconvenience, it does not predict consumers' willingness to engage into collaborative marketing campaign (β=-.015; t=-0.29; p=.772). Indeed, this result does not support H2.

Moreover, involvement does not predict consumers' willingness to engage into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.071; t=1.36; p=.174). Thus, this result does not support H3.

Focusing on brand love, it positively predicts consumers' willingness to engage into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.256; t=3.22; p=.002). Indeed, this result lends support to H4.

Furthermore, brand trust positively predicts consumers' willingness to engage into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.310; t=3.12; p=.002). Indeed, this result supports H5.

Then, privacy concerns do not predict consumers' willingness to engage into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.039; t=0.85; p=.399). Thus, this result does not lend support to H6.

Once the model is confirmed and reliable, coefficients can be interpreted. Thus, according to these results, it is possible to notice that customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns can be explained through Anticipated benefits, Brand trust and Brand love. Results and hypothesis tested are summarized in the following table (Table 3):

Hypothesis	Result	Verified
H1 (Anticipated benefits): The more a consumer is able to identify the main benefits of a collaborative marketing campaign before its beginning, the more he/she will be willing to participate in the collaborative marketing campaign	According to the p-value we reject H0. In particular, for every unit increase in Anticipated benefits, keeping the other variables constant, there is a 0.333 unit increase in customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns	Supported
H2 (Inconvenience): The more a consumer perceives that his/her participation to a collaborative marketing campaign requires high efforts on his/her part, the less he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign	According to the p-value we do not reject H0. P-value > .05	Not Supported
H3 (Involvement): The more a consumer is involved with the brand, the more he/she will be willing to participate in the collaborative marketing campaign	According to the p-value we do not reject H0. P-value > .05	Not supported
H4 (Brand Love): The more a consumer has a brand love feeling toward a company, the more he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign	According to the p-value we reject H0. In particular, for every unit increase in Brand Love there is a 0.256 unit increase in the customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns, keeping other variables constant	Supported
H5 (Brand Trust): The more a consumer trusts a brand, the more he/she will be	According to the p-value we reject H0.	Supported

willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign	In particular, for every unit increase in Brand Trust there is a 0.333 unit increase in the customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns, keeping other variables constant	
H6 (Privacy concerns): The more a consumer is concerned with protecting his/her privacy, the less he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign	According to the p-value we do not reject H0. P-value > .05	Not supported

Table3. Hypotheses

The conceptual framework results are here displayed; dashed arrows refer to not supported hypotheses.
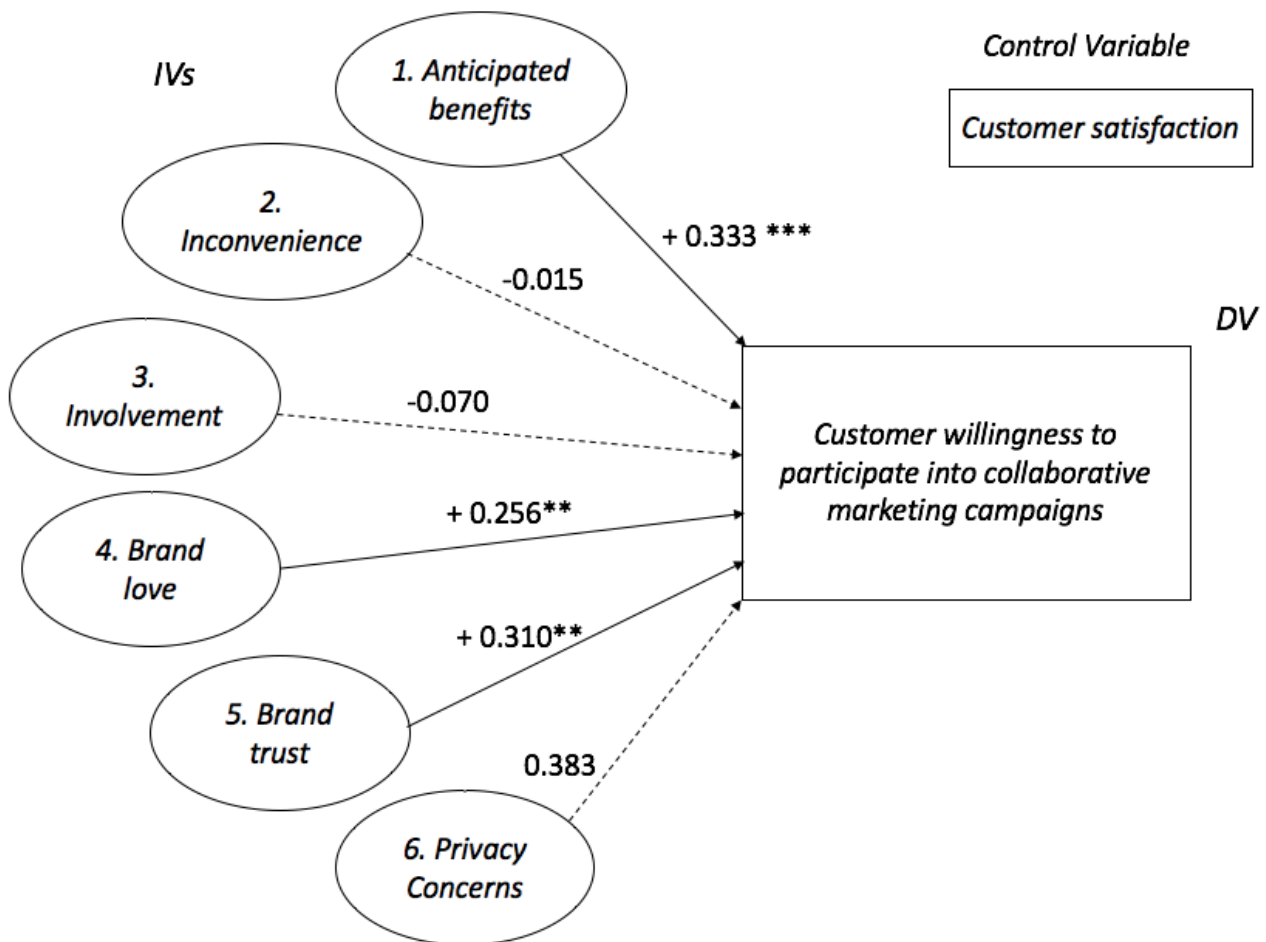
*** p<.001

** p<.01

Graph2. Model with results

Moreover, basing on a careful analysis of the previous literature, the study theorized also that customers' satisfaction toward a specific brand could enhance the effect of the independent

variables on customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns. Indeed, considering that practical examinations in this field suggest that a direct influence of customers' satisfaction on customers' disposition to collaborate with firms does not exist (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997), it has been impossible to include in my model customers' satisfaction as an independent variable. However, considering that customers' satisfaction is often considered as a main determinant of the success of relationship and collaborative marketing campaigns (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997), I decided to use customers' satisfaction as a control variable within my analysis.

Thus, to assess if customers' satisfaction could enhance the effect of anticipated benefits, involvement, inconvenience, brand trust, brand love and privacy concerns on customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns, another multiple was conducted using customers' satisfaction as a control variable.

The following results refer to the multiple regression conducted controlling for customers' satisfaction.

Anticipated benefits still positively predicts customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.329; t=4,96; p=.000).

Inconvenience does not predict customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaign (β=-.015; t=-0,29; p=.771).

Involvement does not predict customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.070; t=1,35; p=.180).

Focusing on brand love, it still positively predicts customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.237; t=2,93; p=.004).

Focusing on brand trust, it still positively predicts customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.293; t=2,92; p=.004).

Finally, privacy concerns do not predict customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaign (β=.383; t=0,83; p=.409).

Thus, these findings show that including customers' satisfaction, as a control variable within my model, does not generate any relevant consequences on the effects produced by my main independent variables on the dependent one. Indeed, the independent variables (anticipated benefits, brand love and brand trust) that have a significant effect on the dependent one (customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns) are the same of the case in which customers' satisfaction is not considered within the multiple regression analysis.

Finally, according to my findings it seems that satisfaction does not significantly predict customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns (β=.631; t=1,05; p=.296).

Chapter 5. Conclusions

5.1 Discussion and Conclusion

The present study proposed and tested a new conceptual model aimed at discovering which are the main factors that characterizes the collaborative marketing context. Indeed, considering that previous literature had not developed a clear model able to explain the main collaborative marketing features, the main purpose of my work has been to understand which are the principal drivers of customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns.

Earlier literature had mainly focused on relationship marketing, concentrating most of the efforts in discovering the main drivers of marketing techniques based on the development of relationships between customers and firms. Anyway, within the relationship marketing context, customers do not play an active role: relationships are mainly driven by firms, while customers are receptive and inactive.

More recently, marketers are focusing their efforts on the development of interactive collaborations between customers' and their preferred brands. Indeed, within the collaborative marketing framework, customers are the main protagonists of the companies' marketing strategies: they participate to the companies' marketing decisions, they co-create products and give feedbacks about new items and they promote the brands generating positive word-of-mouth effects.

Even if collaborative marketing offers new solutions to innovative marketers that aim at completely involving customers into their marketing campaigns, trying to unlock the hidden potentiality of clients, previous literature had weakly focused on this marketing technique.

Indeed, since collaborative marketing is gaining importance in recent years, only recently academic researchers are starting to concentrate on this marketing method, abandoning the obsolescent relationship marketing techniques in favour of the more innovative and dynamic collaborative marketing paradigms.

More specifically, an important gap in the literature has been found: none of the previous studies had addressed the problematic of which are the main features that characterize the collaborative marketing context and, in particular, what leads the customers' disposition to collaborate with firms. Thus, aiming at filling this gap, I developed a conceptual model composed by six different hypotheses aimed at discovering which are the main drivers of the customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns.

Among all the variables, anticipated benefits, brand love and brand trust show a p-value lower than 0.05, thus they have a significant effect on the dependent variable. Focusing on anticipated benefits, one of the main reasons according to which customers are willing to collaborate with firms resides in the consumers' capability of understanding, before the beginning of the campaign, which

benefits they would receive helping companies in developing their marketing campaigns and promoting the brand within their networks of contacts. Thus, it is important that both physical and emotional benefits related to the customers' participation to a collaborative marketing campaign are clearly exposed before the beginning of the marketing promotion. Indeed, if customers are convinced that they will receive valuable benefits from their participation to a collaborative marketing campaign, they will be more willing to collaborate with that firm.

Then, my findings support the idea that also brand trust and brand love positively affect customers' willingness to engage in a collaborative marketing campaign. Indeed, it is possible to argue that customers' willingness to engage in a collaborative marketing campaign is strongly influenced by brand-related factors, such as the customers' reliance on a specific brand and the customers' degree of passionate attachment toward a company.

Focusing on brand love, it is important to consider that one of the main reasons that lead customers to collaborate with firms over long-time periods is related to the customers' desire of being part of the marketing decisions of their beloved brands (Barbara A. Carroll & Aaron C. Ahuvia, 2006). Indeed, when customers have strong love feelings toward a specific brand, they are more willing to participate into a collaborative marketing campaign developed by that company.

Moreover, focusing on brand trust, it is important to consider that, when deciding if to participate to a collaborative marketing initiative developed by a specific company, customers need to completely trust that brand. Indeed, considering that collaborative marketing implies long-term relationships and associations, customers have the necessity of effectively relying on the chosen brand in order to start collaborations that will last over years and that will require dynamic actions such as promoting the brand, giving feedbacks to the company or trying innovative products. Then, it is important to bear in mind that customers want to be sure about the benefits (both emotional or physical) that they would receive participating to a collaborative marketing initiative. Accordingly, my findings show that brand trust plays a fundamental role in ensuring to customers that the collaborative marketing benefits would be as valuable as expected.

Unfortunately, findings of my multiple linear regression do not support all my research hypotheses. Indeed, according to my results, inconvenience, involvement and privacy concerns do not affect customers' willingness to participate in collaborative marketing campaigns. Thus, taking into consideration these results and basing on prior academic researches, it is possible to find out some reasons why these independent variables are not supported within my model.

First, according to my study, the variable inconvenience is not significant. As suggested by Barbara A. Carroll & Aaron C. Ahuvia (2006), it could be because customers (within the collaborative marketing context) do not care about the degree of accessibility of a collaborative marketing initiative, since perceived benefits (both physical and immaterial) related to the customers' participation to a collaborative marketing campaign are usually higher than associated costs.

Then, it is also possible to consider that privacy concerns have no effects on the customers' willingness to collaborate with firms because of the low relevance that customers impute to the loss of privacy that they generally face when they choose to participate into long-lasting relationships with brands. According to Elena Delgado-Ballester & Jose Luis Munuera-Aleman (1999), it could be the direct consequence of the high level of trust toward the brands that customers choose to collaborate with. Indeed, once customers start to trust a particular brand, they stop to care about problems eventually related to possible invasions of their privacy (Elena Delgado-Ballester & Jose Luis Munuera-Aleman, 1999).

Finally, it is important to consider the role of involvement. As suggested by Ashley et al. (2011), involvement could be considered as a relevant driver within the relationship marketing context, since it is an expression of the customers' disposition to receive communications from firms and to be passively involved into companies' loyalty programs obtaining firms' loyalty cards. Differently, given that collaborative marketing is about active collaborations between clients and firms aimed at letting customers actively co-create products and value with firms (Lazarus et al., 2014), it seems that, within the collaborative marketing framework, there are no linear relations between customers' level of involvement and customers' willingness to collaborate with firms.

Overall, the present work provides interesting results for the literature of collaborative marketing, since it sheds light on some variables that can positively affect customers' willingness to participate into brand collaborative marketing campaigns, thus determining the success of a collaborative marketing campaign.

5.2 Theoretical contributions and managerial implications

As previously stated, collaborative marketing is a new marketing technique that need more attention and deeper studies. Indeed, after a careful literature review, it is possible to consider that previous academic researchers have mainly focused on the relationship marketing approach, leaving out the collaborative marketing context. Anyway, even if many similarities with relationship marketing exist, collaborative marketing is a new marketing paradigm that offer a lot of innovative and disruptive marketing choices for pioneering and original companies. Given the importance of this topic, my work has been aimed at shifting the focus from relationship to collaborative marketing, developing a model able to explain what drives customers' intention to collaborate with firms. Thus, the most significant scientific result of my work has been the conceptualization of a new theoretical model that, according to a meticulous literature review, sheds light on those factors that determine customers' likelihood to take part to a collaborative marketing campaign. In particular, my work has shown that, within the collaborative marketing context, great significance is given to the consumer-brand relationships and to the companies'

capability of offering great benefits to consumers. Indeed, since the main variables that positively affect customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns are represented by anticipated benefits, brand love and brand trust, it is important to notice how important are consumer-brand relationships for collaborative marketing campaigns' success. Indeed, brand love and brand trust directly refer to the reliability and to the feeling of affection that characterize long-term relations between customers and firms. Similarly, anticipated benefits refer to the main welfares offered by companies to customers and to the clients' capability of easily recognizing those benefits. In both cases, great importance is given to the value of the relationships established between a brand and its consumers. Moreover, the results of the present study also offer significant managerial implications for marketers. First, the importance of factors concerning the relationship between customers and brands such as brand love and brand trust have been confirmed. Thus, marketers need to pay attention to the creation of strong brand identities aimed at inspiring love and trust feeling into customers' minds before trying to involve them in collaborative marketing campaigns. Indeed, these elements, if managed well, will increase the customers' disposition to collaborate with companies and will help firms in developing stable relationships with involved customers.

Furthermore, companies must clearly expose to customers (before the beginning of a collaborative marketing campaign) which benefits are related to their decision to collaborate with firms; otherwise, the risk would be that customers would not be willing to participate to a collaborative marketing program because they would fail to recognize which would be the main paybacks (both emotional and physical) that they would receive participating into a collaborative marketing campaign.

5.3 Limitations & Future Researches

Even if these discoveries provide many remarkable understandings about customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing initiatives, my model is affected by some weaknesses; thus, some limitations should be exposed.

The main drawbacks of the current work are linked to the selected analysis techniques, since the survey approach include some limitations connected to the data gathering method and to the chosen sample. Indeed, the survey method in this study required respondents to imagine that a specific food company that they patronize was trying to involve them into a collaborative marketing program. Even if within the survey it has been explained to customers what is collaborative marketing about, it could be possible that some respondents had not fully understood which are the main characteristics of collaborative marketing; so, this could have caused some biases in the customers' perceptions related to the topic of interest.

In addition, the data collection process lasted less than one week and comprised a limited number of respondents; moreover, because of the sampling technique, the random sampling error can also happen. Thus, according to these motivations, it is not possible to be completely sure of the full representativeness of the sample used in this research.

Thus, considering the main limitations of my study, future researches should be focused on different traits.

First, it would be useful to repeat similar analysis when customers will be more aware of what is collaborative marketing about; in this way, biases related to the newness and originality of this marketing techniques would be avoided. Then, it would be useful to replicate analogous studies focusing on specific brands' consumers or expanding the sample through the collection of a higher and more demonstrative number of responses. In this way, it would be possible to ensure the full representativeness of the sample. Moreover, it could be interesting to extend this study to other business categories. Indeed, my work has been exclusively focused on food brands but it would be interest to apply the same research model to other industries. Indeed, it could also happen that variables such as privacy concerns, that are not relevant within the food brand categories, could become significant within other contexts. Finally, future researches should try to expand my model with other dependent and independent variables, trying to deepen collaborative marketing knowledge and identifying more numerous and significant drivers of the customers' willingness to collaborate with firms.

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Appendix

Stata analysis

. alpha AnticipatedBenefits_1 AnticipatedBenefits_3, asis casewise detail generate(Anticipated_Benefits_) item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

```
Average interitem covariance:     1.444048
Number of items in the scale:            2
Scale reliability coefficient:      0.8219
```

. alpha AnticipatedBenefits_1 AnticipatedBenefits_2 AnticipatedBenefits_3, casewise detail generate(Anticipated_Benefits_) :
> s_2)

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

Item	Obs	Sign	item-test correlation	item-rest correlation	average interitem covariance	alpha
Anticipate~1	184	+	0.7978	0.5282	.3085056	0.2115
Anticipate~2	184	-	0.6373	0.1488	1.444048	0.8219
Anticipate~3	184	+	0.7810	0.4973	.3910668	0.2608
Test scale					.7145403	0.5557

. pwcorr Inconvenience_1 Inconvenience_2, sig

	Inconv~1	Inconv~2
Inconvenie~1	1.0000	
Inconvenie~2	0.6544	1.0000
	0.0000	

. regress WTPmod Anticipated_Benefits PrivacyConcerns Brandtrust BrandLove Involvement Inconvenience, beta

Source	SS	df	MS			
Model	182.616506	6	30.4360844			
Residual	138.91848	177	.78485017			
Total	321.534986	183	1.75702178			

```
Number of obs =     184
F(6, 177)     =   38.78
Prob > F      =  0.0000
R-squared     =  0.5680
Adj R-squared =  0.5533
Root MSE      =  .88592
```

WTPmod	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	Beta
Anticipated_Benefits	.3334241	.0663712	5.02	0.000	.3334165
PrivacyConcerns	.0390969	.0462502	0.85	0.399	.0461087
Brandtrust	.3100935	.0993165	3.12	0.002	.2639492
BrandLove	.2560442	.0794319	3.22	0.002	.2194865
Involvement	.0713299	.0522932	1.36	0.174	.0864556
Inconvenience	-.0157548	.0542874	-0.29	0.772	-.0158985
_cons	.5165269	.4165782	1.24	0.217	.

```
. regress WTPmod satisfaction Anticipated_Benefits PrivacyConcerns Brandtrust BrandLove Involvement Inconvenience, beta
```

Source	SS	df	MS
Model	183.479257	7	26.2113225
Residual	138.055729	176	.784407552
Total	321.534986	183	1.75702178

Number of obs	=	184
F(7, 176)	=	33.42
Prob > F	=	0.0000
R-squared	=	0.5706
Adj R-squared	=	0.5536
Root MSE	=	.88567

WTPmod	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	Beta
satisfaction	.0631533	.0602177	1.05	0.296	.0601555
Anticipated_Benefits	.3293445	.0664664	4.96	0.000	.329337
PrivacyConcerns	.0383004	.0462434	0.83	0.409	.0451693
Brandtrust	.2932479	.1005794	2.92	0.004	.2496104
BrandLove	.237963	.0812596	2.93	0.004	.203987
Involvement	.0704326	.0522855	1.35	0.180	.0853679
Inconvenience	-.0158085	.0542721	-0.29	0.771	-.0159527
_cons	.3448432	.4474799	0.77	0.442	.

Survey

Hi!

Thank you very much for taking part to this survey!
I am collecting some information on collaborative marketing, as it is the topic of my master thesis in Marketing Analytics and Metrics.

I am going to give you some guideline and then I will ask you to answer to some brief questions. Please, remember there are not wrong or right answers, I am just interested in your personal opinion.

The answers are collected in a completely anonymous way!

Thank you for your help!

Are you male or female?

○ Male

○ Female

How old are you?

Please, enter in the space below your Nationality

Before to start the questionnaire, I would like to ask you to think about a food brand/company that you regularly buy.

Please, write the brand/company's name in the space below (your answer will not be used for promotional purposes)

You must imagine that this brand/company is trying to develop collaborations with you, trying to involve you into a **collaborative marketing strategy.**

In the following page, I will show you a case of **collaborative marketing campaign promoted by a company named "Neko Sushi".**

"If you decide to join a collaborative marketing campaign you will be aware of the coolest innovations and you will have the possibility to influence brands' marketing initiatives with your own opinion!

People who decide to join the recent collaborative marketing campaign developed by Neko Sushi will just have to:

- **Subscribe** to the project and tell us if they have already tried Neko Sushi's products before

- **Give us their personal data** to complete the **subscription** to the project and to **receive a sample of Neko Sushi for free**

- **Product test** a free sample of Neko Sushi and **share experiences on the blog** using the following hashtag: #NekoSushi

- **Share with us their personal opinion** about the product completing a short questionnaire

- **Promote the product** with all their friends who love sushi!

 Participating to Neko Sushi's collaborative marketing campaign means to have the chance to co-create Neko Sushi' s contents (communication, product..) with the company! "

Before going to the main questions,
I would like to remind you to answer imaging that the **brand/company** that you have mentioned before is trying to involve you into a **collaborative marketing campaign** which, as shown in the previous example concerning Neko Sushi, implies:

providing your personal data to the brand/company,
participating in the brand/company's marketing initiatives,
testing company' s product,
giving feedbacks to the brand/company ,
promoting the brand/company with your friends.

Please, indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) the extent to which you agree with the following statements concerning the possible benefits offered by participating in a collaborative marketing campaign developed by the brand/company you are thinking about.

	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly agree
It would be beneficial for me to be committed to a collaborative marketing campaign developed by this brand/company	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The benefits offered from engaging in a collaborative marketing campaign developed by this brand/company would not be enticing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would gain valuable benefits from participating to a collaborative marketing campaign developed by this brand/company	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please, indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) the extent to which you agree with the following statements related to your perceptions about participating to a collaborative marketing campaign developed by the brand/company you mentioned before.

	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly agree
Keep on participating to a collaborative marketing campaign with this brand/company would be time consuming	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Initiating a collaborative marketing campaign with this brand/company would be time consuming	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please, indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) the extent to which you agree with the following statements relative to your personal behaviors and attitudes toward the services offered by the brand/company you are thinking about.

	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly agree
I closely keep track of the services provided by the brand/company I am thinking about	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I participate in many of the services offered by the brand/company I am thinking about	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have everything under control regarding the collaborations promoted by the brand/company I am thinking about	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please, now indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) the extent to which you agree with the following statements with respect to the brand you are thinking about

	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly agree
The brand/company I am thinking about is wonderful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand/company I am thinking about makes me feel good	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand/company I am thinking about is totally awesome	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have neutral feelings about the brand/company I am thinking about	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand/company I am thinking about makes me very happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I love the brand/company I am thinking about!	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have no particular feelings about the brand/company I am thinking about	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand/company I am thinking about is a pure delight	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am passionate about the brand/company I am thinking about	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am very attached to the brand/company I am thinking about	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please, now indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) the extent to which you agree with the following statements with respect to the brand you are thinking about

	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly agree
The brand/company I am thinking about offers me a product with a constant quality level	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand/company I am thinking about helps me to solve any problem I could have with its products	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand/company I am thinking about offers me new products I may need	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand/company I am thinking about is interested in my satisfaction	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand/company I am thinking about values me as a consumer of its product	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand/company I am thinking about offers me recommendations and advices on how to make the most of its product	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please, now indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) the extent to which you agree with the following statements concerning personal data protection.

	1 Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly agree
I dislike giving out my personal information to any brand/company	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am fearful about giving out my personal information to any brand/company	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I get annoyed when a brand/company sends me unsolicited emails	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please, indicate once again the brand/company you are thinking about while answering the prior questions (a brand/company that you patronize and that is ostensibly trying to involve you in a collaborative marketing campaign)

How likely are you to:

	1 Totally not	2	3	4	5	6	7 Extremely
collaborate with this brand/company for enjoyment and entertainment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
collaborate with this brand/company to develop your self	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
collaborate with this brand/company to get rewards	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
collaborate with this brand/company for enhancing your overall experience	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
participate to this brand/company's collaborative marketing initiative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please, now indicate your personal opinion about your experience with the brand/company you mentioned before:

Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very satisfied
Very displeased	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very pleased
Frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Contented
Terrible	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Delighted

The Survey is over !

Thank you for your help!

DEPARTMENT OF Economics and Business

THESIS IN Marketing Metrics

Collaborative marketing and customers' active participation into companies' marketing strategies: an examination of the main factors that predict customers' willingness to collaborate with firms

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Nowadays, a new wave technology characterized by inexpensive computers and smartphones, low-cost internet and open source have enabled new marketing paradigms such as collaborative marketing and co-creation (Kotler et al., 2010). Moreover, customers desire more and more to be directly and actively engaged into companies' marketing strategies, participating in the value creation process through co-creation and collaborative marketing approaches (Hidayanti et al., 2018). According to this point of view, companies should try to unlock customers' inner potentialities, involving them into companies' marketing choices and *"ensuring that products remain in accordance with the customers' needs and wishes"* (Hidayanti et al., 2018, p. 20). In other terms, "corporate culture should be collaborative, cultural and creative" (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 84). Thus, existent literature on consumers-brands relationship suggest that it is time to move from basic relationships to active collaborations between customers and firms, obtaining better insights about the reasons why marketing paradigms are moving toward a more collaborative approach (Kotler et al., 2010).

Accordingly, the present research specifically focuses on collaborative marketing, which refers to a particular marketing technique aimed at developing active collaborations and long-lasting bonds between customers and firms. Extant studies on collaborative marketing defines it as a fundamental solution for companies that want to stand out from competition and that aim at innovating their businesses. To illustrate, according to Bharti el al. (2014), a collaborative marketing approach is central for companies that desire to gain consumers' knowledge, taking advantage of customers' capabilities, gaining valuable feedbacks and generating positive word of mouth effects. Indeed, during the last years, consumers' necessity of being always more involved into companies' marketing campaigns is getting stronger; brand users want to express their opinions and they are showing their willingness of being the main "ambassadors" of their preferred brands (Davis & Risenmay, 2013). For these reasons, collaborative or participatory marketing could be considered as one of the most relevant forms of customer-focused marketing strategies; indeed, it *"requires firms to think about collaborating with customers and making customers an integral part of the firm's marketing activities"* (Sawhney, 2001, p. 44). Thus, according to the author, it is important to consider that one of the main characteristics of collaborative marketing is the purpose of stimulating reciprocal interdependence between firms and customers, to reach the maximization of mutual benefits.

Thus, within the collaborative marketing context, customers actively participate to the marketing campaign, cooperating during the production, giving feedbacks to the company, helping the firm to improve goods and services and sharing feedbacks and opinions (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000).

Importantly, these collaborations between companies and clients lead to a greater value for both parties. On the one hand, companies get helpful feedbacks from customers while taking advantage from positive WOM effects. Specifically, it is important to notice that there is a hidden potentiality

that companies need to unlock for gaining the highest level of benefits from them. This potentiality especially resides in the customers' capability of creating dynamic and original contents that can be useful to reach many different targets of clients with low costs and great impact (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2000) On the other hand, customers are actively involved in marketing campaigns, they can get discounts, express their opinions and participate to the production of new items, test pre-views products and they can become "ambassadors" of their preferred brands, developing a strong sense of belonging to the brand.

After a careful analysis concerning collaborative marketing academic researches, it has been possible to affirm that a clear gap in the literature exists; it consists in the absence of a well-defined model that delineate the main drivers of customers' "willingness" to cooperate with brands; consequently, it is essential to find out which are the main factors that affect customers' willingness to take part into companies' collaborative initiatives.

Indeed, the research question that this study wants to address is the following one:

Which are the factors that affect customers' willingness to participate in collaborative marketing campaigns?

Thus, aiming at responding to this research question and after a careful literature review, I suppose that anticipated benefits, involvement, inconvenience, privacy concerns, brand love and brand trust have some positive or negative effects on customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns.

Focusing on anticipated benefits, it refers to the customers' capability to recognize before the official beginning of the campaign which are the main benefits that they are going to receive through their participation to the collaborative marketing initiative. Accordingly, especially for immaterial benefits, it is essential that companies strive to clearly communicate to customers even before the beginning of the campaign which are the main benefits that they are going to receive, otherwise their willingness to participate to the promotion will be lower (Ashley et al, 2011). Therefore:

H1: The more a consumer is able to identify the main benefits of a collaborative marketing campaign before its beginning, the more he/she will be willing to participate in the collaborative marketing campaign

Moreover, inconvenience is useful to measure how much a collaborative marketing campaign is perceived as accessible and easily manageable. Indeed, inconvenience is an indicator of the accessibility of a marketing initiative: the less a campaign is easy-to-access, the more it will be perceived as inconvenient (Ashley et al., 2011). Indeed, if costs associated with the participation

to the campaign are too high, participants' impressions about the initiative will be negatively influenced, the campaign will be considered inconvenient and their willingness to collaborate will be lower (Goodwin & Ross, 1992). Thus:

H2: The more a consumer perceives that his/her participation to a collaborative marketing campaign requires high efforts on his/her part, the

Focusing on involvement, it is considered as *"a motivating variable with a number of consequences on the consumer's purchase and communication behavior"* (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985, p. 42). Moreover, highly involved consumers are usually more likely to show higher levels of interest toward companies' marketing efforts and they are usually more willing to engage in long-lasting collaborative marketing programs with their beloved brands to receive informs, rewards and any kind of special treatments. Accordingly, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H3: The more a consumer is involved with the brand, the more he/she will be willing to participate in the collaborative marketing campaign

Focusing on brand love, it is defined as *"the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name"* (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). Thus, it is possible to consider that brand love usually conducts to the development of positive customers' impressions about the brand and to a strong disposition to preserve long-lasting relationships and collaborations with firms. Brand love is likely to lead consumers to engage into active and long-lasting collaborations with a brand, rather than one-shot contacts or passive connections (Batra et al., 2012). Thus:

H4: The more a consumer has a brand love feeling toward a company, the more he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign

Focusing on brand trust, it is defined as *"the confident expectations of the brand's reliability and intentions"* (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005, p. 188) Moreover, brand trust is a long-term oriented item that leads to the creation of durable and enduring relationships and collaborations between customers and firms. Thus, if managers need to develop long-term oriented marketing activities, they should complement their marketing campaigns with actions aimed at building brand trust, since enhancing brand trust is one of the main key-points to develop enduring partnerships with customers, stimulating their willingness to collaborate. Therefore:

H5: The more a consumer trusts a brand, the more he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign

Finally, privacy is a term that indicates the right to preserve personal information about an individual's body, behavior, personal communication and data. (Luo, 2002). Analyzing the collaborative marketing context, it is important to notice that many people hesitate to engage into relationship or collaborative marketing programs because of personal worries related to the protection of their privacy and of their personal data (Luo, 2002).

Thus, considering that customers' participation to collaborative marketing campaigns imply the customers' disposition to provide companies with personal information such as habits, preferences and individual attitudes (Kotler et al., 2010), I suppose that customers' privacy concerns could represent a problem for the development of winning collaborative marketing strategies. Thus:

H6: The more a consumer is concerned with protecting his/her privacy, the less he/she will be willing to participate to the collaborative marketing campaign

Moreover, basing on a careful analysis of the previous literature, the study theorized also that customers' satisfaction toward a specific brand could enhance the effect of the independent variables on customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaign.

After a process of data cleaning and after having checked the reliability of the items, a multiple regression analysis has been employed to control if the chosen independent variables have an influence on customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns.

Results demonstrate that, among all the variables, anticipated benefits, brand love and brand trust show a p-value lower than 0.05, thus they have a significant effect on the dependent variable. On the contrary, involvement, inconvenience and privacy concerns do not influence the dependent one. Focusing on anticipated benefits, one of the main reasons according to which customers are willing to collaborate with firms resides in the consumers' capability of understanding, before the beginning of the campaign, which benefits they would receive helping companies in developing their marketing campaigns and promoting the brand within their networks of contacts. Thus, it is important that both physical and emotional benefits related to the customers' participation to a collaborative marketing campaign are clearly exposed before the beginning of the marketing promotion. Indeed, if customers are convinced that they will receive valuable benefits from their participation to a collaborative marketing campaign, they will be more willing to collaborate with that firm. Then, my findings support the idea that also brand trust and brand love positively affect customers' willingness to engage in a collaborative marketing campaign. Indeed, it is possible to argue that customers' willingness to engage in a collaborative marketing initiative is strongly influenced by brand-related factors, such as the customers' reliance on a specific brand and the customers' degree of passionate attachment toward a company. Focusing on brand love, it is important to consider that one of the main reasons that lead customers to collaborate with firms over long-time periods is related to the customers' desire of being part of the marketing decisions of their beloved brands (Barbara A. Carroll & Aaron C. Ahuvia, 2006). Indeed, when customers have strong love feelings toward a specific brand, they are more willing to participate into a collaborative marketing campaign developed by that company. Moreover, focusing on brand trust, it is important to consider that, when deciding if to participate to a collaborative marketing initiative developed by a specific company, customers need to completely trust that brand. Indeed, considering that collaborative marketing implies long-term relationships and associations,

customers have the necessity of effectively relying on the chosen brand in order to start collaborations that will last over years and that will require dynamic actions such as promoting the brand, giving feedbacks to the company or trying innovative products.

 Focusing on customers' satisfaction, outcomes show that the presence of customers' satisfaction as a control variable within my model does not generate relevant consequences on the effects produced by the independent variables on the dependent one. Indeed, the independent variables (anticipated benefits, brand love and brand trust) that have a significant effect on the dependent one (customers' willingness to participate into collaborative marketing campaigns) are the same of the case in which customers' satisfaction is not considered within the multiple regression analysis. Moreover, including customers' satisfaction within the study, independent variables coefficients and t-values do not change substantially. Thus, the present work provides interesting results for the literature of collaborative marketing, since it sheds light on some variables that can positively affect customers' willingness to participate into brand collaborative marketing campaigns, thus determining the success of a collaborative marketing campaign.