Co-Creation during New Product Development

Downsides and effects of a booming activity

Authors: Charlotte CHÉRON
         Guillaume PERA

Supervisor: Jan Bodin

Student
Umeå School of Business and Economics
Spring semester 2016
Master thesis, two-year, 30 hp
Abstract

Co-creation is nowadays a booming activity implemented by companies in order to be closer to their customers and to fulfil their needs. By using co-creation, a company involves their customers in the process of creation aiming to get ideas and insights that allow the company to launch a new product or to improve an existing product. Nevertheless, most of the companies think that implementing a co-creation process is a question of methodology. Companies believe that by building on a formalized method and by using a step-by-step implementation, the co-creation will be successful. The truth speaks something else. Recently, researchers started to pop-up trying to highlight how the co-creation is a complex process arising the likelihood of having a value co-destruction rather than a value co-creation as a result of the process. Further, in 2015, a study states the importance of studying and understanding the negative consequences of value co-creation. For these reasons, the purpose of our thesis is to understand the downsides of co-creation during new product development and their effects on the relationship between the company and the customers. Our research question is: What are the downsides of the co-creation process and their effects on the relationship between the company and customers during new product development?

In order to answer this question, we conducted a qualitative study to collect our primary data using an in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data have been collected from eleven participants involved in the co-creation field. From experts of co-creation to designers and researchers, we wanted to have a practitioner point of view rather than from a customer perspective. Indeed, the objectives of conducting these interviews were to gain a focus understanding and a comprehensive perception of the individuals using, implementing, researching on, or consulting about the co-creation process. From the data collected, we analysed our interviews using a thematic network analysis approach. From then, we tested and discussed our empirical results and our concepts from our theoretical frame of references.

Through the analysis of the interviews data, we are able to state that there are four main downsides of the co-creation process during new product development: misbehaviour of the company, mismanagement of the environment, miscommunication and mismanagement of the process. The effects of these downsides will affect: the company, the product, the customer satisfaction, trust and commitment and the emotions. Further, we are capable to confirm the importance of the variables of trust, commitment and customer satisfaction in the management of a relationship. Finally, we compromise the idea of customer self-blaming, and the term of “failure”. Indeed, our analysis shows that the responsibility of co-creation belongs to the company that owns the project. Hence, the customer will not blame themselves or feel guilty in case of unsuccessful outcomes. Interestingly, our analysis debates about the use of the term failure to express unexpected negative outcomes from the process. We conclude that a mismanaged co-creation can be perceived as a learning process rather than a failure per se, leading us to confirm that we cannot consider the co-creation outcome as a failure.

Keywords: Co-creation, new product development, relationship, trust, commitment, customer satisfaction, value co-creation, downsides, co-destruction, training, failure, co-creation downsides.
Acknowledgements

We would like to begin by thanking our supervisor, Jan Bodin for helping and guiding us through the writing process, for sharing with us his knowledge and experiences, and for continuously encouraging us.

A special thanks to all our participants for their time and for sharing with us their knowledge and experiences.

I would like to thank my parents, my sister and her husband for their continuous support along my years of studies. Special thanks to my friends from all around the world making my stay in Sweden more than valuable. I would like to dedicate my work to Prospera Pera.

Guillaume PERA

I am very grateful to my father, my grandmother, my sister and my brother for believing in me, and for helping me all along my studies. To my friends in France, and all around the world for their supports and encouragements.

Charlotte CHÉRON
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1  
   1.1 Problem Background ...................................................................................... 1  
   1.2 Research purpose and research question ......................................................... 5  
   1.3 Focus areas and contributions ........................................................................ 5  
   1.4 Definition of the main terms ......................................................................... 6  

2. Theoretical Frame of Reference ........................................................................... 7  
   2.1 New product development .............................................................................. 7  
      2.1.1. The traditional model ........................................................................... 7  
      2.1.2 The shift toward an active customer in NPD ......................................... 9  
      2.1.3 The customer co-creation ...................................................................... 10  
   2.2 The Co-Creation process in NPD ................................................................... 11  
      2.2.1 Nature of co-creation ............................................................................ 11  
      2.2.2 Benefits of the co-creation process ....................................................... 14  
      2.2.3 Co-destruction ...................................................................................... 15  
   2.3 The variables of the relationship .................................................................... 17  
      2.3.1 The notion of Trust ............................................................................... 17  
      2.3.2 The notion of Commitment ................................................................... 18  
      2.3.3 Relationship through trust and commitment ......................................... 19  
      2.3.4 Customer Satisfaction ......................................................................... 22  
   2.4 Summary of the theoretical framework .......................................................... 23  

3. Scientific Methodology ......................................................................................... 25  
   3.1 Choice of subject ........................................................................................... 25  
   3.2 Pre-understandings ......................................................................................... 26  
   3.3 Philosophical position ..................................................................................... 26  
      3.3.1 Ontology ................................................................................................ 27  
      3.3.2 Epistemology ......................................................................................... 27  
   3.4 Research Approach ......................................................................................... 28  
   3.5 Research Design .............................................................................................. 29  
   3.6 Literature search & Source of criticism ......................................................... 30  
   3.7 Choice of theories ......................................................................................... 31  

4. Practical Method .................................................................................................... 33  
   4.1 Qualitative data collection method .................................................................. 33  
   4.2 Qualitative sampling methods ....................................................................... 33  
   4.3 Selection of the participants ......................................................................... 34  
   4.4 Interview guide .............................................................................................. 35  
   4.5 Conducting the interview ............................................................................. 35  
   4.6 Transcription .................................................................................................. 36  
   4.7 Qualitative Analysis ....................................................................................... 36  
   4.8 Ethical considerations .................................................................................... 38  
      4.8.1 Consequences ....................................................................................... 38  
      4.8.2 Informed consent ................................................................................. 39  
      4.8.3 Confidentiality ...................................................................................... 39  
      4.8.4 Deception .............................................................................................. 40  

5. Qualitative Empirical Findings .......................................................................... 41  
   5.1 Interviewees Description .............................................................................. 42  
      5.1.1 Cristian Saracco ....................................................................................... 42  
      5.1.2 Maarten Pieters ...................................................................................... 42  
      5.1.3 Respondent 3 .......................................................................................... 42
"We do believe that calling everything co-creation makes you think that you live in a fictitious world, and it is not the case" - Loïc Plé

1. Introduction
This chapter aims to provide our problem background in order to have an understanding of our research. Then, we introduce our research question and the purpose of our study. This chapter ends with the focus areas and the main notions of our study.

1.1 Problem Background

From the past few years, creativity appears as a key driver of companies’ success behind innovation. Increasing numbers of companies implement a creative business by looking at new perspectives and practices by developing a new creative culture. Those companies that cultivate creativity are more intended to gain advantages compare to the less creative companies. By being creative, a company can grow its revenue, gain market share and have a better competitive leadership and thereby involves their customers to achieve their goals (Forrester, 2014). Further, a study made in 2016 highlights that 90% of CEOs perceive the customers and clients as the top priorities while implementing a strategy and 27% of these CEOs believe that their customers are looking for a relationship with organizations that address wider stakeholders needs. In five years, this figure has been presumed to be 44% (PWC, 2016). It appears that companies are looking for a better understanding of customer needs.

Due to the globalization, and the important competition, people are increasingly demanding concerning their products and services. For this reason, companies have to be as creative as possible. Yusuf (2009, p. 3) discusses the relationship between creativity and innovation. Innovation comes from two major drivers, the creative acts and the stock of knowledge. Moreover, to be an innovative company, information is paramount in order to be competitive over the market. Indeed, companies need two types of information: solution information and need information, respectively the information pertaining solution possibilities and information concerning customer and market needs (Piller et al., 2010, p. 2). For this reason, knowledge acquisition is considered as a valuable resource for companies. Firms are more tempted to interact with external sources aiming to facilitate the knowledge flows within the company. Previous researches support the thought that by being able to create an interaction with external sources, firms can affect positively their level of innovation. Indeed, the internal ability and the willingness towards sharing knowledge are significant for the firm in order to increase their innovative performance (Caloghirou et al., 2004, p. 29; Piller et al., 2010, p. 2). This innovation process which integrates the interaction between a firm and an external knowledge provider, is seen as the epicenter of value creation. Furthermore, this cooperation with the customer is for companies a lever for uncertainty reduction concerning the acquisition of both the need and solution information acquisition (Piller et al., 2010, p. 3).

Throughout the years, the way how the companies perceive their customers has changed, shifting the role of customers from passive to active in the innovation process
(Prahalad and Ramaswany, 2004, p. 2). For this reason, we can notice a shift in the literature from a market orientation toward a customer centricity. Indeed, decades ago, the literature was market oriented in which the customer was a market segment and companies tried to satisfy customer needs at a profit (Narver & Slater, 1990, p. 21). This notion has been replaced by the customer orientation with the creation of a superior customer value by prioritizing the customer’s interests (Piller et al., 2010, p. 5). Recently, customer orientation has been replaced by the customer centricity aiming to focus on serving customers and to create a unique value for them (Sheth et al., 2000, p. 61). Due to these changes, the research literature has been evolving concerning the role of the customer in the innovation process. Since the past decades, the role of customers within the value creation has tremendously increased becoming fundamental for the company (Krishna et al., 2013, p. 14). Nowadays, customers are more informed and educated. For this reason, they are more rigorous concerning their needs. Due to the large capacity of choices, customers are also volatile when it comes to loyalty (Vega-Vazquez et al., 2013, p. 1945). When it comes to the process of innovation, customers can have different types of role. Some can provide information, such as need information or solution information, other customers are more willing to evaluate innovative concepts or prototypes (Piller et al., 2010, p. 7). Consequently, companies change their perception toward the customers role, the evolution of their needs and their loyalty, leading to reconsider their innovation process. Thus, it becomes important for the company to acquire relevant knowledge from external sources, especially customers in order to create products that meet their needs.

This shift of consumer role during the innovation process leads us to “co-creation”. This notion has been discussed by several authors with different terms as co-creation paradigm (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; O’Hern & Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 84), co-creation process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 10, Piller et al., 2010, p. 21), co-creation model or co-creation design (European Commission, 2014). However, the meaning of the definition has remained unchanged, since Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) defined it as the interactions between companies and consumers in order to co-create value. Furthermore, they discuss the importance for companies to take into consideration the context and to involve customers in order to co-create an experience with the product and to deliver a unique co-created value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 16). These experiences occur during the co-creation process where the quality of the interactions between the customer and the company can lead to a rich relationship and impact positively the co-creation experience for the customer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 50). These interactions are discussed by Ind & Coates (2013, p. 87) who emphasize these exchanges as social, creating common meanings between both parties. These interactions lead the customer to become a “connected, informed and active” individual (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 2).

During our research, we focus on the co-creation process defined as:

*An active, creative and social process, based on collaboration between producers and users that is initiated by the firm to generate value for customer (Piller et al., 2010, p. 21).*

Resulting from the open innovation (i.e. the use of both internal and external ideas to accelerate the internal innovation) (Van Leen & Lubben, 2013, p. 82), the co-creation design is seen by companies as the process allowing to develop new products and
services, to gain a competitive advantage, new consumers, and to increase the market share (European Commission, 2014, p. 2). The co-creation process is implemented through many tools where companies and customers interact in order to have a learning and an understanding of the needs and expectations. Internet has enabled to improve the communication between companies and customers through the creation of communities (European Commission, 2014, p. 3)

According to Hoyer et al., (2010, p. 292), the co-creation process leads to positive outcomes for the customers and companies allowing the company to gain a competitive advantage when it is successfully done. The firm can increase its efficiency and gain in productivity, while improving its effectiveness towards the customers as the co-created products should fit their expectations. Customer-related, co-creation allows to enhance the relationship between the company and its customers by providing them satisfaction (Hoyer et al., 2010, p. 284).

In order to fulfill the customer requirements and to provide new offers to them, companies use the process of new product development (NPD), which is defined as the “overall process of strategy, organization, concept generation, product and marketing plan creation and evaluation, and commercialization of a new product” (Kahn et al., 2013, p. 458). Hoyer et al. (2010, p. 282) highlight the increase of customer engagement in this specific context. Thereby, in adapting the co-creation process, companies can adapt the new product development by empowering customers in order to innovate products. Nowadays, the product innovation, i.e. “development of new and improved products and services”, seems paramount for the survival of an organization and is seen as the major driver of corporate growth and prosperity (Cooper, 2013, p. 3). However, all new products do not succeed.

By relating the NPD and the co-creation process, O’Hern and Rindfleisch (2015, p. 86) discuss a definition of the co-creation as “a collaborative NPD activity in which customers actively contribute and/or select the content of a new product offering”. The empowerment of the customer in the NPD activities is eased by the improvement of technologies. For example, Internet allows companies to reach the customers, and to communicate with them. Therefore, the co-creation is a process which takes place between individuals and companies where the ideas flow through social interactions (O’Hern and Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 88; Hoyer et al., 2010, p. 288).

As aforementioned, the co-creation process underlines the relationship between a company and their customers aiming to increase the creation of value and the satisfaction of the customer. The relationship is determined through interactions and openness in which knowledge is shared in order to enhance innovation (Caloghirou et al., 2004, p. 29). Plus, Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 20) theorize the concept of relationship arguing the importance to integrate the notion of trust and commitment. During the co-creation process, trust is created by an equal dialogue aiming to build bonds in which transparency and sharing risks are required while commitment is developed from the customer by being involved in a company (Randall et al., 2011, p. 5). The notion of trust and commitment of the customer must be taken into account in order to ensure a good relationship and a high customer satisfaction. Indeed, if the three variables trust, commitment and satisfaction are met efficiently, the future intention of the customer will be in favor of continuing the relationship (Randall et al., 2011, p. 7). Indeed, Vargo and Lusch (2004, p. 12) discuss the general positive impact of the co-
creation process on the customer satisfaction. A connection will be created through this relationship in which the benefits are mutual with an emotional attachment between both the company and the customers (Randall et al., 2011, p. 8).

Lately, the co-creation process has been discussed by many authors such as Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004), Ind & Coates (2013) or Hoyer et al. (2010) who acknowledge different perspectives, i.e. firm-perspective and consumer-perspective, highlighting the benefits for both parts. The advantages of the co-creation process such as the satisfaction, the value creation, or even knowledge sharing, result from a positive relationship between the company and the customers. However, Piller et al. (2010, p. 21) concluded their research in arguing that co-creation can be more complex in the future. Some authors (Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Echeverri & Skalen, 2011; Smith, 2013) have starting to discuss the possibility that the process can result in a collaborative co-creation value or co-destruction value. Recently, the co-creation activities are booming, companies are increasingly participating with the process leading to a desire to look to the potential negative consequences of it. Authors do think that customers could become a scarce good, and for this reason companies will have to compete in order to get customers involved in their co-creation process (Piller et al., 2010, p. 21).

Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres (2010) are the pioneers in developing the concept of “co-destruction”. They conceptualize the process and define it as a decrease of well-being of a system involved in the process resulting from an accidental or intentional misuse from the company or the customers. Following this conceptual paper, other authors discuss the creation of value in practice, which can result in a co-creation or in a co-destruction of value (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011). Additionally, this term has been discussed vaguely to conclude an article of Krishna et al. (2013, p. 19). Looking beyond, a research has been done, analysing further the phenomenon of co-destruction process with a customer perspective (Smith, 2013). This study reports the impacts of the customer experiences. Gebauer et al. (2013) discuss the consequences of bad co-creation experiences with online communities. This article can be related to a recent study discussing the “dark side of the co-creation process” within the service industries. Authors (Heidenreich et al., 2015) disclose the impacts of a failed co-creation on the customer reactions while exploring the benefits to pursue a service recovery (Heidenreich et al., 2015). Indeed, both articles (Gebauer et al., 2013; Heidenreich et al., 2015) discuss the reactions of customer that can be perceived through feelings of dissatisfaction and self-guilty when the co-creation process has been mismanaged. Thus, as the customer satisfaction provides great benefits, it has been highlighted to ensure this satisfaction by implementing a service recovery (Heidenreich et al., 2015, p. 279).

The low amount of researches into this field of study has been emphasized by Hoyer et al. (2010, p. 284) who assert the lack of research and the ignorance concerning the management of the relationship with the customers during new product development process. Additionally, Ostrom et al. (2015, p. 138) highlight the need to cover this field in outlining that understanding the negative consequences of value co-creation comes out among the top three of the research priorities, concerning the field of value creation.
Therefore, we are curious about the downsides of the co-creation process on the relationship between customers and companies during new product development. As previously mentioned, only few studies discuss the co-destruction process and the downsides within the services industries and online communities. We believe it would be interesting to develop a new theory with a practitioner perspective such as experts or managers in the co-creation process and also researchers. By doing so, we would contribute to expand the existing literature concerning the co-destruction while adding new knowledge on the consequences on relationship between the customers and the company.

1.2 Research purpose and research question

The main purpose of this study is to pinpoint and to understand the downsides of the co-creation process during new product development and their effects on the relationship. Knowing the advantages of co-creation that are provided to a company and the customers, we do think it is important to have an understanding of the downsides and their effects of this process on the relationship between a company and customers during the product innovation. Since researches have been done for the co-destruction in different fields, we want to fulfil the literature gap by investigating the field of new product development. In doing so, we use our theoretical framework established after our literature review and our empirical data collected during our interviews with practitioners of the co-creation process.

Therefore, our research question for this study is:

**RQ: What are the downsides of the co-creation process and their effects on the relationship between the company and customers during new product development?**

This research question aims to investigate the downsides of customer involvement during the development of a new product and to obtain a general overview of their effects on the relationship between the customer and the company during the co-creation process. To do so, we use several variables (i.e. Trust, Commitment, and Customer Satisfaction) arising from the relationship with the company. Thus, we want to know what are those downsides and their effects which can harm the relationship between the customer and the firm and affect these variables during new product development.

1.3 Focus areas and contributions

We decided to limit our research to a practitioner perspective by interviewing experts, managers and researchers involved in the co-creation process. Our research does not have a customers related perspective. Further, our study contributes to investigate the relationship between companies and customers during a new product development. We do not have an interest toward the services. Hence, we conduct our research with a B2C perspective as we focus on the relationship between companies and customers during new product development. In addition, the study is not context-dependent since we do not determine a specific industry, nor a specific type of product. We determine our research based on physical products including non-durable and durable goods. Further, the research focuses on innovation in general and not upon a specific type of innovation such as incremental or breakthrough innovation.
In this study, we do not distinguish the terms customer and end-users. We use these terms interchangeably along the paper. We determine the customer or user as an individual who has already purchased a product from the company. In addition, when we mention trust, commitment and customer satisfaction, we determine these variables with a high level.

With our research, we would like to fulfil the gap in the existing literature, and provide a new perspective of the downsides of the co-creation process and their effects on the relationship between the company and the customers involved. Therefore, by providing new findings, we believe that our research could provide a new theory that researchers and companies could take into consideration when they want to study or implement a co-creation process knowing what risks do they have to face to maintain a positive relationship with their customers during the process of co-creation.

### 1.4 Definition of the main terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-creation Process</td>
<td>Customer co-creation denotes an active, creative and social collaboration process between producers (retailers) and customers (users), facilitated by the company. (Piller et al., 2010, p. 21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Product Development</td>
<td>Overall process of strategy, organization, concept generation, product and marketing plan creation and evaluation, and commercialization of a new product (Kahn et al., 2013, p. 458)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>the customer’s approach toward the capacity, the willingness, and integrity of the company (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 715)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Commitment captures pride in belonging, concern for long-term success, and a desire for customers to participate as friends of the organization (Morgan &amp; Hunt, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Anderson et al. (1994, p. 54) consider satisfaction is an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Marketing</td>
<td>Relationship marketing is establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges (Morgan &amp; Hunt, 1994, p. 20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Theoretical Frame of Reference

This chapter aims to examine and discuss the existing literature and theories related to the co-creation process and new product development. We analyze the literature about the co-destruction. We provide insights on the importance of trust, commitment and satisfaction. We end this chapter with a theoretical framework.

2.1 New product development

During our research, we consider significant to have a review of the new product development and thereby highlight the assessment of the process over the literature.

2.1.1. The traditional model

In a constant changing business environment, as it is nowadays, companies need to compete in implementing new strategies where innovation is used to answer to customer’s needs and wants. Incorporating innovation within companies leads to a development of new products on the competitive marketplace. According to Filieri (2013, p. 40), an effective and constant innovation leads companies to obtain a sustainable competitive advantage, and is done through the new product development process and its stages (Tzokas et al., 2003, p. 621; Sawhney et al., 2005, p. 5). Therefore, we believe that the new product development is a major source as well of competitive advantage (Bessant & Francis, 1997, p. 189; Tzokas et al., 2003, p. 619; Fang et al., 2008, p. 332; Fuchs & Schreier, 2011, p. 17), of corporate prosperity (Cooper, 2001, p.8), of corporate growth (O’hern and Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 84; Barczak & Kahn, 2012, p. 293), profitability (O’hern and Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 84), and market leadership and healthy market share (Barczak & Kahn, 2012, p. 293).

By launching new products, companies try to deliver new product characteristics such as new benefits and higher quality (Cooper, 2013, p. 6; Bessant & Francis, 1997, p. 189) which correspond to provide a unique superior product (Cooper, 2001, p. 83) and to improve variety, frequency, speed of response & customization of the product (Bessant & Francis, 1997, p. 189) toward the customer. The new product development aims to provide solutions that would satisfy customer needs and wants (Von Hippel, 2005, p. 66). Therefore, all new launched products do not succeed on the marketplace and fail to captivate customers’ interests. Indeed, Joshi & Sharma (2004, p. 50) discuss the failures of new products in arguing that they do not match with customer’s preferences. Von Hippel (2005, p. 108) claims also this idea by arguing that companies fail to understand customers’ needs.

The new product development is, traditionally, described as an internal activity within the firm in which customers are seen as passive aiming to buy or to use the product (O’hern and Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 84; Fuchs & Schreier, 2011, p. 20). In this model, the company has the responsibility to make the decisions of launching a product or not, and has the control of the process (Fuchs & Schreier, 2011, p. 17). This model appears as an activity of being firm-centric with a flow of information in one direction from the customer to the firm (Sawhney et al., 2005, p. 6) and where the ideas come mainly from internal sources (Filieri, 2013, p. 43). A company develops traditionally a new product by being market-oriented (Cooper, 2013, p. 8). With a responsive market orientation, the company tries to understand and to discover customers’ needs in order
to generate products built in the Voice of Customers (Kristensson et al., 2008, p. 488). In order to allow the company to innovate and to launch new successful products, it is needed that the company takes into consideration the customer’s expectations (Joshi & Sharma, 2004, p. 48), the available skills and knowledge (Bessant & Francis, 1997, p.190) and also the competitive environment and the nature of the marketplace (Cooper, 2013, p. 8).

In 2001, Cooper has developed the Stage-Gate process for NPD aiming to accommodate the traditional new product development by implementing a multi-stage system for companies to reach successful new products. Each stage aims to collect information needed to progress to the next gate, which is defined as a decision point where the information is controlled with quality criteria. The different stages such as Discovery (Ideas Generation), Scoping, Business Case, Development, Testing & Validation and Launch are defined and advised to follow in order to launch successful product in a easy and fast way. Ideas Generation corresponds to figure out the opportunities and to develop ideas. Then, Scoping allows the company to delimitate the project in terms of technical resources and of market requirements. Build the business case corresponds to an in-depth description of the project in analyzing the market, competitors, and customers’ expectations. Development represents the design of the new product in term of physical development. Testing and Validation allow the company to verify the product’s characteristics, how it would be marketed, and its production. The final stage is Launch, meaning the introduction of the new product over the market. This stage will be followed by the Post Launch Review, which corresponds to adapt and to fix the products in relation to customers’ feedbacks (Cooper, 2001, p. 131-141).

In order to obtain the customer’s perspective and their wants, needs, and problems, it is important to learn about the users. It allows the company to create a product superiority with a higher value for the customer. Therefore, it leads to build the product in the Voice of Customers (VoC) (Cooper, 2001, p. 85). The VoC allows the company to capture information from the customers and to identify customer’s needs and wants (Cooper, 2001, p. 85; Fuchs & Schreier, 2011, p. 19). It results in the use of different market research techniques soliciting customer feedbacks in order to develop a new product. The VoC can be implemented in various ways depending of the stages of NPD. Indeed, some market research techniques such as focus group, customers’ surveys, in-depth interviews, user needs-and-wants and quantitative techniques with a conjoint analysis can be conducted in order to design the product built in the VoC (Sawhney et al., 2005, p. 5; Cooper, 2001, p.86; Cooper, 2013, p. 9; Witell et al., 2011, p. 141). These market research techniques aim to grasp information and to learn about customers, competitors and the environment of marketplace (Kahn et al., 2006, p. 111).

Therefore, in order to align the products with the market trends and to discover new opportunities, it becomes essential for the company to build their product by using the VoC (Cooper, 2001, p. 165). We believe that the VoC does not always provide a successful product, but it makes a strong contribution. It is needed to complete the VoC with other analysis such as competitive product analysis in order to determine the product’s weaknesses of the competitors.

Nonetheless, engaging the customer through these traditional techniques leads the company to have a limited understanding of the customers’ expectations (Sawhney et
Indeed, the techniques used by companies to determine the customer's desires lead to get feedbacks of their experiences with the product and thereby it belongs to a specific context. Then, it appears important to go beyond the VoC and to create a new product matching customer’s needs (Sawhney et al., 2005, p. 14).

Consequently, in the literature, we can notice that questions arose about the market research techniques and thereby about the traditional closed NPD process (Wittel et al., 2011). Chesbrough (2003a, p. 37) discusses the limited internal resources to innovate within the company. He argues on the new way to acquire knowledge by incorporating external sources of knowledge, technologies and information into NPD process in order to discover new opportunities of business. Therefore, this leads us to discuss the open innovation which is described as “the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation and expand the markets for external use of innovation” (Chesbrough, 2003b, p. xxiv). The open innovation is eased in using certain tools such as licensing, alliances and acquisitions, corporate venturing (indirect investment or being shareholder). However, it requires a share of knowledge and information (Van Leen & Lubben, 2013, p. 83) among the involved parties. Supporting Chesbrough’s idea, Piller et al. (2010, p. 3) state the open innovation as a “formal discipline and practice of leveraging the discoveries of unobvious others as input for the innovation process through formal and informal relationship” and thereby involve the customer as an external participant to NPD who appears as an unobvious and informal source of innovation (Piller et al., 2010, p. 3-4).

We believe that the open innovation marks a new trend where the customer becomes an entire part in NPD leading us to discuss the co-creation process.

2.1.2 The shift toward an active customer in NPD

Present in the literature, the shift from the closed NPD with a passive customer toward an active customer can be explained by the increasing need for the customers to obtain superior inputs from the products (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 2). By this fact, customers want to have control over NPD activities. In addition, cultural motivations seem to be a motivation for the customer to take part into the NPD activities. Indeed, individuals do not always trust the marketing communications over a product and do not believe in all features the product holds. By being involved, customers are more willing to trust the company and its product communication (O’hern and Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 87). Resulting of this NPD assessment, the role of the customers into the NPD activities is changing and evolving. It has been shift from an isolated and unaware passive consumer to a connected, informed and active consumer where the information flows between both parts (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 2). Companies begin to change their views to see the customers and start to consider them as a source of knowledge, skills and competence (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 139).

The evolving role of the customer in NPD has been highlighted by the improvement of the access of information. Indeed the improvement of the technologies and the growth of the Internet allow customers to be more present and active in NPD (O’hern and Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 87). Related to the traditional NPD model, companies thought that customers were lacking of skills and capabilities to be incorporate in NPD. Online, the access and the diffusion of knowledge are facilitated and give the opportunity to customers to participate to creative projects. Indeed, through the Internet, individuals can be connected to each others forming communities sharing common interests (Von
The communities generate a flow of knowledge where people can learn and teach with others (O’Hern and Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 88) creating a social dimension (Sawhney et al., 2005, p. 5). The interactions between individuals tend to be, nowadays, more customer-to-firm and also customer-to-customer. Therefore, the communication ways have been shift from one direction to an interactive dialogue (Sawhney et al., 2005, p. 5). As an advantage for the company, the amount of connected individuals is high, allowing companies to reach more than their own customers. They are able to reach the third parties such as non-customers, competitors’ customers or potential customers. In addition to the highest size and scope, companies can reach customers at lowest cost and faster than the traditional market research techniques (O’Hern & Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 14; Filieri, 2013, p. 50). Consequently, the Internet has been a driver of the shifting of the customer’s position in NPD causing a shifting of the communication ways. By dialoguing with customers, companies can work with the flow of online knowledge and directly select the lead users without any limitations (O’Hern & Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 6-7). Indeed, it appears more relevant for the company to collaborate with lead users than “average” users and to avoid the limits (e.g. geographical, market boundaries) that the traditional techniques could present (Ind & Coates, 2013, p. 89). Therefore, companies can use Internet as a source of research to create new products and to understand customer’s perspective. They have the possibility to reach people through online surveys where individuals choose deliberately to answer or not, leading to more honest and authentic answers. In exchange, individuals will provide ideas and feedbacks to the companies, and even select an innovative pursuit (Filieri, 2013, p. 50).

In the literature, the fact to involve the customer in NPD is developed over different terms such as “customer involvement” (Brockhoff, 2003), “customer participation” (Fang et al., 2008), “customer engagement” (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014), “customer empowerment” (Füller et al., 2010; Hoyer et al., 2010; Fuchs & Schreier, 2011). We noticed that these terms were not always linked with “co-creation process”. However, the role of the empowered customer in NPD described by Fuchs & Schreier (2011, p. 18) is similar to the definition of the customer co-creation given by O’Hern & Rindfleisch (2015, p. 86). Consequently, we believe that in our study, we can gather these terms in order to have an in-depth discussion of the existing literature.

2.1.3 The customer co-creation

As aforementioned, Fuchs & Schreier (2011, p. 18) describe the role of the empowered customer in the NPD under two dimensions. According to these authors, companies involve customers in NPD because (1) the customer is willing to create and to have new ideas for new products and (2) they are able to select the product in order to allow the company to commercialize this latter. Supporting this idea, O’Hern & Rindfleisch (2015, p. 86) develop the concept of customer co-creation where s/he is able of contribution of new ideas and selection which ideas should be achieved.

Customer co-creation in NPD is defined as “a collaborative NPD activity in which customers actively contribute and/or select the content of a new product offering” (O’Hern & Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 86). On the other hand, Piller et al., (2010, p. 21) relate the customer co-creation to the general process by describing that the “customer co-creation denotes an active, creative and social collaboration process between producers (retailers) and customers (users), facilitated by the company” resulting a co-created value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). It aims to generate more innovative ideas than
the small-scale of customers interviewed with traditional market research techniques (Witell et al., 2011, p. 152) and also to distinguish good ideas from bad ideas (Filieri, 2013, p. 49). Thus, customers are willing to vote for the products, which could be the most suitable for the markets and thereby being successful on the marketplace. By giving freedom to the customers, the company has the opportunity to learn more about customers’ needs and to implement innovative solutions while customers deliver valuable thoughts from their latent needs and desires. This allows the company to privilege an idea compare to the others and therefore decrease the risk, the ambiguity and the uncertainty (Filieri, 2013, p. 49). The product resulting from collaboration between customers and a company provides a co-created value. By doing so, companies are more able to deliver a successful product responding to customers wants (Witell et al., 2011, p. 142). For instance, this has been shown by the international company, Swarovski, who has implemented a contest in involving creative customers in order to design and develop a new watch. A variety of watches have been designed and proposed to their community of customers in order to receive feedbacks from their propositions. As a result, the brand has been aware about consumers’ preferences, and had information about the market trends to develop later a successful product (Füller, 2010, p. 98).

Then, along with the literature, we noticed different motives for the customers to participate to the co-creation process, which classify the customers into categories (O’hern & Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 89). Depending of the individual’s personality, the motives would differ. Some persons participate in order to learn, to generate ideas, to improve dissatisfied products while some expect financial rewards (Füller et al., 2010, p. 101, Hoyer, 2010, p. 288, Verleye, 2015, p. 323, O’hern & Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 89). However, in our thesis, we believe that it would not be relevant to focus on a certain type of users. Therefore, we focus our thesis in taking into consideration all customers involved in the co-creation process in general.

2.2 The Co-Creation process in NPD

Previously, we have presented the customer co-creation which is related to the co-creation process leading to an overlap of definitions. To introduce the co-creation process broader, we characterize the co-creation process as a collaboration between organizations and individuals who share knowledge and information in order to discover opportunities to create new product while delivering value and benefits for each part involved.

2.2.1 Nature of co-creation

The co-creation process has affected the marketing field in highlighting the shift from good dominant logic (as it was in the traditional innovation), to the service dominant logic. Indeed, in the service dominant logic, consumers and customers are perceived as operant resources with knowledge and skills. Therefore, the relationship between the company and the customers is perceived as an exchange in terms of knowledge and skills and/or services in which a value is co-created (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 4). Von Hippel (2005, p. 66) discusses the customer value as “sticky information” by emphasizing the costs and the difficulty to transfer the information from one place to another as the information is tacit. Consequently, before, it was difficult for companies
to create customers experience as they were not able to understand the customer’s value.

However, companies have started to change their opinions about customers and their capacities to provide knowledge and skills and nowadays, they treat the customers as an entire part of NPD. Indeed, it has been shown that interacting with customers with co-creative market research techniques such as over the Internet, allows companies to discover new opportunities (Witell et al., 2011, p. 152). Furthermore, Narver et al. (2004, p. 335) distinguish the shift from a responsive market orientation toward a proactive market orientation. Indeed, in the closed NPD, firm seeks to discover and to understand customers’ needs and wants and to create new products built in the VoC in order to satisfy their expectations. In the co-creation process, the proactive market orientation is highlighted and represented by the companies who want to be “customer-driven” by determining the latent needs of their customers and discovering new opportunities over the marketplace, which is important to develop successful products (Narver et al., 2004, p. 336; Salomo et al., 2003, p. 457). By being proactive market oriented, the company is getting closer with its lead-users by doing market experiments (Witell et al., 2011, p. 141). This approach aims to grasp an important amount of information of spoken and unspoken needs. These latter are defined as the latent needs of customers and are difficult to determine for a company. Discovering these latent needs requires from the company to reach the lead users in collaborating with them in order to capture them and to have a better understanding (Kristensson et al., 2008, p. 488).

Further, Wittel et al. (2011, p. 143) distinguish the co-creation for others and the co-creation for use. The co-creation for use is made by a certain customer to reach his own benefit while the co-creation for others gather all customers aiming to generate ideas and to share knowledge while participating to NPD. In this co-creation process, the customers provide information about their own needs while suggesting ideas to solve them (Wittel et al., 2011, p. 144). In our study, we focus on the co-creation defined as for others by Wittel et al. (2011) as it has been described as the most suitable in NPD.

In a proactive market orientation, companies use methods such as the lead-user method in order to get information that customers already have linked with the value-in-use. By incorporating the knowledge in a certain context of use, the company is more willing to deliver an offer corresponding to the customers’ latent needs (Wittel et al., 2011, p. 145). Related to the idea, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004, p. 22) state the importance of the co-creation experience. This experience is based on the co-created value brought by the product and not only the product’s features that the company offers during a traditional purchase (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 22).

From a holistic perspective, the co-creation experience emerges from the building blocks of the co-creation process such as dialogue, access, risk assessment, and transparency which refer to the DART framework. Dialogue is characterized by the interactions between the company and the customers. It allows to get a deeper understanding of customers’ needs by listening to them and by recognizing their emotional, social and cultural different context of experiences. Dialogue requires to cultivate a certain communication of both own interests in an equal way and to share knowledge allowing the other part to learn. By doing so, a loyal community is created (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 23-24). Access results in the use of information and
tools such as access to data on the manufacturing process, design or quality processes. Customers become aware about the value chains, which is evolving compared to the traditional way where companies had all the control. Risk assessment takes into consideration the concept of risk and the likelihood to harm the customer. Assessing risk is a complex task for the company. By communicating actively with customers about risks and benefits, the company can increase customer’s awareness, which would lead to a higher level of trust between the company and the customers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 30). According to Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004, p. 30), customers look for more Transparency from the company. Von Hippel (2005, p. 48) discusses the concept of information asymmetry emerging from the difference of information held by the company and the one held by the customers. We believe by giving complete information to the customers, this asymmetry can decrease.

As aforementioned, the consumer experience goes beyond the product’s characteristics in order to obtain a rich experience and not only the concept of “feature rich” about the product. In order to create this experience, it is important to implement the DART blocks and also to carry out the dimensions of choices during the interactions between consumer and company. First, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004, p. 43) detail the need for the consumer to be able to interact with the company as they want, which means that the company has to be present across several channels in order to provide a certain quality of experience. Then, as the value differs from an individual to another, it is important from the company to provide them a certain availability and affordability and to offer them an amount of options in order the consumer to weight the choices they have and choose the most valuable for them. Third, the consumer looks for an easy transaction experience. Indeed, they want to interact with the company but in a safe and easy ways for them. Consequently, it seems more appreciable to be able to interact, for example, in their own language in order to gain time and to feel safe, or even to highlight the privacy of the interaction. The transactional efficiency could lead the consumer to a feeling of trust toward the company and thereby to a satisfying experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 46). Finally, the price stays a factor of choices for individuals and however the importance of this factor depends from an individual to another one. However, customers prefer to experience a product that they are willing to pay. Therefore, the price-experience relationship should be considered by the company when they co-create value with the customer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 48).

Going further, authors (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 68; Wittel et al., 2011, p. 143; Gustafsson et al., 2012, p. 314) discuss the importance to have an interactive dialogue between the customers and the company and thereby to learn, understand and share the customer's needs. The co-creation process leads to implement a “bidirectional, face to face, active communication” (Gustafsson et al., 2012, p. 314). This highlights the relevance of customers communities to create an experience environment. Therefore, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004, p. 71) state the need to encourage the experience in taking into consideration the levers to create a rich experience. Traditionally, NPD consists to deliver a product improved in terms of cost, quality, speed and modularity, while here, the experience innovation aims to deliver an experience environment by implement granularity (i.e. interactivity), extensibility (i.e. technologies), linkage (i.e. connectivity) and evolvability (i.e. learning) (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 71). These dimensions to encourage the creation of a co-creation experience has been confirmed by Verleye (2015, p. 322) who states that the
experience depends of the characteristics of the co-creation environment such as the technologization (i.e. access to online tools for co-creation tasks) and connectivity (i.e. access to the help from others) while adding the importance of individual characteristics. Indeed, he supports the fact that individual characteristics such as the expected benefits for the customers, and the customer role readiness (i.e. degree to which the individual is as a co-creator) affect the co-creation experience (Verleye, 2015, p. 322). In addition, Ind et al., (2013, p. 19) discuss the need to implement a successful co-creation environment which results of social and explorative conversations among individuals who can find common interests.

Furthermore, Payne et al. (2009, p. 382) discuss the co-creation experience in distinguishing the customer value creating process (i.e. activities in which the customer aims to accomplish a purpose), the supplier value creating process (i.e. co-creation opportunities) and the encounter (i.e. interactions during the relationship between companies and customers). The customer value creating process concerns two perspectives, the information process, and the experiential, highlighting the importance of the communities. The experiences are described as important because they encourage the customers to participate to the co-creation process. Then, the supplier value creating process is characterized by the challenge to provide customer experience that leads to customer satisfaction. Therefore, companies need to take the VoC entirely into consideration (Payne et al., 2009, p. 383). Encounters highlight the two ways communication between the company and the customers where they interact to create a mutual co-creation experience. They can be characterized as emotion-supporting encounters, cognition-supporting encounters and action-supporting encounters. Managing encounters in setting objectives allow to understand how customers and the company experience their relationship. For instance, the company Ikea that explains to their customers how to obtain the best value from its products such as with the assembly (Payne et al., 2009, p. 383). Then the relationship between the company and the customers allow to acquire a better experience.

### 2.2.2 Benefits of the co-creation process

According to Ind et al. (2013, p. 9) the co-creation process is defined as “an active, creative, and social process based on collaboration between organizations and participants that generates benefits for all and creates value for stakeholders”.

From an organization perspective, involving customers during NPD results in terms of many positive outcomes for the company. Indeed, by collaborating with customers, companies engage a communication in two sides, where customers provide information and knowledge to the company. This communication aims to have a flow of knowledge, information and skills between both parts. Indeed, for example, involving the leads users into the NPD stages provide to the company to develop more relevant and usable products (Ind & Coates, 2013, p. 91), successful products (Brockhoff, 2003, p. 478; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 31), to reduce the risk of failure (Ind & Coates, 2013, p. 91; Hoyer et al.; 2010, p. 292), to minimize the product development costs (Hoyer et al., 2010, p. 292) while allowing the company to gain in effectiveness and efficiency (Fang et al., 2008, p. 323) as the final product fits correctly with the customers needs. Furthermore, in matching customer expectations, the company is able to launch a product over the market which appears more acceptable and more appreciable for the customers (Joshi & Sharma, 2004, p. 55). Furthermore, by delivering a higher value to the consumers, and by increasing the communication, the
co-creation process can strengthen the relationship between the customers and the company (Hoyer, et al., 2010, p. 292). Indeed, the communication can lead to more transparency and thereby generates a relationship that appears more solid (Filieri, 2013, p. 50; Fang et al., 2008, p. 325) leading to a feeling of trust (Filieri, 2013, p. 50; Ind et al., 2013, p. 20), and encouraging loyalty (Cossio Silva, 2016, p. 1621; Sawhney et al., 2005, p. 14; Sheth et al., 2000, p. 57) toward the brand.

From a customer perspective, it has been noticed in the existing literature that authors (Etgar, 2008; Nambisan & Baron, 2009; Hoyer et al., 2010) state different customer motives to support their actions in participating to the co-creation process. The literature emphasizes the fact that those motives lead to different customer expectations from the process. Indeed, Hoyer et al. (2010, p. 288) distinguish different motives of participation depending of the stages of NPD. According to Nambisan & Baron (2009, p. 390 – 391), the customer’s motives lead to obtain hedonic benefits, cognitive or learning benefits, social benefits and personal benefits. In line with this idea, Füller (2010, p. 105) defines the intrinsic (e.g. curiosity, intrinsic play task) and the extrinsic motives (e.g. financial reward, personal needs) to participate to the co-creation activities. We believe that we can relate these motives to the several benefits described by Nambisan & Baron (2009). In addition, Etgar (2008, p. 101-103) gathers the benefits into three categories; economic benefits (e.g. cost reduction), social benefits (status and social esteem), and psychological benefits (e.g. fun, ethics, self-expression). Verleye (2015, p. 323) confirms the previous literature in concluding with five different benefits such as hedonic benefits (i.e. pleasurable experience), cognitive benefits (i.e. learning), social benefits (i.e. connectivity), personal benefits (i.e. better status and recognition), pragmatic benefits (i.e. products are closed to customers’ personal needs), and economic benefits (i.e. compensation in return to the effort). Then, the customer perceives the experience in relation to the degree to which the expected benefits is realized (Verleye, 2015, p. 324). Therefore, accomplishing the expected benefits results in a positive experience for the consumer. In the existing literature, authors (Füller, 2010, p. 105; Hoyer et al., 2010, p. 288; Nambisan and Baron, 2009, p. 391) stress strongly the importance of the psychological benefits, such as belong to a community, increase social esteem and status as a motive to co-create with a brand. Moreover, belonging to a community generates a higher commitment and a loyalty to the brand (Sawhney et al., 2005, p. 14). Consequently, participating in the co-creation process generally increases the customer satisfaction (Hsieh & Chang, 2016, p. 23).

### 2.2.3 Co-destruction

As previously mentioned, the co-creation process aims to obtain advantages and benefits for the company and for the customer. However, as Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004, p. 21) state that not all the co-creation experience results in positive outcomes. We believe that sometimes the process can be mismanaged and harmful for the relationship between the parts involved. Few studies have been conducted concerning the downsides of the co-creation process but are not focused on NPD. We believe it is still relevant for our study to review the few articles that are studying online communities and services industries. Additionally, authors did not expressly assign the impact of the negative aspects of co-creation on the relationship, which highlights our literature gap.

Moreover, few authors identify the term “co-destruction” while others use the term “dark sides” to discuss about the negative outcomes from the co-creation process.
Therefore, we believe that it is better for our research to focus on the term “downsides” in order to gather the information coming from all articles.

In the literature, the studies about the downsides of the co-creation have started with Plé and Chumpitaz Caceres (2010, p. 431) who assume the possibility that a value can be co-created, and also co-destroyed. Therefore, they settle a term, *co-destruction* in relation to their assumptions, and define it as “an interactional process between service systems that results in a decline in at least one of the systems’ well-being” (Plé & Chumpitaz Caceres, 2010, p. 431). This conceptual paper allows us to have an overview of the nature of the co-destruction process, which occurs during a service dominant logic, when one of the involved part failed to use the resources in an appropriate and expected manner for the other part (Plé and Chumpitaz Caceres, 2010, p. 432). They suggest that the co-destruction process results of misuses of available resources. Precisely, they distinguish two types of misuses; accidental and intentional. Accidental can be exemplified by a lack of knowledge of the customers during NPD, or by developing an incremental innovation when a disruptive innovation was intended, or by the presence of information asymmetry between the involved service systems (Plé and Chumpitaz Caceres, 2010, p. 433). The intentional misuse results in a desire to increase the wellbeing of one of the service systems to the detriment of another’s (Plé and Chumpitaz Caceres, 2010, p. 434).

In line with these previous authors, Echeverri and Skalén (2011) discuss the interactive value formation in practice. In doing so, the authors confirm the process described by Plé and Chumpitaz Caceres (2010) by identifying the co-destruction value in practice (Echeverri and Skalén, 2011, p. 355). Their article reports different interaction value practice such as informing, greeting, delivering, charging and helping. During these interactions, the value may be collaboratively co-destructed when there are incompatible elements of practice such as procedure, understanding and engagement, between customers and providers during the interactions (Echeverri and Skalén, 2011, p. 368).

On the other hand, Gebauer et al. (2013) have conducted two studies on the online communities and stress the conflicts that could occur during a co-creation contest. They found a couple of reasons who can explain the negative experience such as dissatisfaction and disappointment with the co-creation outcomes which result in a feeling of unfairness and a lack of transparency. Their participants who had a negative co-creation experience have had emotional feelings such as anger or frustration. They advise to implement a rich and interactive dialogue in order to understand participants opinions and to know their unspoken assumptions that hinder commitment and satisfaction (Gebauer et al., 2013, p. 1521).

Additionally, Smith (2013) discusses the customer perspective of the co-destruction process where it results in a failure to co-create expected value (p. 1893). That leads the customer to experience an unexpected resource loss in terms of material resources, self-related resources, social resources, and energies (i.e. time, money, knowledge, physical and emotional) (Smith, 2013, p. 1900- 1901). The unexpected resource loss has an impact on the behaviour of the customers and on their emotions. It has been reported that the relationship benefits (i.e. trust) would be affected as well. In the same idea, Heidenreich et al., (2015) have conducted a study in the service industries. This qualitative study reports a gap between the customers’ expectations and the actual
outcomes which leads to a negative disconfirmation that affects the customer satisfaction (Heidenreich et al., 2015, p. 284).

Consequently, we believe that the downsides of the co-creation process is a recent topic which is poorly investigated. Authors start to look for an understanding of the process which has resulted to conduct some researches on different sectors such as the online communities or the service industries. However, we can notice that any of the research focuses on the downsides and their impacts on the relationship between the companies and the customers, nor during NPD. In addition, we believe that this review is necessary and relevant in order to pinpoint the literature gap and also to guide our research on the downsides during NPD. Therefore, we use this review in order to have insights about the co-destruction.

2.3 The variables of the relationship

During our literature review, we have noticed that the marketing relationship between consumers and companies are characterized under two variables, trust and commitment. These variables have been detailed by Morgan and Hunt (1994). In addition to these variables, it has been stressed that the customer satisfaction has an impact also on the relationship. Therefore, we decided to review all these dimensions in order to have a complete overview about the relationship between customers and companies.

2.3.1 The notion of Trust

The notion of trust has been studied in several fields such as psychology or economics and the notion differs according to the fields and the authors (McEvily & Tortoriello, 2011). Due to this amount of definitions of trust, it is complex to have a clear and unique view of the notion. In most of the research, the concept of trust includes the idea of the importance of reliability and confidence (Moorman et al, 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Indeed, the authors Moorman et al. (1993, p. 83) describe the notion of trust by highlighting the willingness to rely on a exchange in whom one has confidence. Trust has also been defined as the confidence in the exchange partner’s reliability (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). These two definitions clearly feature the importance that trust is based on a certain confidence between the parts involved during a process of exchange. This confidence within the exchange depends on the sole willingness to be devoted entirely to the integrity and reliability of the relationship. Here, the notion of willingness is an important aspect of trust. Moorman et al. (1993, p. 82) do highlight that being trustworthy while being unwilling to rely on a partner, impact and limit trust.

It is known that trust is an important aspect for the success of a relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Keh & Xie, 2009; Martinez & Bosque, 2013). Indeed, implementing a trustworthy identity within a company is seen as a crucial task. The results of this implementation among the customers do positively impact the customer commitment (Keh & Xie, 2009, p. 735). Moreover, authors such as Reichheld and Schefter (2000, p. 107) tend to remind that trust has always been important for a company, especially in order to gain the loyalty of customers. In this study, we do think that trust is an important aspect of the relationship between a customer and a company in order to co-create. In our study, we define the notion of customer trust as described
by Mayer et al. (1995, p. 715) as the perceptions of the customers towards the ability, the benevolence and the integrity that the company has.

### 2.3.2 The notion of Commitment

The notion of commitment is very vague and has been studied in different views such as organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 1993; Ellemers, 2001), psychological (O’Driscoll et al., 2006) and customer relationship oriented (Moorman et al. 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The field of study provides us a variety of definitions of commitment very interesting to analyze. Indeed, Moorman et al. (1992, p.139) provide a notion of commitment to the relationship as the willingness to ensure and maintain a valued relationship. Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 23) enhance this notion stating that a relational commitment is when a relationship is important enough to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining the relationship. This concept of relational commitment integrates the aspect of pride in belonging to this very relationship and the willingness of the customers to be part of this relation as friends of the company (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). By analyzing these two notions of commitment, we can notice the shared view concerning the importance of the customer willingness to ensure the relationship. Interestingly, this aspect can be found also in the notion of trust. Moreover, the integration of the notion of pride and belonging added to the willingness in the customer commitment can be seen as a basic aspect of commitment since these same notions are found in organizational commitment described by Ellemers (2001). The notion of commitment can be studied more in-depth when it comes to its components. Indeed, Gundlach et al. (1995) provide to the field of study three components. First, the instrumental component concerns the stake of value from the relationship (Gundlach et al., 1995, p. 79). Second, is the attitudinal component, corresponding to the identification and attachment to the value of an organization (Gundlach et al, 1995, p. 80). Third, the temporal component, takes into consideration the importance of maintaining a relationship on a long-term period (Gundlach et al, 1995, p. 80).

As trust, commitment is seen as an important aspect of a relationship. Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 22) theorize that commitment is paramount to each relational exchange including a company and any other partners. Knowing this aspect, we can conclude that commitment is a key aspect of a strong relationship between a company and its customers. Using the notions and explanations previously mentioned, we decided to define commitment as:

*The pride and feeling of belonging to a certain relationship ensuring the customer’s willingness to pursue this relationship in order to gain value from it on a specific time frame.*

This definition of commitment does take into account all the components of commitment such as temporal, attitudinal, and instrumental dimensions described by Gundlach et al. (1995). It appears for us important to include the notion of gaining value from the relationship since the co-creation process does provide value to the customers through the experience of new products.
2.3.3 Relationship through trust and commitment

As aforementioned, in this study, we define trust as,
*The customer’s approach toward the capacity, the willingness, and integrity of the company (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 715)*

According to the existing literature, we describe commitment with our own definition as,

*The pride and feeling of belonging to a certain relationships ensuring the customer’s willingness to pursue this relationship in order to gain value from it*

Giving these notions does not allow us to clearly provide an understanding of their importance on the relationship and their roles. When it comes to identify the interlink trust and commitment and the notion of relationship, a major study has to be taken into consideration. The work done by Morgan & Hunt (1994) has tremendously impacted the field of research of the marketing relationship. By theorizing the importance of the two variables trust and commitment, the authors have been referenced as major precursors leading their theory to be used at a large extent. The conclusion of their study states that unsuccessful integration of the effects of trust and commitment in any relationship study would inevitably results in an improper conclusion regarding the impact of commitment and trust on the outcomes (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 31). Given this conclusion, it appears that trust and commitment are paramount to integrate to our study due to our desire to pinpoint certain downsides of the co-creation process on the relationship between the customers and the company. It seems crucial to fathom in which extent these two variables are seen as significant while studying relationships. Moreover, being aware of the precursors of relationship commitment and trust and of the factors and determinants influencing these notions can be important for this study.

The process of developing a relationship can be complex for companies. Dwyer et al. (1987) come up with a description of a relationship development process in five phases. The first phase is called *awareness*, this phase suggests that one of the partner recognizes the feasibility of an exchange with another partner (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 15). The second phase is called *exploration*; benefits, obligations and burdens of the exchange between the partners are considered. This phase is composed by the attraction of the rewards of the relationship; the communication and bargaining, which is perceived as the willingness to negotiate aspects of their attraction (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 16); power and justice are perceived as the ability to achieve intended goals; norms development in which partners set the ground of their exchanges (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 17); and expectations development that will either enhance or diminish contractual solidarity. The third phase is the *expansion* introducing the idea of a perpetual gain of benefits through the relationships and when the dependence between the partner increases (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 18). The fourth phase is the *commitment* defining the explicit or implicit agreement of relational continuity between the partners (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 19). The last phase is called the *dissolution*. It is the possibility of disengagement of one of the partners that will breakup the relationship, and can have an important impact when this dissolution happens after that the partners attained interdependence (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 19). We suggest that when the co-creation process occurs, the first and second phases have been completed while the third and fourth stages are on process. It is for us to understand the downsides of the co-creation process that can cause the final phase of dissolution.
Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 22) call trust and commitment the Key Mediating Variable (KMV) due to the importance these variables have on the relationship. Indeed, the authors state that the relationship commitment and trust are paramount to successfully create relationship marketing with customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22). By being key mediating variable, trust and commitment give support to companies in order to work with their partners such as customer in a long-term perspective. Due to this willingness for long-term relationship, trust and commitment enhance the company's investments in order to cooperate with their partners with the objectives to obtain potential benefits. Moreover, it helps the companies to be seen by their partners as prudent concerning high-risk actions (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22). This last element pertaining risk is very important and has been confirmed by Lacey (2007, p. 316) stating that the ability to rely on a company will provide a certain customer stability and will have a substantive effect on risk and vulnerability diminution. In order words, trust and commitment are key variables of relationships that enhance a long-term cooperative behavior towards each other. Moreover, it has been found that both commitment and trust, gathered together, develop a better productivity and effectiveness (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22). Interestingly, we can link some elements described with the co-creation process. Indeed, the concept of investment in a relationship that has the ability to create certain benefits, the willingness to forge a long-term relationship, and the notion of risks perception are the elements that can be pinpointed in the co-creation process. This emphasizes the importance of the key mediating variable within a relationship between the customers a company. It gives us a hint concerning the integration of these two variables in our study.

The term Key Mediating Variable has been given due to the position of Morgan & Hunt (1994) claiming that trust and commitment are mediating variables between several major precursor elements that have an influence on these variables. The first element is the relationship termination cost suggests that the customer's anticipation of high switching costs gives rise the customer's interest in maintaining a quality relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 14). In other words, by facing a high termination costs, it can impact the partner’s commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 24). The second element is the relationship benefits, it is stated that when a company receives superior benefits from their partnership in terms of customer satisfaction and product profitability and performance, it will impact positively the commitment within the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25). The third element is shared values; it is advocated by Dwyer et al. (1987, p. 21) that this element contributes to the good advancement of trust and commitment of the relationship. Thus, if there are shared values between the partners, then commitment and trust will increase. The fourth element is the communication, the authors Moorman et al. (1993, p. 84) propose that communication is an element that encourages trust by adjusting the perceptions and expectations into the relationship. The fifth element is called opportunistic behavior, this element is seen as an indirect factor because it does not provide a positive impact but it is seen as a potential risk. Opportunistic behavior, if happening during the relationship, can impact negatively the relationship commitment and the trust to the partner (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 23; Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25). We do believe that these elements used by Morgan & Hunt (1994) and Dwyer et al. (1987) are important in order to conduct our study. Indeed, the elements such as shared values, communication, relationship benefits and opportunistic behavior can be seen as factors of the relationship during the co-creation process since these aspects can be linked to
the co-creation process. It is for us relevant to know if these elements are impacted while studying the downsides of the co-creation process.

As aforementioned, the customers and company are both willing to commit and trust if they can get certain benefits from the relationship. Relationship does have benefits outcomes and consequences on specific constructs. Relational benefits are an approach suggesting that during a relationship both customer and company must benefit in order to get involved in a long term relation (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2002, p. 234). This statement is confirmed by Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 22) arguing that the relationship commitment and trust is paramount to successfully create relationship marketing with customers in order to obtain potential profitability. These benefits can be various and can either be directly linked to the relationship in itself or the core service (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2002, p. 234). The authors Hennig-thurau et al. (2002, p. 234) debate that beside relational benefits, we can also take into account the relationship quality. Indeed, relationship quality is composed by several elements described by the literature. It appears that the customer satisfaction, trust and commitment to the relationship with the company are the elements the most important (Baker et al.,1999; Hennig-Thurau et al, 2002). These findings in the literature emphasize our willingness to focus on the notions of trust and commitment while studying relationship. Indeed, as trust and commitment are seen as two relevant elements for relationship quality, we do know that relational benefits and relationship quality are two important constructs to the relationship. It appears also important to know what are the basic outcomes of the relationship.

Morgan & Hunt provide to the literature four mains outcomes of the relationship while taking into account trust and commitment. The first outcome is *the acquiescence and propensity to leave*. Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 25) explain that acquiescence is positively influenced by relationship commitment. It is stated that the propensity to leave is the perception of the probability that a partner will terminate the relationship in the future. (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 26). The second outcome is *cooperation*; this element is seen as being influenced directly by commitment and trust. The concept of cooperation is the willingness to commit and the desire to make a relationship working (i.e having a dispute between partners and still cooperating because both parts have a high termination costs) (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25). The third element is *functional conflict*; this refers to resolve disputes amicably. Authors claim that trust allows partners to perceive that the conflict will be functional (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25). *Decision-making uncertainty* is the fourth element; it is the perception of who has enough information to make the key decisions, who can predict the consequences and who has confidence to take it (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25). In other words, decision-making uncertainty is related to who has the knowledge and who has the confidence to take decision, and trust does have an impact on this since the more you have trust, the less you will have uncertainty concerning decision making (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25). Those outcomes seem to us interesting to take into consideration for our study, especially cooperation since it could be relevant to know if there is any downsides affecting trust and commitment that will impact cooperation and functional conflict during the co-creation process.
2.3.4 Customer Satisfaction

Nowadays, it appears clear that the customers know more. They are more informed and educated, their criteria of selection are stricter due to the great capacity of choice (Vega-Vazquez et al., 2013, p. 1945). Due to this, customer satisfaction is an important aspect to take into consideration. Customer satisfaction can be defined with two perspectives: transaction-specific and cumulative perspective (Anderson et al., 1994, p. 54). Transaction-specific perspective is described as the customer satisfaction concerning the post-choice evaluation of a specific purchase occasion (Anderson et al., 1994, p. 54) while the cumulative perspective is described as the overall evaluation of the total purchase and consumption of a good or service (Anderson et al., 1994, p. 54). For our research, we do think that having a cumulative perspective of the customer satisfaction is more accurate than a transaction-specific. Indeed, according to Anderson et al. (1994, p. 54), it is stated that a cumulative perspective provides more indication on the firm’s past, current and future performance with a focus on the relationship between the company and the customer. These authors indicated that improving quality and customer satisfaction has to be seen as an investment rather than an expense due to the stream of revenue that loyalty and customer satisfaction can provide (Anderson et al., 1994, p. 64).

Linking customer satisfaction with co-creation is very interesting. As stated above, co-creation is described as a creative and social collaboration process between a company and the customers (Piller et al., 2010, p. 21). It appears that co-creation allows the company to develop new product that fits the customer’s needs and increase their satisfaction. Indeed, as Piller et al. (2010, p. 2) explain, a company can have access to two different types of information in order to co-create which is the information on the customers and the information on the solution possibilities. By using that information provided by the customers, a company has the opportunity to create products or services that correspond to customers’ needs. Moreover, it is argued by Vargo & Lusch (2004, p. 11) that companies only offer the value proposition, which is completed with the participation of the customers during NPD to create the value of the good. When a company considers the consumer as their main focus, the value creation is only possible when the customers consume a good while an unsold good has no value (Gummesson, 1998, p. 247).

It has been shown that including the customer’s active participation in the value creation process has a positive influence on customer satisfaction with the firm’s service (Vega-Vazquez, 2013, p. 1951). Indeed, if we reflect on what have been stated above, it appears that by involving the customer within a co-creation process, a company create a service or a product that fits with the customer’s needs. Because of that, their satisfaction is a consequence of this process (Grönroos, 2008, p. 299). This is emphasized by Jaworski & Kohli (2006, p. 117) stating that there is a high probability to increase the customer satisfaction when a product or service is co-created. Moreover, involving the customer in the co-creation process allows to increase the satisfaction, and to create a stronger relationship between the customer and the company (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 13). It is clear that the field of research agree on the correlation between the co-creation process and the increase of customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, it seems relevant to express that during a high co-created service, there is an important amount of time, effort and knowledge provided by the customers (Hoyer et al., 2010, p. 288). For this reason, Heidenreich et al. (2015, p. 281) claimed that the more the customer gets involved and invests in the process of co-creation of services
and the more the failure is likely to generate greater negative impacts on satisfaction. The customers can experience a feeling of blaming themselves as a response of the failure (Heidenreich et al., 2015, p. 289).

For these reasons, it appears relevant to include customer satisfaction within our study. Indeed, we have seen that co-creation can increase the customer satisfaction due to the creation of products or services that fit with the customer’s needs. Moreover, according to Randall et al. (2011, p. 7) customer satisfaction, as well as future intention, (i.e. the customer will remain or not within the relationship) are mediated by trust and commitment. As we already postulated, trust and commitment are two variables that we take into consideration in our research. Then, due to the connection that trust, commitment and customer satisfaction have with co-creation, we believe it is significant to include the variable customer satisfaction in our research.

2.4 Summary of the theoretical framework

In a nutshell, during our literature review, we highlight the assessment of NPD which has caused the shift of the customer role into the process. Indeed, authors (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 2) state the new role of the customer by defining her/him as an informed, connected, active individual. This increasing participation of customers in NPD leads to the co-creation process. An amount of authors investigates this field in order to understand the concept which is characterized by experiencing the product and not only consume it. Literature agree on the beneficial aspects that the co-creation can provide by creating value for the customers and for the companies. Enterprises can increase the performance of product, reduce costs and failures while gaining competitive advantage. On the other hand, a positive co-creation experience results in achievement of the expected benefits by the customers such as psychological and social benefits. By answering the expected benefits from the customers, the company is able to deliver a value to them. However, it has been shown that the co-creation process does not always end up successfully. Indeed, some authors determine the term co-destruction as a misuse of the process, resulting to negative consequences for the customers and the company, and thereby the relationship.

Further, we have a clear and better understanding of the relationship process and the importance of trust and commitment as we can see in the Figure 1. We demonstrate the importance of the variable of trust and commitment using the commitment-trust theory elaborated by Morgan & Hunt (1994). Then, we suggest that the co-creation process takes place during the phases of awareness, expansion and commitment of the relationship development process described by Dwyer et al. (1987). It appears that our research would take place between those phases before the phase of dissolution. Still, by using the research of Morgan & Hunt (1994) we also found interesting the link between the co-creation process and the importance of trust and commitment as key mediating variable. This aspect emphasizes our desire to introduce these elements in our study. We notice that some elements precursor and influencing trust and commitment during a relationship can be linked to some variables of the co-creation process such as shared values, relationship benefits and opportunistic behavior (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). These elements allow us to potentially link the downsides of co-creation and their impacts on a relationship. Through our literature, we discover the importance of relationship quality and relation benefits stated by Morgan
& Hunt (1994) and Hennig-Thurau et al (2002). This discovery allows us to support our choice to integrate trust and commitment in our study. Finally, we describe the different outcomes of the relationship through the research of Morgan & Hunt (1994). We suggest that it could be interesting to confront those outcomes such as cooperation or functional conflict to our study. Moreover, as we can see in Figure 6, we decide to include the variable customer satisfaction due to the connection we found with trust and commitment. Further, the reason we include customer satisfaction is the likely increasing of the satisfaction as a result of the co-creation process.

![Figure 1: Theoretical Framework](image-url)
3. Scientific Methodology

This chapter aims to discuss our philosophical positions, where we define how we perceive the nature of the social world and the nature of knowledge. Further, we include the research approach that we had to conduct the research, and the research design. This chapter ends with an explanation of the choice of theories and sources criticism.

3.1 Choice of subject

Both of the researchers are studying a Master program at Umeå School of Business and Economics with a similar academic background in marketing during their bachelor. Currently, Guillaume Pera is enrolled in the MSc in Business Development and Internationalization while Charlotte Chéron is studying in the MSc in Marketing. Furthermore, both of the researchers have a minor in management with select courses in innovation management and new product development added in. Together, we believe to have a significant academic background in the fields of entrepreneurship, marketing, management, and innovation. Consequently, the mutual knowledge has been an advantage for us leading to a conjoint desire to interlink the researchers’ fields.

The select courses in innovation led us to gain additional knowledge, and to get a deeper understanding of the importance to innovate for the companies to compete in the marketplace. Moreover, one of us has had a practical experience with the co-creation process since he has discovered the concept during an internship. However, the co-creation process was implemented in the service industry within a software company. Therefore, we are aware of the broad scope of the subject which it is not a standalone research field, in which researchers can incorporate different activities such as marketing or entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, our participation in the select innovation management course led us to learn about the the concepts of open-innovation and co-creation which result to involve users in order to provide knowledge and capabilities to the companies to determine new opportunities of success. As a result, we have found the concept of co-creation as a full learning potential for themselves, leading us to identify the process as very intriguing and interesting for our research, strengthening our choices to research a gap in this field. As a result of our literature researches, we found out an existing literature gap in the co-creation studies leading us to develop our thesis on that topic, fitting with our academic backgrounds.

During our literature research, we have acquired in-depth knowledge and understandings of the field of the co-creation process from its drivers and requirements to the expected benefits. Consequently, we identify the co-creation process as a game-changer for the company, bringing new knowledge and capacities to build a product aligned with customer needs. We believe in the efficiency and effectiveness of the process to create value with customers, conducting the companies to gain in competitive advantage and maximise profit, instead of developing products in the traditional manners. Nevertheless, the co-creation process cannot be effortless. We did give a special interest to the downsides that could harm and impact the relationship between customers and the company. Consequently, from a common concern, we have
chosen to investigate the potential downsides of the co-creation process during new product development.

### 3.2 Pre-understandings

According to Nyström & Dahlberg (2001, p. 339), researchers have to perform their research while taking into consideration the presuppositions they already have in order to remind them to be opened during the research. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that pre-understandings result from researchers’ understanding; experience or prior encounters (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 414) and are difficult to reach (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2011, p. 342). However, during an inquiry, researchers have to be aware about their own thoughts, and their point of views. Consequently, we have been aware about our personal prior experiences, academic and professional backgrounds. Indeed, we both studied marketing during few years, and therefore we had the opportunities to apply our knowledge gained during our internships. As a result of our mutual pre-understandings, we have decided to choose a subject concerning co-creation, new product development, and the relationship between customers and the company.

During our bachelor, we have had the opportunity to discover the field of innovation, in which we have learnt more during the elective courses of our master. Consequently, before to write this thesis, we were aware about the advantages for the companies to innovate, and the importance of the marketing department to strategically and correctly launch the new product. Moreover, during the academic years, we have had the opportunities to work with the co-creation process in the service industries. Thanks to internships, we believe to have a practical experience around the co-creation process, allowing us to understand the concept, and also to identify the benefits of the process while pinpoint the challenges.

During the thesis, we have used this previous knowledge as our pre-understandings in order to interpret data (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2011, p. 345). Therefore, we have been reflective about the method we used and the meanings of data. Hence, we have explained as much as possible the methodologies used during the thesis. Moreover, due to these different backgrounds and experiences, we were aware of the potential bias that the thesis can encounter. For this reason, we have ensured to have an open-minded on-going discussion to avoid any impact of the pre-understanding throughout the whole process of the study (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2011, p. 345). Furthermore, we have developed a strong interest about co-creation and new product development allowing us to stay focus on the study and giving us the desire to acquire more knowledge about the research field and thereby ensure to achieve the objectives of the study.

### 3.3 Philosophical position

The research philosophy is determined in relation with the research question of the thesis. It is crucial that authors choose best philosophical standpoints related to their research question and the purpose of the research. The assumptions raised from the research philosophy allow the researchers to emphasize their research strategy and also the selected methods to answer their research question in relation with their own approach of the world, more precisely the different views of reality, social beings and
knowledge (Hunton and Ozanne, 1988, p. 508). The research philosophy involves two philosophical branches, ontology and epistemology.

### 3.3.1 Ontology
Ontology determines the authors’ assumptions about the nature of social reality, which is either objective and external to the individual or subjective and constructed with individuals (Long et al., 2000, p. 190). The different aspects of the ontological philosophy are presented through a spectrum, and are extending from objectivism to subjectivism.

In social research, objectivism is determined in believing that the social actors exist and are independent from each other’s while subjectivism, the opposite, is defined in considering the fact that the social phenomena are created through the perceptions of the social actors and their social interactions between them (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 22; Saunders et al., 2009, p. 110).

Furthermore, Flick (2006, p. 78) discusses the term of social constructivism as a position which is related to the subjectivism philosophy. Indeed, social constructivism supports the fact that the creation of a phenomenon occurs through the social actors and their actions. Therefore, social constructivism refers to have a social construction where social actors can have different interpretations and meanings of the world and thereby believe in the fact that many realities exist (Hunton and Ozanne, 1988, p. 509). These interpretations can affect their actions and the interactions with each other’s.

By investigating the downsides of the co-creation process, we deem that our ontological standpoint is to have a social constructivism view. Indeed, the co-creation process takes place by involving the customers during new product development. Therefore, our research question determines the presence of social actors who collectively create value. However, these social actors, i.e. customers and companies can experience the process in different ways, and thereby one part involved in co-creation can experience negatively the process while another can be satisfied. Thus, by having a constructivism position, we believe that the social actors involved in our research can have different interpretations and perceptions of the process which could affect the relationship between them.

### 3.3.2 Epistemology
Epistemology standpoints refer to the basis of knowledge (Long et al., 2000, p. 190) and determine what knowledge is acceptable or not for the authors while conducting their research (Space & Spencer, 2003, p. 13). The two opposites are represented by the knowledge seen as objective and available for everyone and the knowledge seen as subjective and affected by individual’s experience (Long et al., 2000, p. 190). Going further, Saunders et al., (2009, p. 113) discuss three different aspects, positivism, interpretivism and realism. Positivism concerns the natural sciences where researchers observe the social reality to collect data in order to determine hypotheses. These hypotheses have to be confirmed or refuted in order to develop a theory that will be tested later. Indeed, positivists want to find out conditions, causes and effects in order to generalize laws (Hunton and Ozanne, 1988, p. 511). Realism corresponds to the philosophical standpoint where the reality is independent of the researcher’s mind. This position requires the understanding of collected data and thereby demands a scientific approach. Further, it exists two aspects of the realism standpoint, the direct realism, i.e.
what the researcher experiences the reality and the world with his/her senses while the critical realism corresponds to what the researcher experiences of the reality are expressed by the sensations rather than feelings (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 114). Finally, the interpretivist’ stance supports the idea that the business world is complex and changing and cannot be rule by laws as the physical sciences do or distinguish a cause from an effect as the positivism (Hunton and Ozanne, 1988, p. 512). Therefore, in this view, the researcher seeks to understand the difference between the social actors, i.e. humans, and to determine motives, meanings and reasons (Hunton and Ozanne, 1988, p. 511) with an empathetic position where the researchers have to be transparent toward their own assumptions of the world (Space and Spencer, 2003, p. 17).

As researchers, we believe that our epistemology position is to stand with an interpretivism view in which we think that the company and the customers, i.e. the social actors of the co-creation process can interact together but however can experience the process differently. Therefore, we believe that our research question belongs to have this view in order to understand the differences between the social actors involved within our research, and thereby understand what are the impacts of these differences on the relationship.

3.4 Research Approach

The philosophical standpoints lead researchers to determine the research approach. We previously have mentioned our positions in terms of ontology and epistemology, which are constructivism and interpretivism, respectively. Indeed, Morgan & Smircich (1980, p. 49) have demonstrated that the research approach, and all other approaches to the social sciences depend of the assumptions of the researchers in regard to their ontology and epistemology positions. In line with this idea, Space and Spencer (2003, p. 14) determine the research approach as a debate concerning the manner in which the knowledge is obtained during the thesis. It exists several approaches a research can engage in. The most common approaches to conduct a research are the deductive and the inductive approaches.

A deductive approach is used when a specific theoretical position is made before any collection of data, and results in the use of evidence allowing to have a conclusion (Space and Spencer, 2003, p. 14). This approach can be used to develop a serie of hypotheses to test in order to come up with a conclusion that will either refute or verify the formed hypotheses (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010, p. 316). Thomas (2006, p. 238) also endorsed the same standpoint by explaining that during a deductive approach, the researcher will investigate in analyzing data and comparing them to previous hypotheses or assumptions developed by the researchers. It is clearly stated by Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 11) that if a researcher comes up with hypotheses, which will be confronted to some empirical collection, then the researcher is practicing a deduction approach. From the different authors, we can notice a common stance concerning the deduction approach, which aims clearly to verify or refute hypotheses made from specific theoretical framework. For our study, we have preferred to have first, a global understanding of the field, which appears for us to be the foundations on which we have determined specific aspects to conduct our research. Consequently, we did not chose to come up with hypotheses to test in order to verify or refute a theory. However, since some studies are connected to our research, we believe that we could support our
findings in keeping in mind the existing research. Consequently, we could conclude in verifying or refuting the existing research related to our topic.

On the other hand, an inductive approach is defined by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 41) as the development of theories after collecting data. These theories will be related to existing theories (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 61). In order words, conducting an inductive approach is related to building a theory. Indeed, researchers will first collect data, which is later used to formulate a new theory (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 126). Space & Spencer (2003, p.14) indicate that the theory is led by the observation and the empirical finding as conclusion of the research. Interestingly, by conducting an inductive approach, more than developing theories, the researchers will have a direct look at the human interpretation on the social world (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 126; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 13). In other words, by choosing an inductive approach, the aim is to get a better understanding of specific phenomena that would conduct to a theory development. Ketokivi & Mantere (2010, p. 316) validate this aspect by stating that an inductive often concerns the fulfillment of a gap in the theory by untested theories.

For this thesis, we believe that the inductive approach is the most appropriate and relevant. Indeed, our main goal is to fulfil a gap in the research concerning the downsides of co-creation during new product development. These elements are seen as social phenomenon and involve human interpretations. However, we believe that to build our interview guide, we based our themes and questions in relation to our literature review. By doing so, we are aware that we have had a deductive approach when developing our interview guide. Nevertheless, in this thesis, we generally adopt an inductive approach in order to get a rich understanding of the matter and come up with a theory, which could be tested later with a quantitative study.

### 3.5 Research Design

According to Flick (2006, p. 135), the research design raises the questions about how to plan the inquiry in order to answer to the research question and the purpose. It has been identified three different types of research design. The design of a research is interlinked with three variables, such as ontology, epistemology and the research approach. The qualitative method requires to have a subjective standpoint as ontological philosophy, an interpretivist position as epistemological philosophy and an inductive research approach (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 31). The mix method is rather associated with a realist standpoint as ontology, interpretivist position as epistemology and the research approach can be either deductive or inductive. A mix method results of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Through a mix-method, the researcher can get a better understanding of a specific subject (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 151). In another hand, the quantitative method is correlated with an objectivism position as ontology, a positivism epistemology and a deductive research approach (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 41).

As aforementioned, during the writing of the thesis, the authors have a subjectivism ontology, a interpretivism epistemology and an inductive research approach. As a result of these elements, we believe that a qualitative research design appears to be more relevant for the topic. In conducting a qualitative research, we have been able to collect relevant data from the different actors involved with the co-creation process and new
product development. Moreover, the research question and the purpose of the thesis imply the generation of a new theory concerning the potential downsides of the co-creation process during new product development, corresponding to fulfill an existing gap in the literature. Consequently, we assume that the quantitative research is not relevant and adequate. This aspect echoes with Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 35) explaining that with a qualitative method, researchers will produce theories and not testing theories. Furthermore, by following Golafshani (2003, p. 600) who states that by conducting a qualitative method, a researcher will be focus on explanation and understanding. In this study, we are looking for analyzing meanings and phenomena in order to gain a deep understanding on how the downsides of the co-creation can affect the relationship between the customer and the company. For these reasons, we believe that a qualitative method is relevant for our research.

However, we are aware that the generalization of a qualitative study can be seen as complex. Indeed, when using an inductive approach, we have to be aware that it is difficult to be sure whether our reasoning preserves truth or not, while a deduction it appears more feasible (Lukka & Kasanen, 1995, p. 73). Moreover, due to our epistemology, it can also affect the generalization since having an interpretivism epistemology implies focusing on subjective meanings and social phenomena by trying to understand the reality behind the details of the situation (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 119). Still, it is stated that authors can claim generalization while conducting an inductive research by using substantial knowledge from prior studies and the aspects of the phenomenon under study (Lukka & Kasanen, 1995, p. 86).

### 3.6 Literature search & Source of criticism

A qualitative study can be perceived as the desire to discover new fields and to explore new areas to the social sciences and to the academic research (Flick, 2006, p. 57). Building on that, we have chosen to review and to treat the existing literature in our field of study. We believe the literature helped us to have an overview of data we have gathered, to enhance our sensitivity to manage data, to have an orientation in our field, and to formulate our interview’ questions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp. 49-52).

It has been important to use existing literature to build our argumentation (Flick, 2006, p. 62). We have conducted literature researches in a way to obtain relevant articles and book and to avoid any loss of original meaning to explain a concept, a theory or an idea from an author. We believe it is important for the well-being of the thesis to take the validity and the objectivity of the sources used into consideration. Consequently, we have decided to not have any secondary references in our thesis because we believe they are unreliable. We only have used primary sources in the field of co-creation and new product development. In doing so, we have taken the source criticism into account in order to ensure the credibility of this study. Moreover, during the empirical data collection, researchers can combine primary and secondary data. Primary data is the collection of data during our study in order to provide an answer to our research question; these primary data are collected through observations, interviews or questionnaires (Saunders et al, 2009, p. 258). The secondary data are defined as the books, articles, and journals that already collect specific information and data from previous researches (Saunders et al, 2009, p. 256). For our study, we have chosen to
only collect primary data and not secondary data, because they appear for us more 
authentic than secondary data.

According to Flick (2006, p. 63), the research of relevant existing literature depends of 
the subject of the researchers. In order to have a pertinent literature review, we have 
chosen existing research in diverse ways in order to have a variety in data and to get a 
broader perspective of the topic. To do so, we have used several databases via Umeå 
University’s library such as SAGE, JSTOR, EBSCO, ELSEVIER, Science Direct, and 
EMERALD Insight. These databases deliver peer-reviewed scientific and academic 
articles. Further, another tool, Google Scholar, helps researchers to have an access to 
scientific researches. This online tool is efficient because it allowed us to get a better 
view of the field in completing the lack of certain academic research of the university 
library database.

In order to find scientific articles, we have used the content of certain reference list of 
the existing literature. It allows us to discover new authors, and therefore access to the 
primary sources. This method is very fruitful to have an extent of the literature and to 
get a rich review. Indeed, by reading literature and taking into consideration their 
reference list, we have been able to broad our own literature review. For this reason, 
most of the books and articles that we have read, have been cited a considerable 
amount of time and have been written by noticeable researchers. Further, when it 
comes to research on database, keywords are very significant in order to concentrate on 
a specific literature and to improve the effectiveness of the literature search. In order to 
find our theories, we have used precise terms such as co-creation, co-destruction, trust, 
commitment, relationship, relational marketing, satisfaction, new product development, 
customer involvement, and customer participation. By using these methods combined 
with using specific databases, we have been able to find and to use relevant literature.

3.7 Choice of theories

Our research question aims to point out the downsides of the co-creation process on the 
relationship between a company and its customers during new product development. 
Therefore, we have had to gather several theories in order to have all the information 
needed to conduct our interviews. This information comes from the literature review, 
which seems essential to generate strong arguments and to show what researches have 
been previously conducted. We believe that it is important to point out the relevance of 
our theories for our research. Consequently, we have supported our research based on 
relevant theories around the topic.

The theoretical framework begins by discussing the assessment of the new product 
development, which has been influenced by the improvement of technologies and 
thereby by the raise of active consumers. This evolution in the business world leads the 
researchers to discuss the term of customer co-creation which is defined as “a 
collaborative NPD activity in which customers actively contribute and/or select the 
content of a new product offering” (O’hern & Rindfleisch, 2015, p. 86). We have 
chosen to guide our research with this definition because it takes into consideration the 
main themes of our research question. Then, we found it important to emphasize the 
different customer co-creation processes present in the existing literature.
We agree on the importance to present the principles of the co-creation process. First, this process has been defined by Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004). They have developed the DART building blocks framework, which represent the dimensions to highlight when a company wants to experience the concept and establish a strong relationship with its customers. Indeed, many authors agree on the benefits of the co-creation process on the relationship between company and customers. Because of it, we decided to discuss the positives outcomes that both parts can receive during the process.

For our research, we are looking to figure out the downsides of the co-creation during NPD on the relationship between stakeholders. Some articles present a new theory concerning the downsides, which is called co-destruction and sometimes named under the term, dark sides of the co-creation. The term co-destruction has been given by Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres (2010) who describe the process in a conceptual manner. Some studies have been conducted to investigate this process in-depth. For instance, we have found a study based on the consequences of a mismanaged co-creation with a customer’s perspective. Further, another study has been done in conducting the research in the service industries. Through this review, we highlighted our existing gap in the literature, and we used those findings to have an overview of the downsides in the service industries such as online websites and communities.

Further, we specify our research by investigating the management of the relationship between customers and companies. We do think that it is important to stress the concerning variables of the marketing relationship with the Commitment-Trust Theory. However, the terms, trust and commitment, can be defined in many ways leading to confusion. Therefore, we have chosen to create our own definition based on the previous meanings given by authors, which will guide our thesis. We consider these variables as the foundations of a relationship that we could relate to the co-creation process where a relationship between customer and companies is present. This is supported by Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22) who developed these components as the Key Mediating Variables, which influence positively or negatively the relationship. Further, our theory claims that trust and commitment are mediating variable of customer satisfaction. For this reason, we integrate the variable customer satisfaction in our research.

By gathering the theories, we can get a deeper understanding on the relationship between companies and customers which takes place during the co-creation process, and thereby point out the importance of the Trust and Commitment to maintain a positive relationship and its benefits such as loyalty. Further, in order to fulfill our research, we are able to discover and to adapt these relevant theories to our research in order to understand the downsides of the process and what can hinder or break the relationship between the both involved parts.
4. Practical Method

This chapter aims to present the way we have conducted our research and collected our empirical data. Through the chapter, we give an explanation of each method we used and we conclude on the ethical considerations that we have taken into consideration during our study.

4.1 Qualitative data collection method

Within a qualitative method, researchers must approach the participants through interviews in order to understand the respondents’ lives and their own perspectives with their own words (Kvale, 1996, p. 70). In doing so, the researcher is able to describe the respondents’ experiences with interpretations and meaning of the phenomena (Kvale, 1996, p. 30). It exists different techniques of interviewing, structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews. The choice of the techniques is justified by the research topic, purpose and the objectives the researchers want to achieve through their research. Indeed, the researchers would conduct structured interviews, which are defined as standardized with similar questions for all the participants. They would be used when the researchers want to have results allowing to create a generalization over the population (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 204). In another hand, when the researchers want to understand the perspectives of the participants, they will use unstructured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 466) which can be referred to semi-structured interviews.

For our research, our purpose is to understand the impacts of the downsides of the co-creation process on the relationship between the customers and the companies. Therefore, we assure to undertake an exploratory study. The exploratory study aims to figure out what is happening and look for new observations (Chisnall, 2005, p. 37). In order to undertake this study, we believe therefore that the semi-structured interviews technique is the most suitable. Indeed, as the purpose of our research leads us to look for an understanding of a phenomenon, i.e. the downsides of the co-creation process, we consider that the structured interviews would not be appropriate to understand the impacts of the phenomenon on the variables of a relationship.

By using a semi-structured interviews technique, we want to let to the respondents a certain freedom during the interviews. The semi-structured interview is in some ways structured as it displays a list of questions or/and themes that the researchers want to cover with an interview guide (Kvale, 1996, p. 27). By doing so, we have the opportunity to cover the themes found in the existing literature, while asking follow-up questions depending of the answers. Further, we believe that the answers could be interesting as they could provide us some insights and areas useful for our analysis but they were not highlighted before. Thus, we consider the semi-structured interviews technique as being the most suitable for our research. Further, this technique could allow us to collect the data needed to provide a contribution for the literature.

4.2 Qualitative sampling methods

According to Ritchie et al. (2003, p. 78), during a qualitative research, it might happen that the researchers are not able to determine a probability sampling. This occurs for certain types a study and thereby a non-probability sampling would be applied. For a
non-probability sampling, it does not exist specific rules to follow, but rather results from a judgment from the researchers. It exists several kinds of non-probability sampling such as, quotas, snowball, self-selection, purposive and convenience (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 236). Furthermore, Collingridge & Gantt (2008, p. 391) state that a qualitative research sampling has to fulfill the purpose. Therefore, we believe that our research corresponds the most to a purposive sample where we, researchers, have interviewed individuals involved in the co-creation process selected by ourselves. By choosing this sample, we believe that we have conducted our research in judging who were the most suitable to answer to our research question, to meet our purpose and our objectives (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008, p. 391). Our choice has been highlighted by the fact that our research topic is new in the business world and can appear as sensitive to discuss, thereby we have preferred to interview individuals willing to help our research.

As we have chosen a non-probability sampling, especially, a purposive sampling technique, we had the judgment to require as many respondents as we want until we decided our sample size was reached. Further, with this technique, we are aware about the fact that this technique does not allow us any generalization as we do not reach a representative sample (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 239). However, as aforementioned, we did not intend to generalize our outcomes, but we focus to get an understanding.

**4.3 Selection of the participants**

As aforementioned, we have decided to use a purposive sampling technique in order to conduct our research. According to Ritchie et al. (2003, p. 80), a purposive sampling technique requires to select participants in relation to certain participants. Generally, the select participants have been chosen because they are involved in a way or another in the co-creation process and during new product development. Consequently, we did not chose individuals involved in co-creation in the service industries. In order to have a comprehensive perspective, we wanted to select people working with the co-creation process during new product develop such as experts, managers or researchers. By doing so, we believed to reach more people and to avoid refusal from people working within organizations implementing the co-creation process. Indeed, we were aware about the sensitivity of our topic causing the difficulty for people to express about it.

Limited in terms of time and cost, we have selected our participants all over the world, with any focus on a specific country. To do so, we have focused our participants’ research on professional social network websites such as LinkedIn or Viadeo the French version of LinkedIn. We believed it was the cheapest and the faster way to meet experts and managers. Our focus on the practitioners is explained by the fact that we thought they have a specific vision of the topic, and have extensive knowledge about it. They can provide answers with diverse orientations and have both inside-out and outside-in view and are not focus with the company or consumer perspectives, they are “neutral”. These practitioners have to prove a certain experience in the matter before being selected for our research. For this reason, we have targeted senior level experts focus on a B2C perspective.

Practitioners have been chosen related to their language. Both of us speak English and French, and thereby we have been able to conduct the research in both languages.
However, we required a decent level of French or English from the participants in order to have a fluid dialogue between researchers and participants.

**4.4 Interview guide**

According to Kvale (1996, p. 129) an interview guide helps the researchers for conducting the interview. For a semi-structured interview, the interview guide contains the main themes the researchers want to cover with questions while being focus on the research’ objectives. It has been written in English and are structured under 5 main topics.

In order to build our interview guide (Appendix 2), we started to determine themes from our literature review, and we have brainstormed in order to write down the questions that we wanted to ask. We attempted to relate our questions with our research question and research objectives in order to bring value to the answers. Therefore, our interview guide covers specific themes such as co-creation, the downsides of the process, the relationship during the process, trust and commitment, and customer satisfaction and starts with a warm-up question. Under these themes, we have several questions, which we believe are generating knowledge for our research. All the questions match with our objectives and contribute to our topic. Therefore, we have avoided the out of scope questions. Furthermore, we have ensured to use open questions in order to leave participants to answer freely and spontaneously and also to obtain more details while not influencing the answers (Chisnall, 2005, p. 145; Flick, 2006, p. 155)

**4.5 Conducting the interview**

According to the participants’ location, we have decided to perform the interviews by telephone, via Skype and in face-to-face. Indeed, the locations are diverse and all over the world (e.g. Los Angeles, Amsterdam) and in order to save time and money, we have decided to do so. Moreover, conducting telephone interviews or face-to-face interviews do not impact tremendously the results (Abascal et al., 2012, p. 529). During the interview, we have always been together; while one was interacting with the participant, the other one was taking notes and recording for the transcription. In doing so, both of us were present and aware about all the discussion during the interviews, and then both were able to have an understanding of the results, rather than only one of us conducting the interview and therefore having all the information and knowledge for the empirical data.

For conducting the interviews, we have followed the 10 criteria defined by Kvale (1996, pp. 148-149) which are knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering, interpreting. Indeed, each interview was structured in the same way. We have always started by thanking the participant for giving us his time for our study. Then, we introduced ourselves, the study and its purpose, in order to have an informed participant. By doing this, we are willing to be as transparent as possible that allowed us to receive high-quality results. Then, we presented the structure of the interview and the main topics of our interview guide. The first questions were always about the ethical considerations such as anonymous, confidentiality, and agreement to be recorded, following then by the warm-up question.
During the whole interview, we have spoken clearly and simply and avoid complex terms from theories. We ascertained to be always understandable for the participants. In order to generate as much knowledge as possible, we came up with follow-up questions in order to get more elaborate and in-depth answers from the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 477). Moreover, during the interview we were able to interlink the participant statements in order to have more elaborations of the subject. Further, it happened that sometimes, we asked for more clarifications and extensions of the answers in order later, to interpret it fully. At the end of the interview, we always let the possibility to the respondents to express themselves if they wanted to ask something, or to introduce some aspects that have not been tackled. This open-question results in the opportunity to gather complementary data that we would not have had along the interview.

Bryman & Bell (2001, p. 482) state that every qualitative interview has a different length and time. Table 2 shows the different interviewees and the duration of the interviews. We can notice that our shortest interview lasted 33 minutes and the longer duration of interview is 1h54.

4.6 Transcription

According to Kvale (1996, p. 160), it is important to record interviews during a research. Thus, the researcher can be focused on the interview and be dynamic. To do so, it was primordial to ask first the consent of the interviewees if they were serene with being recorded (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 482). For this reason, before each interview, we have asked the respondents their agreement to be recorded. The reason of recording rather than taking note relate to the efficiency and relevance of the results. Indeed, by recording and transcribing the answers, we do not lose time and focus by taking notes during the interview (Kvale, 1996, p. 160). While asking their permission to record and transcribe their answer we also made sure that the respondents feel secure by asking their choices between being anonymous or not when it comes to integrate their answers in our research. Indeed, in order to have their thoughts with a free and open-minded discussion, it appears important to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees if they ask for it (Kvale, 1996, p. 172). Recording does have some advantages and disadvantages that we have to be aware of. According to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 341) the advantages to record is the possibility to re-listen the answers, allow direct quotes also allow the interviewers to stay focus while the disadvantages are the technical problems, reduce the reliability, and inhibit the interviewee. If an interviewee does not accept being recorded, we then propose the alternative to take note and make sure that the note is in correlation with their sayings at the end of the interview. Then, by transcribing the answers, we both proofread the transcript in order to avoid any mistakes or misunderstandings.

4.7 Qualitative Analysis

According to Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 571) conducting a qualitative research can generate a very large amount of data and the rules to analyze these data are not minor. Indeed, data analysis from a qualitative method must be based on the nature of the research, Kvale (1996, p. 185) explains that there is no standardized approach to analyze the data but it appears that the research has to take into consideration their
research question, research design, and research approach during the selection of the method of analysis. Still, the method of analysis will mostly depend on your research approach (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 489); which is in our study an inductive approach. When it comes to qualitative methods to analyze data, the most used method in qualitative research is called the thematic analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 572; Roluston, 2001, p. 280). The advantage of a thematic method is the possibility to implement this method to any type of qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 572). We believe this better can be relevant to our type of research.

A qualitative research does provide a great amount of data. By doing a qualitative analysis, it has to be taken into consideration the different meanings of words from their abundance and their complexity (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 508). Due to the amount of data, it also appears important to categorize the data in order to have a better view of the results and make sense of it. In order to gain a better understanding of the meaning from our data, we decide to use a systematic method designed to organize and interpret the data. This method has been brought by Attride-Stirling (2001) and is called the Thematic Network Analysis (Figure 2). By using this method, we broke down the text from the data in order to explore the understanding and signification of it to find common themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). This method is based on three main phases. During the first phase we coded the data coming from our theoretical frame of reference in order to group the most relevant data and make sense of it (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 390). Then, during the second phase, we have created the themes by using the thematic network with the themes that have been found through the first phase (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 390). Finally, during the third phase, we analysed the data in using the thematic network, research question and theoretically frame of reference (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 402). By doing so, we came up with global themes that encompassed the principal ideas (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). We ended up with several basics themes. These basic themes piled together create a specific model (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). Once the specific model is highlighted then they are summarized in a middle-order theme, called organizing theme. Then, global themes gather several organizing themes piled together (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389).

As previously stated, our themes are related to our data collection. We believe that we can base our thematic analysis keeping in mind that new themes can be detected throughout our research with our data collection. We decided to start with themes such as co-creation, downsides, and their effects. We do believe that these themes are important to answer our research question. Then, we analyzed and interpret these themes in order to make sense of them (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389).
According to Flick (2006, p. 49), researchers need to take into consideration the ethical aspects of how conduct the interviews during the whole research. Indeed, we are aware about the nature and the content of our research, which can raise ethical issues during interviews. Discussed by Richardson & Godfrey (2003, p. 348), an emotional relationship is created during an interview between the researcher and the interviewee with highlight the need for the interviewer to accomplish the interview with sensitivity while being responsible. Therefore, we have considered ethic as an important criterion for our research.

As we sought to point out the downsides of the co-creation in new product development, we believe that our interviewees want to be feel safe and confident about the answers they will provide to us. As our research topic can be perceived as new and sensitive in the business world as we seek for the negatives consequences of the process, individuals can be reluctant to participate or to share their experiences with us. By providing them the reasons of our research and a clear purpose, we highlighted the positive implications of our research and gave them the willingness to participate by implementing a feeling of trust. By doing so, we have considered our interviewees guided by the ethical aspects, which are significant in order to access to relevant information from the participants.

**4.8 Ethical considerations**

During a research, it appears paramount to pay attention to avoid harm for the participants. The researchers have to act carefully in order to collect data in the right manners for the participants. Indeed, conducting interviews can be sometimes intrusive and thereby entails anxiety and stress for the participants (Flick, 2006, p. 50). Therefore, to avoid participants felt stressed, we had previously written a consent form

![Figure 2: Structure of a thematic Network](image-url)
for them and us to sign, which included a confidentiality agreement. Moreover, we informed them about the consequences of the interview, i.e. in our case, the future of the interview (Kvale, 1996, p. 116). By doing so, we believe we established a trustful relationship between the researchers and the participants who felt more free to express themselves on the topic.

Further, the researchers should pay attention to the timing and the nature of the participant’s approach (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 189) by contacting them to appropriate hours.

**4.8.2 Informed consent**

Informed consent corresponds to explain entirely the characteristics of the study to the participants, the risks and the benefits for the interviewees to participate (Kvale, 1996, p. 112). In order to obtain relevant data, we first have chosen voluntary people. We explained the research to the participants in giving the research question, how did we come up with it, the purpose of our research and thereby the importance to conduct interviews to increase the value of our research. By doing so, we thought to highlight the need to conduct this research and thereby the significance to collect data. Indeed, we believe that by giving information to the participants, the answers would appear more complete. Furthermore, participants take part in the research in providing data, however, they could not be agree about how the researchers will use them. Thus, in order to clarify and avoid confusions and misunderstandings, we had preferred to inform them that the use of data would be only for academic purposes. Then, in order to finish the preparation our interview, we have ensured to make the participants aware about the average duration of the interview, while highlighting the fact that it could last longer or shorter. By informing them before the interview, they could have taken arrangements for them to organize their times while informing about the interview’s duration, and thereby avoid the conversation to be cut off. During the interviews, we paid attention to do not provide too many information to the participants in order for them to do not influence the answers.

**4.8.3 Confidentiality**

In order to maintain a certain respect between the researchers and the participants, we wanted to highlight the privacy and confidentiality of our interviewees and their responses. Indeed, it appears as important to conduct the interview by ensuring the privacy of all collected data such as names, personal information, enterprises’ names etc. (Kvale, 1996, p. 114). Therefore, in order to establish trust with the research’s participants, we asked their desires concerning the collected information such as if they want to be anonymous. Therefore, we have avoided any pressure for the participants as recommended by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 188).

In addition, another ethical consideration has been displayed during the interview. It could come that a participant can perceive a certain question as inadequate or inappropriate in relation to his/her position. If the choice of the participants was to do not answer to certain questions, the question was skipped, leading us to move on to the next one. We made sure that the participants were aware about their rights to do not answer to certain question as it is highlighted by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 195).
4.8.4 Deception

As aforementioned, we provided consent to the participants in order to make them aware about the research topic and the researchers’ objectives for conducting this study. However, consent does not really detail how the data will be used later. Therefore, it could lead to a lack of consent which can entail deception for the participants (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 190). Deception can be characterized by the fact that the research purpose has been changed without informing the participants, or by being in collaboration with a partner or a sponsor. By not providing all the knowledge to the participants, the researchers could harm their interviewees. In order to avoid disappointed interviewees, we have chosen to clarify the interview process by using a consent form. In addition, we left the possibility to the participants to ask any questions about our research at any time.
5. Qualitative Empirical Findings

This chapter aims to introduce the findings of our research. We present the result of our research on the downsides of co-creation during new product development. We use our findings as the basis in order to justify or contradict our theoretical frame of reference and end up with new theory.

Table 2: Table of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cristian Saracco</td>
<td>Co-creation expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maarten Pieters</td>
<td>Co-creation expert at TheCoCreators/ Head of Co-creation at Philips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>Business consultant / Design science researcher / Author and regular contributor to a well-known newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babke Hogenhuis</td>
<td>Strategist in Co-creation at Fronteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikael Ydholm</td>
<td>Head of Research at IKEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel Papworth</td>
<td>Senior Designer at Interactive Swedish Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Latcham</td>
<td>Interaction Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loic Plé</td>
<td>Researcher in Co-creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Coates</td>
<td>Creative Consultancy Director for C Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeroen Peeters</td>
<td>Designer and researcher at Interactive Institute and PhD student at the department of Informatics at Umea University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fredrik Nilbrink</td>
<td>Senior researcher engineer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>1h12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherland</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>1h10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>1h22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherland</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>1h03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>1h02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>52m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>33m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>1h54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>1h41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1h01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>36m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our interviewees represent experts in the co-creation field. These experts are either working, using or doing research in co-creation and new product development. We selected these respondents according to their position and their experience with co-creation. Throughout our empirical findings and analysis, we use the code figuring in the Table 2 for a better reading and for ethical matter. Indeed, as explained in our practical method, we gave the opportunity to the participants to remain anonymous in our research. Then, if one of our respondents has required to be anonymous, we do not
disclose their name. We present our findings following our theory on co-creation, co-destruction, trust, commitment and customer satisfaction in order to answer our research question: *What are the downsides of the co-creation process and their effects on the relationship between the company and customers during new product development?*

5.1 Interviewees Description

_In this section, we briefly present our participants. The aim is to present the relevance of our selection pertaining our research._

5.1.1 Cristian Saracco

Cristian Saracco first starts working with co-production before working with co-creation since now 18 years. With more than 25 years of international experience, he helps companies with the creation of sustainable long-lasting value through developing and revitalizing meaningful and familiar brand experiences. Throughout these years of experiences, Cristian Saracco has been working with leading brands around the globe. He has led projects with companies such as Coca-Cola, Codorniu, Cosentino, Deutsche Bank, Mercedes-Benz, Stella Artois, Telefónica and Zurich among others. Further, Cristian Saracco has written and published articles and book chapters, and has been regular speaker at events in Europe and the Americas. Also, he has an intense academic activity in institutions like ESADE, Loyola University or the Pontifical University of Salamanca.

5.1.2 Maarten Pieters

Maarten Pieters is currently the head of co-creation at Philips and the co-founder of TheCoCreators. These movements of self-employed co-creation specialists, both add invaluable knowledge and experience from their own field of expertise. After an international career in sales and various functions within young start-ups, Maarten Pieters needed to express his own ideas. He particularly wanted to focus on co-creation as a means of helping organizations adding real sustainable value to the customers, so he decided to team up with Stefanie Jansen to co-found TheCoCreators in 2012.

5.1.3 Respondent 3

Our Respondent 3 has a PhD in ME Design Research from Stanford University. He has published twenty-three scientific papers and over one hundred and sixty articles on the Creative Economy, as well as, authoring Profit from Design, a definitive book on design quantification. Nowadays, he is an international business consultant and design science researcher, author and a regular contributor to well-known newspaper. Throughout his twenty-years career, he has worked with many top tier international organizations.

5.1.4 Babke Hogenhuis

Babke Hogenhuis is a strategist at Fronteer based in Amsterdam with a background in industrial product design and strategic product design. She has been working with co-creation for at least 8 years. At Fronteer, they believe that complex challenges deserve breakthrough thinking. Together with their clients and carefully curated teams of external experts, they develop clear strategies and compelling concepts for growth. Their missions are to co-create and ignite remarkable solutions for brands, institutions
and the environment. To do so, they have become experts in co-creation, developing and fine-tuning a variety of proprietary tools. This allows them to apply different methodologies throughout the innovation funnel.

5.1.5 Mikael Ydholm
After being communication manager, head of global media, and range strategist at IKEA, Mikael Ydholm is the head of research at IKEA since 5 years. He used to work for many years within different levels involving people in various kinds of development and innovation areas. His team creates long-term strategic development for the homes of the future, to meet the challenges in a ten-years perspective. Mikael Ydholm is also chairman of the board of the Mobile Life Center at Stockholm University. Mobile Life Center’s researches are based on design-led exploration of novel technology.

5.1.6 Nigel Papworth
Nigel Papworth is a senior interaction designer for Swedish ICT interactive institute part of the RISE (Research Institutes of Sweden), which is a network of research and technology organizations. In global cooperation with academia, enterprise and society, they create value, growth and competitiveness through research excellence and innovation. Nigel Papworth worked in projects where he designed without people for the last twenty to thirty years. He has been working with co-designing and co-creating with the end-users or for a client for a shorter period of twelve years.

5.1.7 Thomas Latcham
Thomas Latcham is an interaction designer finishing his Master at the TU Delft in February 2017. He has 7 years of experience in the field of interaction and experience design, and has been involved in many projects that included co-creation. For his graduation he will work with a children's hospital in the Netherlands to create new operation room garments, and he will be doing this in co-creation with the children and all other stakeholders involved. Currently Thomas is working at the Interactive Institute in Umeå, Sweden, as an intern.

5.1.8 Loic Plé
In 2005, Loic started at IESEG as an associated professor. Now, he is a professor in strategy and organization. He is also in charge of a center called Center for Educational and Technological Innovation in the school. He has been working in co-creation for more than 15 years now, back when the concept was more known under the banner of customer participation. As a researcher, he published several articles, he is one of the authors in 2010, who wrote the article “Not always co-creation: introducing interactional co-destruction of value in service dominant logic” used in our theoretical frame of references. In 2016, he published another article focuses on co-creation called “Studying customers’ resource integration by service employees in interactional value co-creation”.

5.1.9 Nick Coates
After serving as Research Director, Nick Coates is now the Creative Consultancy Director for C Space where he helps companies to work with their customers to invent better products and services. C Space is the leading customer collaboration
consultancy, connecting the world’s best-known brands with the people they serve to create Customer Inspired Growth. In 2009, he published an article called “co-creation: new pathways to value”. Then, in 2013, Nick Coates together with Nicholas Ind, wrote and published the article called “The meanings of Co-Creation” used in our theoretical frame of reference.

5.1.10 Jeroen Peeters
PhD student at the department of informatics at the university, Jeroen Peeters is also a designer and researcher at Interactive Institute. His work is a combination of his own research, design development and design research within Interactive Institute. Before, he studied industrial design in the Netherlands. Jeroen is working with co-creation since 2004.

5.1.11 Fredrik Nilbrink
Fredrik Nilbrink has been working in research and interactive design since 2000. He was working at the design school. Then he has been working for a software company for one year as a developer, and now he is working at Interactive Institute as a senior researcher engineer.

5.2 Co-creation
When discussing about what co-creation can provide to the customers, many of the respondents brought up the notion of feelings and sharing. About, the process of co-creation, Jeroen P. said that “makes things a lot more human because you are working with the person and once you working with the person, if you don't consider the person as a whole, you don't think the person with feelings, desires, personality, character, body, then it is very difficult to makes things meaningful”. Babke H. and Fredrik N. gave an explanation that co-creation is important to provide a certain feeling of being involved within the company and during the development of the product, because customers can feel very involved in the product, such as helping for a new flavor, new name, new packaging. Cristian S. and Babke H. presented the fact that co-creation creates a feeling of being valued by the company. For a company, co-creating adds value to its customers. This feeling is created by asking customers to share their ideas, inputs. Customers will feel valued, because they know that their inputs will be used by the company. Further, the explanation given by another respondent allows to cluster these statements by saying that “if customers know that the product has been tested and co-created by their peers, it could create some kind of emotional and rational quality relationship” (Mikael Y.). In line with this idea, Loic P. and Nick C. claimed that co-creation is a source of pleasure, source of enjoyment, and also of social benefits. According to them, people enjoy interacting with other people through the process. The results here show that co-creation has a positive impact on customers by creating an emotional impact. Indeed, by sharing their ideas or any type of inputs to the company, it allows the customer to feel more valued since the company is using their inputs. Nigel P. and Thomas L. explained that if they can get the end-users to invest in the process of creation, that gives them ownership which means that the end-result has more value for them because in every stage of the process, they have to say what they would like and what they would need. Loic P. also argued that “customers may benefit from better products, more appropriate to their needs, more appropriate to their context of use, more enjoyment, they can feel rewarded by the company”.
Moreover, co-creation does not only impact the customers that participate to the process of co-creation but all the other informed customers of the company that a co-creation has been done. This is emphasized by Mikael Y. saying that if “the product has been tested and co-created by their peers”. Then, an emotional relationship will be built. Mikael Y. indicated with this statement that the effect of co-creation is produced by the inputs of their peers that participate to the co-creation process. Interestingly, this aspect has been tackled by Babke H. stating that “you have all the other customers and that group is probably much bigger and co-creation doesn’t really impact them unless you tell the story”. Knowing that, we can state that co-creation can impact the customers and the customer satisfaction if it is well managed. This notion will be more described in the part pertaining to the customer satisfaction.

When talking about what co-creation can provide to the company, many respondents brought the ideas of learning process and being closer to their target group. Babke H. explained the reason why company perceive co-creation as a learning process because “the inputs the customers give, even if sometimes it is not very useful, it still gives them a lot of insights about what customers find interesting”. Indeed, Respondent 3 and Maarten P. explained that a company can listen to the wisdom of the crowd allowing to be more flexible as “co-creation allows the company to be on top of what is important, they can adapt, they can change stuff, they can just say “ok this doesn't work anymore, we have to do something completely different”. Co-creation provides insights to a company, even not useful, it keeps the company informed of what the customers are thinking of the market, the brand and the company. Although, good insights from the customers allow the company a full range of possibility from creating new product to changing some features of its already existing products. Loic P. explained that co-creation provides a better knowledge of the customers, and it is also a way to decrease the cost of the innovation, to speed up the process of innovation. Loic P. added that a company may launch an early version of the product and based on some case of lean management they may keep improving the product all along. By doing so, the process will “speed the market, produce ideas that work better because they have been shaped by the customer so you reduce the risk of product failure” (Nick C.).

For Respondent 3, the context of the innovation will affect the impact of the co-creation process, according to him, if the company does an incremental innovation it gives to the company, the customer validation and it optimizes what are the customers’ needs, but if the company does a breakthrough innovation it can help the company to identify opportunities that they would not be able to identify internally. Indeed, it appears clear for Mikael Y. that “by inviting users into different level of innovation and product development, we have a believe that we come closer to people's needs”. Then, we understand that for companies, co-creation is a process that allows them to achieve a better development of product by being closer to their target group and knowing the current trends and optimize what are the customers’ needs. This relationship with the customer is important for Jeroen P., for him, co-creation has to be more than just a technique to make a simple better development of a product, it is also “I am not trying to find the best way to sell something to someone, I am trying to use co-creation to make the world better place. Co-creation has a much bigger potential, saying we are creating this world that we all live together, and we try to do it in a harmonious good way.”
Knowing the advantages of co-creation for both the customers and the company is important, some respondents underline the fact that the process of co-creation is obviously not as straightforward that it can seem. Indeed, Jeroen P. stated that “the danger is that people think that by following this 7 or 10 steps then we get something that is good”. Mikael Y. also stated that “there is no formula for success in co-creation, you can’t say that by co-creating you will do something better, it is not by default”. Indeed, as he explained sometimes it can also be the opposite, it could be a really hard and long process with worst results. This statement has been presented also by Maarten P. saying that “you can't standardize it, if it is what you looking for, forget about that immediately, co-creation is not standardizable, because every context is different, is it not because of co-creation but because of every product is different. It is also how you facilitate it, if people have all the same goal, if everybody is open enough and honest about it, you are not going to have many issues”.

The answer of this respondent tackled our curiosity and by observing some of the others respondents’ answers (Respondent 3, Babke H. and Loic P.) while asking how successful the process of co-creation can be. Some respondents stated that the process is definitely not always successful, explaining that many companies try to do co-creation, but they don't execute it very well. Moreover, nothing is perfect in the real world, nothing is an 100%. Between 35% to 40% of all products fail in the marketplace no matter with what the company does. For this reason, it is why it should not be called a co-creation process, it should be called "Value process" because it means that the company still does not know whether it will result in a value co-creation or a value co-destruction.

We have been asking, knowing that co-creation can be a difficult process and not always successful, what are the most important aspects to take into consideration while co-creating. The answers to that question are various and diverse. Jeroen P. stated that doing a very formalized method will create results very predictable. For him, if the company formalized too much and does the same than another, then, the company is not making the world more interesting. Loic P. explained that two elements are important when doing co-creation. These two elements are first, identifying and selecting the proper customers, and the second, the level of knowledge the company has on the customers, because if they don't know very well its customers and its usage, the company may select some customers that will not provide very interesting or relevant insights. For this reason, Mikael Y. explained that it is important to “create an environment where everyone is creative, make an open atmosphere where people dare to show their creativity”. The environment is very important in order to properly collect inputs.

Babke H. explained that “it is very important to listen to the customers but they don't always tell you the truth”, she argued that customers are very impulsive, they do not really think about the company, they just say the first thing it comes to their mind. The company has to ask questions to understand really what they mean, what is it that trigger that emotion for the customers. Then, they can frame their product in such a way that the company can change the perception of people about the product. For this reason, Thomas L. claimed that a company “has to draw lines somewhere because if you are designing on your own it’s very easy you draw your own lines, but if you are involving other people in the process, you have to think about what they are saying and think about what makes sense for you to implement”. This is why, Respondent 3
explained that, for in case of a breakthrough innovation, the company has to rely on what is called the wisdom of the crowd, those people have to be isolated, they cannot talk together, they need to formulate their own opinion in isolation to create insights.

The environment is important and will depend of what type of innovation a company implements. By creating the appropriate environment either for individual or a group, the company will get better results. Mikael Y. claimed that creating an atmosphere where people feel that they can make a difference by gathering with others, by building on each other ideas and by using each other skills are very important. Babke H added that the environment is important because what the customer says, comes from something that they feel maybe, so behind that, there is emotion, the company needs to know what that is, if the company does that customers tend to be more stable in the future. By doing so, Mikael Y. mentioned that the co-creation will be “successful but not by default, you need to work hard to make it successful, you need to have a process, you need to be able to work together with people, you need to show that it is a great value to work with others, no matter who you are, it doesn’t matter as long as you are able to ideate together with others and create value out of that”. Cristian S. emphasized this idea with the importance of sharing the value, both the company and customers have to share the same values, they have to have the same sort of value agenda with the people that the company works with. Thus, the co-creation process would be a matter, for the customers, of sharing the same values of the company in order to co-create together and help to create a value proposition for both the company and the customers. Indeed, it has been indicated that “the attitude of the company is important, they need to be very open in order to receive feedbacks because if you ask for inputs, you will get critical feedbacks, so people will say also negative things and the company should use them in a constructive way” (Babke H.)

Nigel P. gave an interesting vision of what it is important to take into consideration when it comes to co-create. It is related to communication, Nigel P. said that “It always cracks down to a communication challenge, the better we are communicating, or in some cases not communicating what we want, because it is not necessary imperative that they understand what we are doing, sometimes it is actually good that they don't. But the best we are doing that job, giving them to understand what exactly what we want them to understand, the better results we get back from them”. What the companies try to do is emulate reactions, if they want someone to give a very comprehensive answer they can give them a very obvious question and they will get a very obvious answer. If they give them a devious question, they will probably get a richer answer, that may not be as measurable or as accurate. This vision of how to communicate or not is interesting, in order to emulate inputs from the participants, the customers need specifics elements, the communication is then very important. For Nigel P., communicating with the customers has to be prepared in order to give to the customers what exactly the company wants them to understand in order to have specific answers.

In another hand, Nick C. supported the need to communicate, and came up with a concept which is “clearing the past, it's essentially allowing people to be open and talk about everything they hate and we do that as a prelude in order to make them thinking about what can be better, which is based psychological principles or therapies saying that you can't change or improve things in the future, until you acknowledge what is already broken in the past”. This allows the company to break down the barriers with
customers and continue on the process to the next step. This process of clearing the past can be completed with some training sessions for customers and employees, which have been pointed out as important by a respondent “companies have to spend some time coaching or training all participants in what you want them to do” (Nick C.). Moreover, Fredrik N. claimed the need to listen the customers while being aware that customers are not always experts of the subject.

Some other respondents provided answers focus on the company and the co-creation itself. Maarten P. gave his proper vision of co-creation with the definition created by TheCoCreators. This definition brought by Maarten P. is about what he calls the “complete co-creation” saying that “a complete co-creation is a broadly supported, transparent, continuous process. The interpretation of this definition is that co-creation only works if all the parts involved actually support what they are trying to do, they need to support the process itself. The idea of “we are doing this together”. The transparent part of it, is a typical thing, “when you work together you have to be transparent”. It is a continuous process because it never stops. It is not using it as a tool, instead it is something the company starts and continues. A company should always be co-creating, with their customers even if the product is already on the market because it allows companies to understand continuously what is happening, by co-creating with them, the focus is different, but doing that they create an ultimate way of engagement. This definition provides a great overview about what the co-creation process is and a better understanding of what is important during co-creation. Adding to this definition, Maarten P. provided his vision concerning the benefits of co-creation saying that there are several benefits of the complete co-creation such as the relevance of the results, the boost of the marketing effect, a broad support of the stakeholders, enhance the motivation of the stakeholders, a positive impact on the quality results and a positive impact on the company’s resources.

Moreover, Cristian S. talked about what it is important during co-creating and answered that “the co-creation process will be successful if it is aligned to the value of the company”. This aspect seems important, because the value of the company will create a framework and it is linked to the concept of creating trust and commitment. Indeed, as it has been argued by Cristian S. that company’s clients at a certain moment, would say “no you cannot produce that kind of products because nobody is going believe in you and because it is out of the framework that your values are giving”. For this reason, Mikael Y. highlighted that “companies shouldn’t underestimate that is a quite hard work for a company to work with co-creation. They really need to have people capable to do it, they need to have a process of it, they need to be very clear on the conditions, very clear about rewards system”.

Then, focusing on the company while answering the question, one of the participants pointed out that every company does not have to co-create and if they do, they have to think out of the box, especially for a breakthrough innovation. This participant said “you know the old saying by Henry Ford "If I had asked my customers what they wanted they would have said a faster horse", they will never say that need a car. When you are looking at breakthrough innovation you need to engage with experts that have a sense of what is technologically possible and have a vision about what may be beneficial for human race as a whole” (Respondent 3). The same participant indicated that “If you are a leader, you don’t co-create, you create innovation, and you don’t let the customers telling you what to do” (Respondent 3) In a nutshell, this participant
wanted to emphasize the idea that co-creation can be difficult and for some companies, the co-creation and the involvement of the customers in the process of new product development are not required due to their position on the market.

5.3 Co-destruction

Linked to our question concerning how co-creation can be successful, we followed-up by asking more explanations when they declared that co-creation is not always successful, even if “co-creation is a more successful approach than traditional innovation” (Nick C.). Indeed, Jeroen P. said that a company has to be very critical, because if the company uses formalized methods, the company will kill a lot of richness that design needs. As he argued, there is a definite risk of the process goes wrong and most often they do go bad but people do not realize because they think that using the right method is always the correct and if a company wants to innovate, formalization is the enemy. If the company restricts the freedom of speech, the freedom to speak of people by formalizing what they can say, and the freedom to act of the designer, then the company is doing in many ways the opposite of what they are trying to achieved.

Babke H. stated that one of the reasons of an unsuccessful co-creation is probably due to a lack of commitment, “they make the gimmick, they think co-creation is nice and maybe they should do a co-creation campaign, they will be able to have customers that share their inputs, and they can do something with that, making their brand very interactive and attractive, it is good for your image but if you don't work well on the inputs collected from your customers, and you do anything with it and you don't give them feedback, then it will fail”. Here we can already notice the importance of commitment that will be explained in-depth in the next part, although we can say that according to Babke H., commitment of the company during co-creation will impact the results of the process. Cristian S. gave an argument concerning why co-creation is sometimes unsuccessful. This argument concerns how the process is implemented by the company using a straightforward metaphor saying that sometimes the process fails because instead of trying to synthesize the results, some companies used to simplify the results. The difference between the both is for example, “I need to lose weight, the synthesized way is then I have to begin a diet, while the simplification could be I cut my leg, and I reduce 15 kilos in 3 minutes”. Certain companies simplify the process because they need to obtain certain results quickly. This answer indicates the willingness of the company to co-create while being very task and time orientated as they wish to deliver a value proposition in a small time frame. The behavior of the company causes an unsuccessful co-creation.

Mikael Y. explained that if the co-creation is unsuccessful it is because of the description of the project, companies have to describe it broad enough to make many people interested in the project, it has to be understandable, and engaging. But narrow enough to make it more specific and manageable, achievable. It has to do with how the company formulates the challenge. Mikael Y. added that “it has also to be with the management of the community can cause the failure, either the time frame is too short for the people to co-create or people feel it is a very challenging environment”, this answer correlates with Cristian S. stating that “you have to be very clear with what you are expecting as results”. Here the reasons are more focus on how the company will
manage the co-creation campaign and how they will frame the co-creation process”. Some interviewees claimed that the reasons of an unsuccessful co-creation are that companies have implemented an appropriate process to involve their customers, but are not able to identify the appropriate inputs from their customers, or not able to identify the appropriate customers (Loic P. and Nick C.).

Further, Babke H. indicated that the reasons are due to “a lack of feedback, miscommunication, and misunderstanding”. Indeed, the answers by Babke H. correlate with the answers from Mikael Y. stating that it is very important that the company explains clearly the challenges of the co-creation, so that everyone understands what they have to do, what is the challenge, what is the scope of the challenge. Thus, communication is really important. Additionally, Fredrik N. claimed also that the co-creation process can fail because of misunderstandings. Moreover, Respondent 3 relates the failure of co-creation because the company “can’t understand the market correctly. They can’t successfully launch a product that nobody will buy if you didn’t read the market correctly”.

Thus far, we can indicate with the different elements given by our respondents that the company has an important responsibility when it comes to co-creation and some skills are required as explained by Cristian S., “if the co-creation process fails is because of a lack of leadership in the process. It could be also lack of knowledge from the company, how to deal with this sort of processes. Let’s see, in a certain moment, for companies, it is difficult to begin this process, they have to be very open, and let the clients and customers going to the company and begin to play with their ideas, and sometimes the company feels uncomfortable”. Indeed, Jeroen P. explained that companies have to jump into the deep, and emerge themselves and be there, they really have to listen and really see. and if they don't commit to it, then it is better to not do it, because they are wasting everybody’s time. He added that commitment is very important, because the results will be very flat, if the company really has a conversation and asks the customers what do they think about a project/product, and why and see how customers behave, then the company gets a much broader set of information, richer, much more useful. During co-creation, customers and company really have to commit to achieve a successful process, the customers have to bring insights and ideas while the company has to implement the process in the right way by creating conversation with the customers and implement the process according the project and not by following straightforward a method.

Thus, we asked our participants concerning the consequences of an unsuccessful co-creation process. The most straightforward answer we had, is that the consequences can be “either a little curl in the ocean or they go bankrupt” (Respondent 3). Maarten P. said that the consequences can be that the product does not become as good as it should, or the relevance is not as good as it should be, or the product is not attractive as it could be, or the resonance is not optimal. While Loic P. focused on the loss of resources, it can be financial, it can be time, employees, it can be an increase of the level of stress for employees because they may have a lot of pressure. Moreover, Fredrik N. discussed the gap between the customers’ expectations and the product delivered by the company which can provoke a conflict between the involved parts. Here we can understand that the consequences of a failed co-creation affect the end-result product and the company internally. Cristian S. presents his idea in saying that an unsuccessful process is quite frustrating for both companies and customers. Customers
have the sense they were not understood, and the company got the feeling they were losing their time trying to create something, following a certain fashion of co-creation. This participant brought up the idea of learning process as a consequence of failure but emphasized the fact that a failed co-creation will create an emotional response for both the company and the customers. Then, Thomas L said that “if you listen to everybody, you don’t get a unified product, ask them people what colors your new shoes should be, they’re not going all to say blue so you might have new shoes with a rainbow color. When you are really designing something for a product line or to fit a specific context, then listening to everybody can be problematic, you end up with a bunch of aspects that your product should go through into one”. The consequences here concern the end-result of the process on how to manage and listen the inputs of the customers in order to come up with a credible end-result. Nick C. said that customers may think "oh great I have been listen to and I have some kind of involvement in creating something brilliant". Then, the product is launched and does not fit customer expectation, then what happens? There is a risk of customer disappointment, it is probably worst to say that the company wants to work with the customers to improve things if the company does not act like it, they have to be careful with what it really means and that the company does it for the right reasons.

We also wanted to know more about how a company can prevent or avoid the downsides of co-creation. One interviewee gave a straightforward answer saying that “By doing right. As long as you are doing co-creation right appropriate to your kind of innovation, you should have a high chance of success” (Respondent 3) while another participant explained that “the question here is to realize what they are doing wrong, that is the first thing to figure out, so why is that thing didn't work out, this could be for instance, they didn't give the credit to the customers that they deserve, they didn't do anything with the ideas, they didn't involve the right people, it could be that they are not aiming for value and they wasn't supported by the people, they didn't make clear of what they looking for, they didn't do a normal process completely” (Maarten P.). Indeed, having the right people is important, but for another participant it is also important to “trust the skills and intuitions of everybody involved. I think the dangerous part is when you don't trust the abilities of people anymore but you put all on the methods and it becomes more formalized than personalized” (Jeroen P.). The ideas given by those two participants are that it is important to involved the right person and to trust them and their skills rather than just think that the method will do the work.

Several respondents agreed by saying that “the company has to be very clear about their expectations” and to “explain the process to the customers through a dialogue” which is seen as an important part of the process (Nigel P, Jeroen P. and Fredrik N.). Mikael Y. presented the importance of learning from the failures saying that “learn from the failures, they have to constantly being agile in adapting and changing the process. There is no specific way to co-create because it is linked with the values of the company itself. This makes every co-creation different”. Interestingly, it correlates with another answer from Cristian S. who said that “a downside of co-creation is that perhaps what you are trying to develop is not completely aligned with your business model, and also it is not aligned with your strategy. So you end-up to produce something that is strange for you as a company and for your customers”.

Babke H. explained in the case of a failed co-creation a company survives by sending good feedbacks to their customers and said that the company is very happy that they
collaborate with the company, happy about their inputs, it did not work out but thank you anyway and the company hopes to see the customers again in the future. A fail co-creation affects the relationship but if the company does not even send feedback then they might lose the relationship they have with their customers and it might affect their products. She added that “closing the loop” is very important, wrapping up the process is very important. After every project, every co-creation project, companies should ask their clients what the company has done with the project.

Loic P. claimed that “First, they must be aware that it can happen, and this is a very big deal. Indeed, companies may not even think prior to implementing a co-creation strategy that it may fail, and that's very important”. He also argued that they should also train their employees, to make sure that their employees are able to manage this relationship with customers, and are able to identify the kind of innovation that the customers actually want, may want or may need. They also must be prepared to change the level of involvement or to have maybe different steps toward the increasing involvement in the co-creation process with their customers. It is the role of the company to adapt their processes, to make sure that they may pick the right ideas or make sure that they are able to manage their customers completely during the process. For Loic P., it is important that company becomes aware of the risk of downsides of co-creation and for that companies have to train their employees and being flexible to manage the involvement of the customers in the process. This idea has been also brought up by Nick C. who said that companies “need to train their employees more than their customers, because they have so many assumptions and they forgot how to listen so we also have to train the employees of a company and how to participate and how to get the most of the process”.

We have been asking if the co-creation can be harmful for the relationship between the company and the customers. Some participants brought up as an answer the direct consequences of opening the doors of the company to the customers saying that “people can lose out the magic behind the company, for example Apple there is a lot of rumors going around about what is happening behind the scene, it is a bit magic, if you invite people into this magic, and people see that it is a lot of hard work behind, you realize how things are working and the magic behind the brand is broken. The question then is for the company should we open everything to the customer while co-creating?” (Mikael Y.). This answer can be correlated with Maarten P.’s answer stating that “Lot of companies have a problem when it comes to collaborate with the customers because they think it could harm the relationship, they don't dare, basically it fears. They are afraid to get in touch with the actual customer”. Maarten P. argued that if the company explains what they are trying to do, it is fine and good, as long as the customers do not think that the company tries to get something and the customers get nothing back from it. That is why co-creation has to be a win-win situation. It is the principle of creating value, it needs to be a win-win situation with relational benefits.

Cristian S. and Respondent 3 presented the concept that a negative experience travels faster than positive experience by saying that negative travels about 4 times faster than positive. Indeed, the relationship can be impacted by the negative experience as Jeroen claimed “we have a relationship with people because we are partly, as designers, responsible for how they live so if we do the process wrong, use it wrong or design things wrong then we also negatively impact their lives”. We also got an answer from Babke H. about how a wrong choice of customers during the co-creation can harm the
relationship, “we spend a lot of time to find the right experts for customers to co-create with the company, we make sure they can make valuable contribution, we don’t pick random people. If you pick random people you don’t know what they can say about useful things. And also personality is very important, we are open to share insight, are they are eager to collaborate and interact with people, because if they don’t then they are just sitting on a chair, keep it silent, and it is really not useful and it can harm the rest of the group because they make relevance go down”.

We also asked about the possibility of bias during co-creation. Respondent 3 answered that “the knowledge of the process of co-creation by the customer can be a bias. It has an impact on the future engagement because they know how the process works and they can use their knowledge to have better returns and advantages”. Some participants have been more in-depth about their answers saying that “I think that a bigger issue is sometimes people can bias themselves, they can take part of different role, there is a moment people become more a co-owner, they start playing different role, the moment it is not about them as customer, then it becomes an issue, because people have to make sure they are representative” (Maarten P.) This participant also explained that it is important for a company to “keep on refreshing them, make people part of your company for instance but at some points their roles become different, they maybe have some different interests, and that something you have worry about” (Maarten P.)

Mikael Y. explained that the customer's participation to the process of co-creation has to be free of any monetary reasons by saying that if the customer does this for getting money then the company is not interested, it is the wrong reason. Because the reason why people are doing should be other reasons than monetary reasons. This correlate with Babke H. answer “when we ask people for the project, we don’t need to talk about money. So it’s kind of a nice extra. They are already committed to participate so we say “ok you will get a small fee just to cover your expenses” but it’s not the most important for them to participate”. We notice here that it is important that the co-creation stays free of any fee in order to start the relationship in a good way. However, some companies can offer a fee to cover any expense otherwise the relationship during the process will be biased. Same answers have been given by Thomas L. and Nick C. saying that people are very happy to be involved, and then do not want any monetary value, they do not want to get paid, they want to help themselves and to help other. The financial reward is not very large, if it is online, the financial reward is the least important part of it, and the social incentive is more important. People get value from participating, being an advisor for a brand, and help them to shape something that they value, that is the main benefit that they value. That is the main benefit people can get.

The idea of using several times the same customers for different projects has been brought up. Participants are saying that “companies have a database of people and sometimes for different co-creation projects, they have to use the same people for different projects that they know that they are going to be good in the process but the companies begin to realize that sometimes they don’t want the same customers, because, now they are very professional at this and instead they want real clients” (Cristian S.). Here again the choice of the customers is important and it has been explained by one of our participants saying that “we really have a look at the challenge of the project and if we invite someone that we co-create with before then we check what projects they have done last time. We try to find people that didn’t do any co-creation in the same topic. Then they are maybe familiar with the setup of co-creation
but the challenge and project is so completely different that it is still new for them” (Babke H.). This answer correlates with the one given by Maarten P. saying that “it is about how you facilitate it, if you are unable to facilitate and if you are unable to see biases, the you could run into trouble, and that definitely an issue. You have to be skilled, it is not an easy thing, it requires an understanding of a lot of factors that are involved in how you can ideally work together, how can i get information, because you always try to create something, it is about creating value, you always need a productive collaboration”.

Then, we found interesting to have the vision of our participants concerning the failure of co-creation. Some participants have been more straightforward than others. Maarten P. said that a co-creation will fail “if the customer is unhappy with the result, or stakeholders that are using it”. This participant focused his answer on the satisfaction of the end-users as a variable to ensure that the co-creation is not a failure. Cristian S. also focused on the result of the co-creation saying that “you fail the co-creation process when you do not arrive to a new product or service, or process, because you were unable to understand the client’s needs. It’s the worst situation because usually the companies do not either realize or accept the situation”, and then argued that “nobody is sure that you are going to be success, it’s a question of how you manage the process, and how you manage the conversation within groups”.

Nevertheless, some participants expressed their vision of the failure very differently and even, for some participants, compromise the principle of failure during the co-creation process. Respondent 3 said that “I never had a failed once, I can have unforeseen outcomes but doesn’t necessary mean it’s a failure. It just means I have learned something that I didn’t anticipate”. This correlates with Nigel P. claiming that “the results of the process can be a disaster, now we know that the answer of the process is not what we wanted to do, but that means it is a success anyway because we have learnt something, we have learnt that it is not the way to do it”.

Further, Jeroen P. claimed that “it will never be a failure because the knowledge is the most important part, if you don't come up with a product at the end, if during the process of co-creation you say that you are going to make a product as the end-results and during the process of co-creation you realized at the end that actually you don't need a product but you need a service, is it really a failure? the starting point was wrong but that is ok because you had the process to figured that out. I think if the relationship between the stakeholder involved is open enough to understand that the point of co-creation is knowledge and not per se a finished successful product, then I think it is truly what it is for and then it is always successful”. These participants did not express the idea of a failing co-creation but more the likelihood to have unforeseen results. Moreover, these participants brought the idea of learning from the unexpected outcomes. It has been highlighted by some of our participants saying that “I think a project fails when you didn’t learn anything as a company, if a project fails and if you learn something from it that you can use for the next projects, it can still be a success. But if you really didn’t learn anything, that’s a failed project” (Babke H.).

Mikael Y. also explained that during co-creation the term of “failure” should probably not be used, saying that “I think maybe we shouldn't use a term like a “failed co-creation” maybe we should take away that expression” arguing that “all ideas and all results we could give some kind of value in it but it could be that for the time being it’s
not a success, but 5 years ahead it could be something that, in another context, in another time, the same result could be a good result so I think it’s important to think about that when you judge a result”. For Mikael Y., he gave another vision of co-creation, saying that failure should not be seen as such and not be even considered failure during the co-creation, because it is a learning process as explained by other participants and also because the company has to judge the result as future opportunities. For him, even if it is not a success, it is not a failure since the results can be used either as a learning process or used in the future.

This point of view correlates with Nick C. saying that “the process of co-creation should be very rich in insights, I think if the benchmark is "did we generate a breakthrough idea at the end of the process" and that is the only yardstick for success, then that would be missing a point, which is the learning you get and also people say 80% of innovation fails, that is probably a constant because there is probably never enough space in any market for all products. I agree that it is a learning process, and I think it is important to ask the question what is the outcome of co-creation and how do we judge its success. At the same time, I think it is important to recognize that to some extents it is outside the control of the process to deliver all the success but it might be other factors like how well the ideas are executed, launch at the right time with the right budget, this would affect any innovation or product launch” Still, Nick C. added that “saying failure might pose the questions what do you mean by failure, how do you measure failure, I think you need different measures, all the way along the value chain, if you are going to be realistic about it, and I think if co-creation kind of contribution is quite often the kind of fuzzy front-end of the innovation process then it is unrealistic to expect that every co-creation process delivers a game changing products, but that of course should be the aim, because if you don't ever deliver any kind of added value from a process that could be more involved and complicated, then why bother”. The point of view of this participant is that co-creation is that the end-result should not be only the incentive for the company to co-create but also the learning that comes from it. As he said, it is unrealistic to expect that every co-creation project is successful in a way that it will produce a game changing product but it should be the aim of it. Then, here the question is if the result is not a game changer, is it still a success for the company, well for this participant everything will depend of the way a company measures its failure. For him, from the company’s perspective the benefits can be multidimensional, it is not just a learning process, it is important even if they do not come up with the next big idea. But also it can just be the confidence it gives them to do the thing that they have been meaning to do for a long time. Co-creation brings the confidence to the company by working with the customers.

Nevertheless, Loic P. thinks that the term “failure” is important. Loic P. agrees that is it a learning process but believes that avoiding the term “failure” is a radical point of view saying that “when you read the literature about failure, it is always about learning from the failures, so it means that you first need to fail, and what do you need to fail against? It is just against some expectations that you had at the beginning. If you had some specific expectations at the beginning, and if you do not reach these expectations as a product for instance, then it means that you have failed against these expectations, and it means that the involvement of resources that you have used to try and reach these expectations resulted in a result that is below what you wanted to reach at first. So yes of course, this is a learning process, but if you adapt this radical point of view it means that in the end you never fail, you always learn. Yet, sometimes
you do fail and companies do fail and we see that every day.” Even if he agreed that it is a learning process, this participant thinks that this learning process can happen because of a failure. He added that “I think sometimes we should really call a rabbit a rabbit, I hate the kind of wording that has developed over the last 10 years, when I hear about negative profit, negative growth and so on. If it is negative, it cannot be a profit, it cannot be a growth, it is just a decrease, and it is just a deficit. This obsession to try to make somethings positive even though it is not, makes me wonder about the possibility to accept how we can learn from the failure, and it goes back to our prior discussion, if it is not a failure, then if it just unsuccessful, it means that we will be successful one day or another, this is a very optimistic perspective, sometimes you can never reach your objectives of being successful on one specific domain for instance” This respondent here claimed that everything cannot be always successful by nature, and by using a word such as “unsuccessful” rather than “failure”, it can presuppose to intend to a success while it can end up with a failure. Hence, failure happens and has to happened in order to learn from it.

5.4 Relationship

Concerning the relationship, we asked if the co-creation process can influence this relationship between the company and the customers. Respondent 3 said that “it increases the relationship and increases adoption”. Indeed, Cristian S. argued that “if you are extremely transparent with that relation, the customers begin to see you as an authentic company. Then, they begin to believe in you”. Here, also we have this idea of the co-creation can influence positively the relationship by being transparent and authentic. Maarten P. included the idea of trust as an end-result of co-creation saying that it is about trust in the end, people trust more, when people work together, people know how it is happening. By doing so, it can create much more of a relationship, it is about loyalty, it is about creating something that feels like it is for the customers, it's by them, they are part of it, and the company is doing it for them, and if they understand that, if they see this, if the company does it well, then it is about a better relationship. Nigel P. saying that “I am a great believer in this idea that you can get people involved in the creative process so they have sense of sharing the ownership of the ideas, that make the rest of the journey much easier”. This shows that co-creation is profitable for both the company and the customers.

Babke H. brought two different possibilities such as “the customers feel really valued and they will probably value the company for that because they feel the company takes them seriously and they can see improvement in products or development of new products more tailored to their needs”. In another hand, Babke H. also said that “if the project fails, doesn’t meet the needs, it can harm the relationship and the customers might stop buying the products from that company and switch to another company”. Here co-creation will influence positively the relationship by adding value to the customers and the company. However, if something goes wrong during the process, co-creation can be seen as harmful.

Indeed, Mikael Y. stated that “I think a company shall do co-creation because they have a true believe that you are going to achieve better result. And then as a result of that, you have also created a better relationship, it is a result of something else. Some people say it is just to show off that we are doing co-creation. But I don’t agree at all, I
get actually angry when I hear that kind of statement because I think that you need to take customer involvement as serious as they were employees. They should really be seen as peers. Each of them could contribute in one way or the other”. This participant explained that co-creation is a way to achieve better results with the customers that, as a result, will improve the relationship and not only interact with the customers because it is profitable for the company’s image. This correlates with Loic P.’s answer saying that “if the quality of the product that it would result from the co-creation, if the product is not high level of quality, the new usages of the product do not match that much customers’ needs for instance”. Indeed, he explained that if you are a customer, and you put a very bad review, and this is one way to consider co-creation, if you put very bad review on a product on internet, you may expect feedbacks from the company, to make sure that the company reads these feedbacks, that they would take them into account. Further, he said that if none of these things are done, then it means that it’d be a problem, and that you may be less satisfied, you may want to cut the relationship, with the company and so on. The same participant explained that this is why “That’s why once again, it’s necessarily to train your employees to make sure that they can all of them interact with your customers”.

Concerning the important steps to build a relationship during the process of co-creation, Respondent 3 said that “it sounds like you just need good project management skills, and relationship management. You need to make sure that you build trust and you build respect, and you assure a win-win situation that both people get something out of it, and then you’re ok”, while Maarten P. said that “it is not different from any other project, it is about getting consensus, being open towards, everyone knows what the actual goal is, getting everyone on board, creating a plan, there is no difference with any other types of projects”. This participant brought the importance of building trust and respect in order to create a win-win environment. The importance of trust has been also explained by Mikael Y. saying that “the company must make feel the customers equal to employees. It is about building trust, people should feel that they get something out of it as well. There is different reason of course why people want to engage themselves in co-creation. It has to be very clear from the beginning that people have different expectations of co-creation”. Here, trust is presented as an important variable in order to create a better relationship with the customers and starting the relationship with the same understanding of the challenge.

Further, Cristian S. stated that the most important steps are to be authentic. Jeroen P., Cristian S. and Fredrik N. claimed that being open to ensuring that there is a dialogue and get richness of inputs and be part of a deep conversation. It is not only the company talking, but the companies must learn how to hear customers are important elements. This statement is linked with the previous one concerning management skills, as being a good listener and being authentic as a company. Babke H. said that the personal contact is important such as sending a generic confirmation email or send an email that says, thank you so much that you sign up for and looking forward to working with you. Also, keeping people update of the process, explaining the scope of the project, the rules, enhances the communication. Therefore, communication is a key element according to this participant in order to ensure a win-win relationship. Nigel P. explained two important aspects to build a relationship during the process of co-creation. The first element is if with completely new customer, normally the company is going on an extremely clear process and have everything down on paper, the company has to be far more careful about the information flow between them. Then,
the second element is about safety nest, by trying to build safety nest for the customers, that can be economical, conceptional, idea-wise. So, they always feel that even if the company goes way out, and risks falling through, there is always an alternative safety nest. These two elements are linked to create trust with the customer, ensuring the same point of view and providing a certain security for those who participate into the process.

Regarding the possibilities of a dissolution of the relationship between the company and the customer during the process of co-creation, participants expressed few reasons. Indeed, Cristian S. said that it can be a consequence of the end-result of the process saying that producing something that is not the result of the process while Fredrik N. stated that the dissolution can arise because the final product does not fit with the customers’ expectations. Consequently, most of the respondents support the company as responsible for the dissolution of the relationship. Indeed, Nigel P. said that “if I was to have a completely failed co-creation situation, that would be down to me not doing my job properly. So that would be a failure in my planning, my vision of what it should be, of my ability to execute it”.

The responsibility of the company in the co-creation is significant, if the co-creation is unsuccessful, then the company has to think about what was mismanaged. Furthermore, we had some answers such as “bad product management. If you do not have the good people and don’t know what they are doing well, find somebody else” (Respondent 3) or even, because of “lack of commitment” (Babke H). Maarten P. highlighted also the responsibility of the company by saying that “if you try to hide stuff, if you are not transparent about what is happening with the next steps, why certain steps have been chosen, why certain decisions have been made, it is about not involving everybody at the right moment, it is about not creating value to everyone, it is about people noticing that you have got different visions of what you are trying to achieved, maybe lying, it is about not involving the right people just to get the right people on board to actually get the full puzzle together, it can be about not going through the process in the right order which could become very frustrating if you don’t get anything that you helped to implement”.

Regarding the causes of the dissolution, Nick C. highlighted that “if customers feel they are not getting listen by the company, what they hope would happened is not happening, they can just give up and go away. I think that can happen, the relationship isn't open from the start so I think the customers quickly sense if they are being asked to do something that it feels inauthentic for them” while Loic P. declared “if some employees behave bully with the customers, do not take them seriously, do not allow enough time to think about the nature of the inputs that they could give and that the customers could give and so on, then co-creation could of course play a role in the dissolution of the relationship, also if the customers feel that he or she has provided so many inputs in the relationship and then the product is just fine, and it's not really what he expected, this could also result in a dissolution of the relationship”. Consequently, the dissolution can be a result from a misbehavior of the company in terms of managing the relationship with their customers and producing a decent product according the inputs of the customers.
Through this detailed answer we have a great overview of the issues that the company has to face and the reasons why a relationship during the process of co-creation can be dissolved. We have seen with his answers that it is a matter of being authentic, transparent, trustful, and professional. This answer has can be related with another answer given by our third respondent saying that “it’s always the company responsibility, they didn’t manage well enough, they were not respectful enough, they didn’t build trust enough, they didn’t communicate clearly to achieve those things, they didn’t create a win-win situation and that’s your responsibilities as a product manager”. However, this participant argued that “the moment is your fault you have the power to do something about it, the moment is somebody else’s fault, you have no power at all”. In other words, it is always the fault of the company when it comes to co-creation due to the various reasons above, but as long as the company can handle their responsibilities, the company will keep the power to manage the process.

Nevertheless, Mikael Y. indicated that the customers can also be responsible of the dissolution of the relationship due to “a case of bad people, where they want to purposively do bad stuff. It could be that people talk about themselves that they are good about specific skills, and when we are meeting them, nothing is matching with what they told us. It could also be that if we put 5 people together, each of them are brilliant individually, but as a group they fail because they have hard time working together”. According to the participants, the reasons of a dissolution is focused on the personal intentions of the customers to co-create. Moreover, the personal skills and the way of interacting with people can harm the end-result of the process of co-creation and thereby affect negatively the relationship between the company and the customers. Another respondent gave an answer concerning the attitudes of the customers saying that “we try to be very clear with the clients that we are taking risks, but obviously if you have customers that are very conservative, it can be a very hard sell to get them to go to a direction that they are not comfortable with. And if that fails, yes it could be a tricky situation to pull yourself back” (Nigel P.). Consequently, the personality of the customers has an important impact on the process of co-creation, the customer has to be comfortable with the idea that a company is trying to understand their needs and sometimes can take some risks in order to achieve that goal. In another hand, a participant tried to balance the negative aspects of losing customers by declaring that “yes if you, as the customer, you don’t see anything about what you gave in the final design, I mean you probably end up hating the company (...) as the company you would still end up with a better product so on a whole maybe you lose one consumer but I think you would gain more” (Thomas L.).

Regarding the likelihood of opportunistic behavior during the process of co-creation, we have discovered that “one person is always more dominant that the other, the other person can react to that for instance. You have to find motivation where people would be up to work together in the most productive way and avoid pitfalls” (Maarten P.). This statement is linked with the idea of creating a creative environment explained previously in the result. Moreover, Maarten P. expressed that if the company falls into the pitfalls, and a dominant behavior is one of them, then things can become a bit of a mess. They can hold people or push them away from what the company tries to achieve. In another hand, Babke H. argued that “customers might see something that they think it’s nice, and they want to contribute. And they start contributing and then after half way through it’s not that interesting as they hope it would be and they stop. So it would be very opportunistic because the customer made a commitment, and it’s
not as nice as you hoped it would be so you stop contributing”. This participant added that “from the company’s side, the company says “well, we need some inputs let’s just do a co-creation project, because we get a lot of inputs” and then they don’t give feedbacks to people, they don’t do anything with your inputs, just end up in a shelf”. These two different aspects can harm the relationship or the company’s image.

Furthermore, we had an interesting answer from Nigel P. and Jeroen P. who talked about opportunistic behavior in saying that “I would hope it would. I think the creative process is a very selfish process, the biggest problem we have is if we get into a co-creation situation and people don’t stop trying to carve their own place. So, if people sit here very passively, and expect you to feed them with everything that is not a co-creative environment, and it is not giving us anything I can sit and do that on my own on my desk. So, part of that thing is that people should be fighting for their piece of the cake the all-time in the co-creating process. And this little war is part of the process, it should be” (Nigel P.) and “opportunism is very important you can spot something that interest you and you find inspiring, and you want to know more about, but you have to do it right” (Jeroen P.). Interestingly, for our respondents, opportunistic behaviors are part of the process of co-creation in order to incentive the customers to provide richer insights and in order to have a constructive discussion that will emulate ideas. In another hand, Nick C. claimed that opportunistic behavior can be caused by one part who is not honest with the others, or who tries to hide things to the others.

5.5 Trust and Commitment

Concerning the significance to build trust and commitment during the co-creation process, participants assessed these variables as prerequisite (Cristian S.), fundamental (Nigel P.), key variables of humans’ relationships (Respondent 3), and important (Babke H., Nigel P., Nick C., Jeroen P.) to build a strong relationship between customers and companies. Cristian S. added that these variables impact the quality of the relationship, highlighting that companies should ensure to test the variables before to implement a co-creation process.

On the other hand, others participants such as Babke H., Cristian S., Maarten P. expressed the interrelation between trust and commitment. Indeed, Babke H. claimed that “if the company doesn’t commit to the project, the customers won’t trust the company. And if customers don’t commit to the project then you could say that the company doesn’t really trust the customers because they can’t rely on the outcomes because they don’t know how involve the customers are. So I think commitment causes trust probably. The most committed you are, the easier you build a level of trust I’d say” and therefore she highlighted the link between the variables. Cristian S. supported the idea that commitment is present when there is trust, while Maarten P. completed that commitment results from trust. Nigel P. discussed that more commitment an individual has, more trust s/he would have.

Nigel P. and Nick C. discussed the need the importance of these variables to create an comfortable environment for the customers. Nigel P. stated that this environment is necessary in order to makes customers understand that there is no danger and no bad ideas. Hence, we understand that trust and commitment are paramount to create this environment where people can express themselves.
Mikael Y. discussed the difference between the variables by saying that when an individual does not feel trust for the company, the results will not be good, whereas commitment can be affected along the project. Indeed, Mikael Y. exemplified in saying that an individual can lose energy during the project and therefore impact negatively the commitment. Thus, Mikael Y. claimed that these variables have different impacts on the relationship, where a decrease of commitment can be handle from the company if they start to encourage the customers and to engage them through different ways of communication, while trust is a matter of an individual feels trust or does not feel trust. Consequently, Thomas L. supported the idea that the co-creation process can improve the variables between the company and the customers, especially with the customers involved because they feel valued and happy. According to Thomas L. these emotions allow to have a strong feeling of trust and commitment to the co-creation project. We can relate this idea with the answer of Loic P. saying that when a customer decides to be involved in the co-creation process, “it shows a certain level of commitment, it can be something else than trust because you may not trust a company and because you do not trust this company, you do want to co-create with this company to make sure that the resulted product would respect some values”. Hence, according to Loic P., we understand that the co-creation process presupposes a certain level of commitment, without necessarily have a level of trust. This has been covered by Jeroen P. who stated the need to have commitment in order to be into the process, to understand and to learn, while for him, trust corresponds to the honesty between the involved parties.

When discussing about how companies create a feeling of trust for the customers, respondents have answered spontaneously by being authentic (Cristian S., Respondent 3), by being transparent (Cristian S., Maarten P., Nick C.), by being consistent (Cristian S., Respondent 3), by being respectful (Mikael Y., Loic P., Nick C., Jeroen P.) and by being open (Maarten P., Mikael Y., Nick C.). The idea of authenticity can be linked to the idea of honesty developed by half of the participants such as Maarten P., Mikael Y., Nigel P., Thomas L., Nick C., and Jeroen P.

In line with this idea, Maarten P. stated that companies build trust “by being very open about what you are trying to achieve, by making sure that customers understand that you are not just only doing it for yourself but also doing it for them, by being honest about what is it that you trying to do and follow on that, so it is just do what you say and say what you do, you are not trying to scam them”. Hence, we understand that companies have to be very clear about the co-creation project and follow their strategic plans. On the other hand, Jeroen P. highlighted the need to be honest through the co-creation techniques. Jeroen P. discussed the need to learn about the customers involved during the co-creation workshops, be more personal and thereby see the person as a whole. For Babke H, Nigel P., Thomas L., Loic P., Nick C., and Fredrik N., it seems that communication is one driver of trust. Babke H. highlighted the need to be very clear about the scope of the project, Fredrik N. specified to be clear about the expectations, while Nick C. indicated the need to be clear about the challenge of the project and the use of the datas. Loic P. and Nick C. agree on the importance to be clear about the expected outcomes of the project. By clarifying all the aspects of the project, the company can create trust with their customers that would lead them to express trustfully their opinions and their creativity (Loic P.)

Gathering all the ideas previously mentioned, Michael Y. mentioned the aspects to build trust with his own experience in the company is working in. Indeed, the last few
years the company has built up a strong feeling of trust for the customer, over the world, through the co-creation activities. Consequently, he explained the success of the company that have treated people in trustful ways which derives from being very open, honest and straightforward to the point to the way to treat people and to deliver a product according to the perceptions of the customers. Loic P. added that to create trust it is important to deliver a product that respects the statements of communication, and thereby do not create a gap between the communication around the product, and the product itself. Moreover, Loic P. thinks that by showing importance to the customers, by being patient with the customer demands, and by being flexible with the project’s procedures, the level of trust increases. Furthermore, Thomas L. claimed that the co-creation process is trust building because it involves ordinary individuals. He exemplified in saying that involving mothers for a product targeting babies, the fact that the product has been designed by mothers for mothers can influence the purchase of other mothers because it makes the product more human and more real. Hence, the feeling of trust can increase between customers and companies. Furthermore, a respondent (I8) came up with the importance of training, employees and customers to make sure that employees manage the customers in a respectful manner.

On the other hand, Maarten P. described commitment as “when customers understand that there is a possible outcome for them at the end, and if they believe you and trust you, then you can together get to that result”. Building commitment in order to have a strong relationship results in the implementation of a win-win situation for Respondent 3 and by walking the talk for Cristian S. Indeed, Cristian S. stated the importance of the story telling in order to “build the story of the realities, because for creating commitment you have to be real, the good things and bad things that you have overcome”. This can be related to the answer of Loic P. who has stated that the company needs to announce and explain clearly what they expect from the customers, and suggest rewards to the customers, extrinsic (e.g. money) and intrinsic rewards (e.g. valuing the user by thanking, or showing their names). This has been completed Jeroen P. who claimed that companies have to be clearly aware about their real motivations to engage themselves in the process and consequently being honest with themselves.

Further, Nick C. supported the idea that the company has to listen the customers. In line with this, the notion of community has been expressed by Cristian S. and Mikael Y. Indeed, for Cristian S., building commitment results as well in maintaining a fluid conversation and creating a community around your company. Mikael Y. completed this idea in highlighting the need to have a certain management of the community. For him, the communities aim to reach many people needs and wants, and therefore different people engagement and commitment because individuals are all different and all expect different outcomes from companies. Therefore, Mikael Y. discussed the need to take into consideration the factor of diversity in order to meet up the commitment in different ways depending on who you are talking to. Another aspect that has been raised by Babke H. is the accessibility. People would be more committed if it is easier for them to communicate with the company in a simple and faster way, especially if they feel a personal touch. This idea of accessibility can be referred to the need to manage the community of individuals, expressed by Cristian S. and Mikael Y. Further, Thomas L. assumed that even if the co-creation fails, a customer would be more committed to a company that co-creates with customers than a firm that does not involve people. Indeed, the fact that a company engages customer ideas, insights, and inputs makes the process more real than a traditional product development.
When talking about a potential lack of trust in the relationship between companies and consumers, our participants have provided different opinions. Indeed, Cristian S., Respondent 3, Babke H., Jeroen P. and Fredrik N. think that companies are responsible when there is a lack of trust. Babke H. explained the fact that companies are aware that customers involved in the co-creation can be susceptible to leave the co-creation project for several reasons, thereby highlighting the need to have a proper group of customers. However, she has emphasized the consequences of the mistakes made by the company, “everything that you don’t do well affect the project directly, so the effects are just much bigger”. Cristian S. agreed to blame the companies and declared that “the lack of trust is seen through the clients but it is produced by the company, if you as a customer do not trust the company, it’s not because you are paranoiac, it’s because the company does not give you the elements to create the trust environment”. This responsibility of the companies to manage well the project and thereby trust has been claimed by Respondent 3 as well. Indeed, for him, it’s a matter of professionalism. The company decides to start a co-creation project by choosing to involve people, “you are taking their time, it is your project so you are responsible, the moment you own the project you are taking the responsibilities, that’s you, if you are not professional, find another job”.

On the other hand, Maarten P. stated the lack of trust during co-creation could come from both sides, companies and customers. He developed the benefits of trust such as trust can deliver value, trust can give you information that are relevant and important and expressed that trust leads companies to be scared. Indeed, Maarten discussed that people can run off of ideas, or the competition can pick the ideas up, and then create a feeling of fear. Nigel P. thought that the lack of trust can come from anywhere, specifying that “trust is based on the experience, if they say one thing and then you turn around and you say exactly the opposite, that’s not a really good way for the company to create trust” (16). Consequently, it is a matter of communication. However, when it comes to responsibilize the customers for the lack of trust, Maarten P. questioned the drivers of trust for the customers, “do the customers actually believe you in what you are trying to do, and do they believe it is not just for the company?”. Only Babke H. clearly thought that the lack of trust is produced by the customers. She explained her opinions in saying that people working in a company have a purpose, which is to do their job and when they see the value of co-creation, the employees would like to succeed with that, while customers are there for free participation. In a general way, Loic P. said that the lack of trust can emerge from an opportunistic behavior that arises from either customers or company.

Concerning the potential lack of commitment, the answers vary, displaying a reverse of the elements of the creation of commitment. The Respondent 3 claimed that by not having a win-win situation, a lack of commitment could raise from the company. In line with this, Nigel P. asserted that everyone has to be as committed as all the other partners in order to have a balance between customers and companies. Further, Maarten P. said that the lack of commitment results from a lack of trust because if an individual does not trust the company then the company cannot deliver value for the individual. This idea outlines the previous statements expressing the interrelation between trust and commitment. Moreover, Cristian S. supported that the lack of commitment is due to the company in saying that “the company should give a strategic attention of what they are doing, in the conversation they establish with the customers, if you are
authentic and you are giving a good attention to those conversations, you achieve commitment, otherwise nothing happens, you lose commitment when the company fails”. Consequently, we can notice that the company is responsible as well for the lack of commitment in the relationship between customers and company due to a mismanagement of the conversation with the clients. We can relate this idea with the statement of Nigel P. who advanced that the lack of commitment is a matter of continuity in the information flow, because sometimes there are some information that don’t get through. Moreover, Fredrik N. related the lack of commitment and the lack of clarity about the expectations. Indeed, for him, companies can lack of commitment if they were not very clear with the outcomes. Compared to the other answers, Loic P. brought different insights and claimed that the lack of commitment can be produced by both companies and customers. Indeed, Loic P. supported the idea that customers can lack of inputs, of cognitive skills to participate, or do not want to spend too much time while the company may lack of awareness about what they really expect from the process and from the customers. Consequently, he concluded that a lack of commitment from the customer causes a lack of commitment from the company and vice versa.

Concerning the elements that can hinder trust and commitment building, the interviewees gave us mixed answers. Indeed, a lack of transparency (Cristian S.), lack of authenticity (Cristian S., Respondent 3), and lack of information (Nigel P.) have been expressed as affecting negatively commitment and trust of customers toward companies. Further, Cristian S. and Babke H. claimed the idea of lack of purpose and lack of clarity of the scope of the challenge. Fredrik N. expressed about the lack of clarity related to the expectations of the process or because the company does not give credit to the involved customers. Jeroen P. claimed if the company lacks of openness, the customers would feel they waste their time causing a lack of commitment. According to the participants, it seems that companies can jeopardize trust and commitment if they do not define clearly the co-creation projects. Furthermore, not being honest has been mentioned few times (Maarten P., Mikael Y., Nigel P., Loic P., Jeroen P.). This can be led to the idea of other participants (Cristian S., Thomas L., Loic P.) claiming that lies from the company could also affect trust and commitment. However, in line with this, Thomas L. added the idea of not knowing. Despite the best intentions of companies, Thomas L. explained that it could happen that a product fails and it has to be recalled. This incident can lead to a damaged or broken trust between the companies and customers. Only Cristian S. expressed the idea of negative results which could hinder the variables. While, Nigel P. asserted that the budget could affect trust and commitment, because if companies do not have a safety margin, that could be a problem.

5.6 Customer Satisfaction

Concerning the customer satisfaction, the interviewees agreed on the influence of the co-creation process on the customer satisfaction. First, Jeroen P. generalized by saying that somehow customer satisfaction is always involved in the co-creation process. Then, Babke H. conditioned this impact by saying that co-creation impacts the
customer satisfaction, when the company tells the story about it. Babke H. stressed the difference of impact depending of the group of customers. Indeed, according to her, the co-creation process does not impact the customers involved in the same way than the other customers. The co-creation process would not impact the customer satisfaction of the non-involved persons in the process unless the company tells the story through some marketing campaigns. Consequently, we can notice that telling the story about how the product was built with customer involvement, allows the companies to reach the other consumers, potential clients of the product, and maybe influence the purchase. Indeed, according to Babke H., telling the story can impact the perception of the brand for the others.

On the hand, when it comes to talk about the customers involved, it has been said that being part of the process makes people satisfied and happy (Mikael Y., Thomas L., Fredrik N.) because they feel proud of themselves (Mikael Y.). Consequently, Mikael Y. claimed that a company should not underestimate the quality and the satisfaction with people engaging themselves. In line with this idea, the respondent 3 stated that the customer satisfaction increases during the co-creation process if the customer feels engaged and if the value is disseminated and shared. Moreover, Cristian S., Thomas L., and Loic P. related the customer satisfaction to the end-results of the co-creation process. Indeed, for Cristian S., if the results are good, the impact is extremely good. He explained his statement in claiming that is due because the company understood their customers wants and needs. This idea has been covered Thomas L who said that when co-creating a product, the results are always better than if the company launches a new product without customers while outlining that customers are satisfied with good products. Therefore, co-creating a product by involving customers results in a better satisfaction for the customers. Further, Loic P. stated that the level of customer satisfaction would depend of the management of the process. He addressed questions that could be interesting that the company clarifies, “have employees been respectful with customers? Did they have strong relationship with customers? Did the company show what they want from customers? Did the company gain benefits from customer inputs? Was the process clear for customers?”. On the other hand, Nigel P. is mixed about the impact of the co-creation process on the customer satisfaction. Indeed, he stated that a company can produce as good results without necessary co-create in highlighting the difference of outcomes between co-created product and traditional product, “what co-creation techniques would do is to produce different results and it might be and should be more interesting results because it’s more informed”.

In term of using the co-creation in order to improve the customer satisfaction, the answers are diverse. Cristian S., Respondent 3 and Mikael Y. claimed that spontaneously the co-creation process results from an investment from the company while other participants are mixed. Indeed, Nigel P. and Cristian S. argued spontaneously that the co-creation process is an investment. Nigel P. claimed that the investment in the end-results is what the company obtains for the end-customers while Cristian S. gave two specific reasons. Indeed, thanks to the process the results would be quite better because the company would be more accurate on how its new products answer its customer needs, then he supported the fact that by co-creating, the company involves customers without boundaries which results in friendship between the customer and the company. Consequently, through the co-creation process, companies build a closer relationship with customers. On the other hand, Maarten P. and Babke H. are mixed between seeing the process as an investment or an expense. Babke H.
answered that on a short term, it could be an expense while on the long term, the process can be seen as an investment because it can also help to build the brand image and the brand story, which for the company takes time. Maarten P. provided a straightforward answer by stating that the co-creation process is an expense if the company does it wrong, and it is an investment if the company does it right.

When it comes to express the elements which could negatively affect the customer satisfaction during the co-creation, Cristian S. claimed that it depends of the plan, if it is clear or not because “if the company has no plan, they will not invest the necessary time or the right people to manage correctly the process. This need of clarity between customers and the company has been covered as well by Loic P. who declared that it is a question of giving feedback, maintaining the conversation, and sharing results with the customers. Then, when the company does not manage these elements, it could affect the customer satisfaction. In line with this idea, Mikael Y. stated that it is a matter of engagement. Indeed, if the company does not engage enough the customers, they would not be as satisfied as if the company engages them more. Furthermore, Maarten P. demonstrated the necessity to inform the customers, because “if the customer thinks that the company is actually doing something for them, and that create value for them, and they see that, then they start having a better feeling about you and they are satisfied about what is happening”. Consequently, Maarten P. showed us the need for the company to manage the process and to provide value to customers, if they do not, customers will not be satisfied. Additionally, Nigel P. declared that the customer satisfaction could be negatively affected by the negative results, especially in a case of no-result, when the company does not learn anything from it. Another point has been supported by Thomas L. who expressed a lack of diversity during the co-creation process. Indeed, he illustrated by saying that if the company wants to produce a certain product, it is important to involve persons with different subcultures and an equal say during the process in order to have a product corresponding to a large amount of persons. This need to have an equal say during the process has been repeated by Fredrik N. From an organizational view, Loic P. claimed the need to have an internal management in training employees in order to manage the customer involvement and to treat them in a correct and respectful manner. These employees’ trainings would impact positively the satisfaction of the customers involved in the process if they feel well treated.

In relation with his/her satisfaction, the customers would have different reactions. In the situation where the co-creation process is mismanaged, our participants gave us similar answers. Customers would have a feeling of frustration (Maarten P., Respondent 3, Babke H), disappointment (Maarten P., Babke H., Thomas L., Fredrik N.) or feeling to have been used by the company (Loic P.). However, some participants (Cristian S., Respondent 3., Babke H.) involved the context of the situation. According to them, the level of engagement of the customers can lead the customers to have different reactions (Respondent 3) but also it depends of the way the company handles the situation (Cristian S., Babke H., Loic P.). Further, the customer reactions depend also from the end-results (Loic P.) and if customers are affected by the results. Thomas L. and Loic P. agreed on the fact that sometimes, involved customers are not aware about the end-results and thereby do not realize the failure of the process. The Respondent 3 expressed the personality of the customers since the co-creation process involves human emotions. Further, Babke H. came up with the fact that the communication of the company plays a role in the reactions of the customers. She
argued that the company by communicating with its customers, and explaining them why they failed the process, the customers could understand. This has been supported by Fredrik N. who talked about the importance to continue the discussion in order to save the collaboration after a failure. However, if the company does not, the customers would feel frustrated, disappointed, angry because they spent time and energy into the process. Supporting this idea, Mikael Y. talked also of giving feedbacks to the customers while explaining them that the ideas are saved and can be used later for another project. Further, Babke H. Mikael Y. and Loic P. discussed the importance to always thank the customers for their participations in order to mitigate the customer reactions. On the other hand, Nigel P. noticed that the reactions of the customers determine the results of the co-creation process. Indeed, if customers do not provide any feedbacks to the company, or if the company can acknowledge a lack of understanding from the customers toward the process, or even a lack of enjoyment from them, it means that the co-creation process has been mismanaged. Also, Jeroen P. argued that in case the process goes wrong, companies can perceive the failure by the fact that customers did not respond as the company wanted them to.

Concerning the feelings of self-blame and guilt from the customers toward the unsuccessful co-creation process, participants (Cristian S., Maarten P., Babke H., Mikael Y., Thomas L., Nick C., Jeroen P.) do not think that it could happen because they all agree to claim that it results from mistakes from the company. Consequently, customers engaged are more likely to blame the company because the final results are not what they were expected (Babke H., Mikael Y., Nick C.) or if they feel that the company did not listen their inputs or just because it is easier to blame the company (Babke H.). On the other hand, Babke H. stated that the customers could also blame themselves, explaining with an example “as a customer, I could have done more so I can’t blame the company for making a project that it doesn’t really fit to my needs because I didn’t explain them to the company” (14). Additionally, Maarten P. discussed the idea of groups. Indeed, the likelihood that customers would blame themselves would result of a group decision process because people have together decided on a certain product which has completely failed. However, the responsibility is still held by the company since it is its job to guide people in the right way. Then, the Respondent 3 developed a statement based on the culture of the customers. For him, the culture could affect the ways customers would react to the failure of the process. Additionally, Thomas L. brought the variable of individual personality. Indeed, he argued that individuals can be dissatisfied with the final product depending of their personal tastes.

Regarding the level of customer satisfaction, participants discussed different point of views concerning the failure of companies to improve it through the co-creation process. Babke H. highlighted the fact that the change of the level of the customer satisfaction is perceived as a risk that the company is aware to take with the co-creation process. She confirmed that the process can result with a negative impact on the customer satisfaction. Jeroen P. confirmed that not having a high customer satisfaction at the end of the process is perceived as a problem for the company. Respondent 3, Mikael Y. and Thomas L. discussed the impact of the low customer satisfaction after the process of the co-creation on the future engagement of the customers. On the other hand, Cristian S. and Loic P. brought the idea that the low level of the customer satisfaction can be perceived as a downside if the company does not manage the process correctly, neither communicate properly. In line with the idea of process management, Maarten P. added that “it is also about knowledge, implementation, the
whole process, i’m not saying that if you are doing something wrong it is terrible, stuff happen, people forgive, unless it is something unforgettable such as hiding, keeping information away, that’s something terrible”. Further, Cristian S. suggested that it could be also perceived differently depending of the culture of the individuals, for example, in Germany, you just try again while in Nordic countries if the project fails it could be seen as a downside. Consequently, we can notice that certain elements are really important in order to increase the customer satisfaction with the co-creation process. Thus, if the company fails to improve the customer satisfaction it can be perceived as a downside but not specially a co-creation downside because, according to Maarten P., a failure is a downside if the company does things wrong. Regarding the low level of customer satisfaction, Loic P. agreed to perceive this variable as a potential downside of the process, “except if the company has implemented a recovery strategy in which customers would end up by being satisfied, because they would consider that the company has done its best to make sure they are satisfied”.  

6. Thematic Network Analysis

After having presented our empirical findings in the chapter 5 above, we create thematic networks in order to analyze our qualitative data. Based on our empirical findings, we have identified three global themes: co-creation, downsides and effects. This chapter aims to show a clear overview of these three global themes in order to have a better understanding for the discussion.

6.1 Co-creation

The global theme of co-creation concerns the point of views of the participants concerning the process. All participants agreed to express the process as a productive collaboration between customers and a company resulting in a sharing value between both involved parts. The aim of the co-creation process is well-defined by the interviewees who all stated it is based by involving resources such as customers and employees into the process in order to develop a product resulting in better results. According to one of our participants, co-creation is defined through a process involving customers should be supported, transparent and continuous in order to have a complete co-creation process. Another respondent claimed that the process of involving customers should be described as a value process and not as a co-creation process. Indeed, he supported the fact that the process is uncertain in term of outcomes, which could be whether a value co-creation or a value co-destruction.

Figure 3: Co-creation network
Further, participants emphasized the role of customers in the process which appears important to take into consideration during the development of products. Indeed, the companies empower customers in order to have new information, knowledge and ideas from them while companies provide information and feedbacks to the customers. Consequently, this share of information represents one of the aspects of the co-creation process, as shown on the Figure 3. Customer information is characterized by insights and ideas which go back and forth between the company and customers in order to improve them all along the process. In a broader manner, the co-creation process is built through interactions between customers and the company.

Participants have reported that the co-creation process requires to take some factors into consideration such as management skills, communication, identification and selection of customers, and the importance of trainings in order to benefit from the process (Figure 3). Indeed, some respondents claimed the need to train employees and customers. By doing so, the company would engage employees capable to manage the relationship with customers and therefore treat them in a right and respectful manner. Furthermore, the co-creation process requires knowledge of internal management such as leadership and relationship management, and in term of communication. As the process results of exchange between customers and the company, it is important to know how to manage the relationship through the communication. On the other hand, participants agreed on the fact that the company has to be able to identify and to select the right individuals to participate to the project. Indeed, according to the respondents, it seems that depending of the project, the company has to select the right people in order to access to relevant ideas and insights.

By implementing the co-creation process, the respondents affirmed that companies and customers access to several benefits than they could not acquire with a traditional development of new product. Indeed, the ideas provided by customers through different tools of co-creation allow the company to develop a new product or to enhance an existing product in relation to customers’ viewpoints. By doing so, the company has the capacities to create a product that fits customers’ needs and wants because they would be informed about the customers’ trends. Indeed, according to the participants, the co-creation process allows the company to get closer to their targets and thereby create a product that would be more appropriate and accurate for the users. In term of innovation process, the respondents claimed that by co-creating with customers, a company is able to reduce the cost of the process, and also to speed it up. The launch of the product on the market would be faster as the product would have been shaped by customers, and thereby reducing the risks of product failure. Further, co-creation helps to promote the product and increases the marketing effect. In term of end-results, co-creation is perceived for the participants as a learning process, allowing the company to avoid making mistakes.

On the other hand, customers participate to the co-creation process for diverse reasons. Participants expressed the importance of the social benefits for the customers in saying that customers are happy to engage themselves into the process. Feeling engaged appears to be the first reason why customers participate to the development of new product. Further, the respondents affirmed that the monetary reward is not perceived as essential for the customers. Indeed, it has been explained that, companies using co-creation give only a low amount of money, which normally aims to cover the expenses (e.g. day off, transport etc). As a result, they confirmed that social benefits are more
important for the customers than monetary rewards. However, it seems important for the participants to increase the customer social benefits in highlighting social rewards such as by being thankful toward the customer or by giving them feedbacks. By co-creating, customers feel valued by the company, as they receive credit from the company they work with, by for instance expressing the customers’ names during the promotion of the product. Consequently, we can affirm that the co-creation process involves human emotions for the customers as shown in the Figure 3. Indeed, co-creating is perceived by the customers as a source of enjoyment and pleasure, because they feel they contribute to the product, and thereby they feel proud of themselves. Concerning the other customers, companies are able to reach them because they empower people who are seen as peers for the larger target of customers. Indeed by doing that, and by communicating about that, the company can create emotions for those customers who would see the product as “made by peers”.

In order to build a strong relationship with its customers, a company has to create a specific co-creation environment where some variables have to be implemented, as shown in the figure 3. Participants have stated that this environment is important in order to create trust and commitment between customers and the company and to obtain relevant inputs from the customers. First, the relationship has to be open and honest between both parts involved. By being open, people would show their creativity and would not be shy to express it. In this environment, people would feel comfortable where people are free to express themselves and to build on each other’s ideas. Moreover, this environment emphasizes the sharing of information, and also, a sharing of knowledge and skills through communities. By creating communities, the company gives the opportunity to their customers to share ideas and to talk to each others. Using communities is an advantage for companies because it allows to reach and to engage many people. Indeed a participant claimed that co-creation should engage many different people as everyone is different. Consequently, communities could appear as a good way to reach different people and thereby to pay attention to the diversity. By doing that, the company is willing to provide a new product corresponding to a larger target’s needs and expectations. However, the community requires a management where a fluid and a continuous conversation has to be implemented.

In order to communicate in a better way with customers and to build a strong relationship between them and the company, participants brought the necessity to use two techniques, clearing the past and closing the loop. Clearing the past is expressed by one of our participants who explained this concept in highlighting the need for the companies to discuss with its customers about the previous mistakes in order to clarify the situation for the involved parts into the process. By doing so, the company is able to put the past behind and to start the project with its customers with a clean sheet. Further, closing the loop allows to create a strong relationship between the brand and the customers where the company provides a personal touch each time a customer provide insights and ideas. As exemplified by one of our participants, the company can close the loop by being thankful toward the customers. Consequently, the company behaves in a way that the relationship can increase trust and commitment.
6.2 Downsides

The second global theme we have found concerns the downsides of co-creation during the process of new product development. This global theme gathers four organizational themes, which are: miscommunication, mismanagement from the company, mismanagement of the environment and misbehavior of the company (Figure 4). Each of these organizational themes clusters the basic themes that participants have provided.

We found out that one of the downsides of the co-creation process during the development of new products is a result of various variables. Most of them are connected to one common denominator: the company. Indeed, we found out that all the participants agreed upon the fact that the company is and will remain responsible of the process of co-creation. The involvement of the customers in the process does not impact in any way their responsibility toward the end-results.

Therefore, through our results, we have discovered that one of the factors causing downsides is the mismanagement from the company when implementing and running the process of co-creation. The mismanagement affects different matters, such as process, inputs and customers. Indeed, concerning the mismanagement of the process, participants have expressed the lack of leadership from the company. This lack of leadership affects the way the company conducts the process. Additionally, the
respondents assumed that the mismanagement of the process would cause an unsuccessful co-creation affecting the end-results, the customers, their satisfaction and also the relationship between the involved parts. Thus, mismanagement is seen as the mistakes the company makes. As explained by the participants, the process of co-creation is not straightforward and no formula exists to implement it successfully. It is due to the fact that the process will depend on the value of the company and the fact that each context is different in terms of product, budget, and goals of the company and not on a specific method. As aforementioned, managing such a process requires specific skills and qualified employees. The company and the customers both have to trust these skills when they are involved in the process of co-creation. Consequently, bad product management results from a lack of skilled people within the process. Indeed, if some employees mismanage the process, it is important to hire someone else to do the work properly or to involve employees in training. Indeed, training has been highlighted as an important element of the process of co-creation. It is important to ensure that a company goes through the process in the right order to avoid any downside. By training the employees of the company, the employees will deal with the customers in a respectful manner and manage correctly their involvements in the process. As it has been pointed by participants, a lack of training of both the employees and the customers will lead to either an unsuccessful project with unexpected result or to a failure of the process. Conversely, the training can lead to a better management of the inputs provided by the customers. It is important to be careful about the management of the inputs because a mismanagement of the inputs will provoke the same consequences than mismanagement of the process, or of the customers. During the co-creation process, companies are looking for inputs. By asking to the customer’s insights, companies will be able to develop a product that will fit to the customer’s needs. By mismanaging this aspect of the process, it is heading the project to a fall. Additionally, participants stated that mismanagement could occur as well by not listening to the customer’s inputs, by not being able to stimulate enough the creativity of the customers, by not using the inputs and also not being able to identity the appropriate inputs from the customers.

Then, we have identified another global theme, which focuses on the behavior of the company during the process of co-creation. Indeed, by misbehaving, the company will lead the process and the relationship to failure. Indeed, if trust is not created and enhanced during co-creation, the process would lead to failure. Therefore, misbehavior conducts to a lack of trust. Depending on the manners the company will behave during the process toward the customers, trust will improve or not. Thus, it appears important for our participants that companies have to be transparent and authentic towards the customers in order to increase their trust through the process. Participants stated that the relationship can be endangered if the companies hide information, lie to their customers or keep important information for them. These behaviors from the company that are not transparent would affect the level of trust and thereby the relationship between the company and customers. These effects would also be produced if the customers have the feeling to be bullied by the company or if they do not get any attention from the company. Despite the fact that a participant said that during a relationship, there is always one dominant part compared to the others, opportunistic behaviors can occur during the process of co-creation. Interestingly, these opportunistic behaviors can result from either the company or the customer. Some participants think that opportunistic behaviors have to exist during the process due to the selfish attribute of the co-creation process itself. By taking over the process, the company will collect
inputs from the customers and use them for their own sake. On the other hand, customers could engage themselves to the process and bias the results in giving intentional bad insights, or leave the process before the end. Consequently, misbehaviors do have a strong impact on the relationship. Indeed, by influencing the level of trust, misbehavior creates a lack of trust, which can cause a lack of commitment as it has been affirmed by several participants. By the presence of a lack of trust between the company and customers, any involved parts will not be committed to the others and any value will not be created.

Another negative element from the co-creation that we identified is the miscommunication of the company. We found out that a miscommunication from the company can impact the commitment of the customers during the process of co-creation and their satisfaction. Indeed, communication plays an important role during the process and several factors can lead to miscommunication. It has been stated several times by our respondents that providing feedbacks to the customers concerning the process is very important in order to manage a closer relationship. Feedbacks can be either upon the process or the results. Indeed, participants declared that it is necessary that the company keeps update the involved customers during the process in giving information about how far the process is and how their inputs are used. Thus, feedbacks of the end-results are very important because they show the interest of the company towards the customers’ inputs. It could be by notifying them about the development of the product, its launch on the market, the fact they could find soon the product they co-created with the company, or how their inputs have been used during the development of it. Moreover, participants have confirmed several times the importance to keep a personal contact with the involved customers through the whole process. Furthermore, participants confirmed the importance of the communication when it comes to clarify the terms of the relationship during the process of co-creation. The company has to communicate on their expectations with the process, and about what they want from their customers. A participant said that communication allows the company to ensure that the customers will provide meaningful insights by giving or not specific information in order to emulate the customer’s creativity. For this reason, the company has to be authentic and consistent in their communication activities and do not go back and forth on their decision. By doing so, they could ensure that their customers will stay committed to the company during the whole process.

Communication is a major driver of the process of co-creation as it helps to the good establishment of the environment of co-creation. According to the participants, the co-creation environment is paramount during the process in order to ensure a safe space to the customers. Failing to create a comfortable environment such as not being open to the dialogue, it is heading the process for fail. During the process, creativity has to be stimulated, to do so it is important to create a safe environment where ideas and insights of each other will not be criticized as bad or not relevant. Participants indicated the importance of creating a feeling of community between the involved customers in the process. Thus, managing correctly the community through a dialogue is seen as important otherwise it will lead to a mismanagement of the process. Indeed, mismanaging the environment by a lack of community management will conduct to a less fluid conversation and thereby endanger the commitment. Moreover, a lack of community among customers added to miscommunication will lead to an unclear understanding of the challenges, the expectations and the scope of the challenge, which will head the process for fail. Indeed, these elements will also have an impact on the
commitment of both customers and company. For the company, a lack of commitment will result in doing co-creation for the wrong reason, by only thinking that co-creation will be beneficial for their brand image instead of creating a win-win situation where both the company and the customers create value for each other. Indeed, by not having everyone committed to the process, the co-creation cannot be successful. Here as well, the environment does not only affect commitment but does affect trust. Results show that lack of trust can result in misbehavior from the company as stated above, but it can also result from the company itself that does not create a trustful environment.

Hence, following the Figure 4, results show that the downsides of co-creation leading to the failure of the process co-creation focus on four attributes: miscommunication, misbehavior, and mismanagement from the company and mismanagement of the environment. These downsides have an effect on the process of co-creation and its results and also on the variables of the relationship which are trust and commitment but also customer satisfaction.

6.3 Effects of the downsides

Our last and third theme concerns the effects of the downsides of the co-creation process, which can affect different variables as shown on the Figure 5. In the situation where the co-creation process fails, the effects on the company can be perceived through a loss of resources such as loss of time, of energy, of customers, or money etc. Additionally, participants brought the idea of internal mismanagement, which seems that it could perturb the well-being of the employees because it causes pressure and stress. Consequently, some participants believe that these negative effects can make the company wondering if they should open their doors to the customers in order to co-create. In the other hand, others interviewees affirmed that during the co-creation process generates a flow of information and knowledge about the customers, the market and the brand. Consequently, those participants claimed that, even if the co-creation process leads to failed end-results, whether it is launched or not, it is still a learning process for the company as it provides a lot of interesting inputs.

As we already have identified the downsides of the co-creation process, we can affirm that the downsides and their effects are interrelated into a vicious circle. Indeed, for instance, it has been said that the company is responsible to communicate as transparent as possible all along the process. By miscommunicating with the involved customers, it results in a lack of trust and commitment coming from both sides. Indeed, participants agreed that trust and commitment are two interrelated variables which is supported by a respondent who gave an explanation, “if the company doesn’t commit to the project, the customers won’t trust the company. And if customers don’t commit to the project then you could say that the company doesn’t really trust the customers because they can’t rely on the outcomes because they don’t know how involve the customers are” (I4). Consequently, we have identified the effects coming from this lack of trust and commitment.

By lacking of trust and commitment between the company and the customers, according to the participants, it could cause an information asymmetry, where the information is hidden from the other part, and where there is no fluidity and no continuity in the information flow. As a consequence, the company and the customers
do not collaborate correctly anymore causing a bad end-result who does not fit with customers’ needs or expectations. As a result, the co-creation process can end up with a product failure that would be launched over the market and fail, or would not be launched over the market. Therefore, by having bad end-results from the process, at least one of the involved part would not have any value from it. According to the participants, it often results in a bad co-creation experience for the customers because they find that the product does not correspond to what they wanted. This would affect the customer satisfaction and therefore his/her future engagement with the brand and with the co-creation. For these reasons, we assume that the lack of trust and commitment has an impact on the customer satisfaction, which could be perceived through the customers’ reactions.

Indeed, as Figure 5 shows, participants agreed on the fact that the co-creation process generates humans’ emotions. In a case of the co-creation process fails, customers would have different reactions compared to the happiness that co-creation should procure. Indeed, participants highlighted the fact that the customers invested time and energy into the process, in order to develop a new product with the company. Therefore, the customer expects certain results leading to certain benefits. Through a product failure, participants declared that the customers would first feel frustrated in relation with the final results. This feeling of frustration can be completed with a feeling of disappointment. Further, participants think that a failed co-creation can lead the customers to have a feeling of anger or to think that they were used by the company. Additionally, these feelings result of the fact that the customers make the company responsible of the failure of the process. Indeed, according to our participants, customers could think that the process fails because it was not well managed enough, think that the company did not listen their inputs, or it could be because they launched a product that does not fit with their expectations. As a result, some participants think that customers could even start to hate the company.

By having a bad experience, the unsatisfied customers would spread the words about their experiences. However, it has been supported by participants that in this situation, customers provide bad feedbacks about their disappointment, the brand, the product and the process. Then, according to our participants, we can affirm that it can impact negatively the brand image and the brand perception. Plus, it has been said that people have a tendency to share faster their bad experiences and bad results. As a result of low level of customer satisfaction, participants believe that the future engagement will depend of the customer satisfaction.
Figure 5: Effects of the downsides Network
7. General Discussion

In this chapter, we aim to combine our empirical findings and thematic network analysis with our theoretical frame of reference.

7.1 Co-creation process

According to our analysis, the co-creation process has been defined as a collaborative activity between customers and companies where a sharing value is co-created, which is similar to the definitions of the customer co-creation given by Piller et al. (2010, p. 21). The process of co-creation is implemented by companies in order to provide better results compared to the traditional development of products (Brockhoff, 2003, p. 478; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 3). Participants discussed the process of co-creation where customers provide ideas and knowledge to the companies and receive in return feedbacks and information.

According to our theoretical review and our participants, we assume that co-creation is beneficial for companies and customers. Indeed, in a company’s perspective, the process helps to understand and learn about their customers and the market trends which was mentioned by Filieri (2013, p. 49) and Füller (2010, p. 98), and thereby to deliver a new product in relation with customers’ expectations and needs, which was stated by Witell et al. (2011, p. 142). Participants discussed also the fact that the process allows the company to speed up the innovation process and to reduce the costs and the risk of product failure, which confirmed the statement of some authors (Ind & Coates, 2013, p. 91; Hoyer et al.; 2010, p. 292). Furthermore, we can complete these benefits in saying that co-creation helps a company to boost the marketing effects. Indeed, participants discussed the concept of “telling the story”, meanings to talk about the process during the promotion of the product in order to give credit to customers and to reach the larger group of customers in order to influence their purchase.

In a customer’s perspective, we confirm the statements developed during the literature review concerning the benefits. According to our participants, co-creation helps companies to develop an accurate and appropriate product corresponding to customers’ needs. This refers to the pragmatic benefits that the customers receive through the process (Verleye, 2015, p. 323). Participants discussed their experiences with customers’ participation in affirming that the process provides a feeling of happiness, of engagement, and a feeling of being valued, corresponding to the hedonic and social benefits (Verleye, 2015, p. 323). Another aspect that has been expressed from our interviews is the fact that co-creation engages ordinary people to develop the product. We believe that an individual is more willing to buy a product when s/he is aware that people like her/him has participated to the development in which s/he could identify her/himself. Moreover, receiving credit and greetings from the companies (i.e. personal benefits) are seen as relevant for the customer satisfaction. However, the economic benefit from the process has not been recognized as much as in the literature. Indeed, it seems that the feeling of being part of the process and be engaged toward the brand are more important than to receive money for participating. Consequently, according to our participants, companies empowering customers do not really offer economic rewards but more a compensation for the day-off. Thus, we believe that financial incentives are not a major motive for customers. Concerning the cognitive benefits (Verleye, 2015, p.
we presuppose that customers learn through the process by sharing information and knowledge without validation from our participants.

According to the participants, the communication is a major driver of the co-creation. It has to be bidirectional between the company and the customers (Gustafsson et al., 2012, p. 314). Then, in order to manage the co-creation process, it seems important for our participants to establish an interactive dialogue between customers and the company all along the process. Through this dialogue, individuals are able to communicate, learn and share. This dialogue can be implemented through communities that the company has to manage. Further, companies should let a certain access to the involved customers, while keeping a control of the information given to the customers. By being open, companies are more willing to create a feeling of trust towards the customers. Concerning the risk, it seems paramount to do not harm the customers though the process. Participants believe by clarifying specific information such as the challenge or the expected outcomes, the companies avoid any misunderstandings between the customers and the company. This can be related to the fact that companies need to be as transparent as possible through the exchanges, and thereby avoid the information asymmetry expressed by Von Hippel (2005, p. 48). Transparency has been brought up many times during the interviewees added to the need to be authentic. We interpret that these elements to take into consideration during the co-creation process for our participants can be referred to the DART framework defined by Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004, p. 23-24) and to the co-creation environment expressed by Ind et al. (2013, p. 19).

Further, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004, p. 71) highlight the difference between the elements provided through a traditional NPD and those brought during co-creation. Clearly, we can assume that our participants have confirmed the experience innovation developed by these authors. Indeed, participants declared that the co-creation process is developed through interactions between the company and the customers (i.e. granularity) and aims to develop a new product based on technologies (i.e. extensibility). Moreover, during the co-creation process, people are connected to each other’s. They develop a product by sharing insights and building on each other’s idea (i.e. linkage). Through the co-creation activities, companies and customers have the ability to learn from each other’s, which can be referred to the evolvability. Furthermore, companies enhance the fact that everyone is different, leading to different expectations and needs. Consequently, companies have to be careful with the diversity factor in order to satisfy everyone. The diversity factor can be related to the importance to take individual characteristics into consideration (Verleye, 2015, p. 322) in order to provide value for a larger target.

### 7.2 The downsides of the co-creation process

The co-creation process results to deliver a higher value to the customers compared to the traditional NPD. However, downsides can be produced affecting the well-being of the process, and the relationship between the company and its customers.

According to Hoyer et al. (2010, p. 292), a high level of communication allows the company to reinforce the relationship between customers and the company. Reversely, we believe that by miscommunicating, it affects negatively the relationship. According
to our participants, miscommunication occurs through a lack of feedbacks from the companies, a lack of authenticity and of transparency through the dialogue. It has been shown by authors (Filieri, 2013, p. 50; Ind et al., 2013, p. 20) that transparency leads to a feeling of trust. Then, a lack of transparency from the company creates a lack of trust for the customers. As the process is not straightforward to establish, it requires an extreme clarity from the companies towards customers. For this reason, participants advice to maintain a strong communication with an interactive dialogue in order to avoid a lack of clarity. Indeed, miscommunication from the company leads to have a lack of clarity about the project, the challenge, the expected outcomes, and provokes misunderstandings between the company and its customers, which affect in a way or another the process and its outcomes.

Then, another downside of the process is produced because of mismanagement from the company. As aforementioned, the company needs to establish a certain environment where the customer feels comfortable to share ideas and insights. However, this environment can be damaged because the company did not give all the elements to the customers to feel safe. The mismanagement of the environment is mostly due to the employees. Indeed, we have discovered the need for employees to be involved in training in order to be able to participate to the process. Companies have to implement those trainings in order to give all the necessary skills to their employees on how to deal with customers and to manage the conversations with them. Being able to lead internally a co-creation project is also necessary during the process. Indeed, a lack of leadership can provoke mismanagement from the company. Related to this idea of internal management, participants highlight the need for employees to identify and select the rights customers for the process, which is only briefly mentioned by O’hern & Rindfleisch (2015, p. 6-7). In line with this idea, the importance to select the right inputs has been expressed by the participants, which is supported by Filieri (2013, p. 49) who claims the need to distinguish the good and bad ideas from each other’s. However, participants affirm that the selection of the right inputs has to be performed by the company. Because of this statement, we cannot confirm the part of the definition from O’hern & Rindfleisch (2015) who assume that customers should select the inputs during NPD.

Another downside that has been discovered is the misbehavior of the company. Accidentally or intentionally one of the involved part can affect negatively the process. This results from a mismanagement of the resources leading to the co-destruction of value (Plé and Chumpitaz Caceres, 2010, p. 434). Participants exemplified in saying that misuses can be translated by opportunistic behavior which can occur during the process, either from the company’s side or the customer's side. The lies between the company and the customers can be also perceived as a misuse leading to a lack of transparency. We assume that lies and lack of transparency are intentionally done in order to protect information from the customers. However, by doing that, it could affect the trust that customers could have toward the brand. Further, as already mentioned, it is more appreciable for customers to receive credit and greetings from the company. If the company does not provide these elements, it could negatively affect the outcomes of the process for the customers, because they could think the company does not take them seriously.

We believe that the internal mismanagement of the process, the misbehavior of the company and the miscommunication can influence negatively the management of the
co-creation environment, which we claim is a downside. Indeed, by not having skilled employees to manage the community of customers, the company is not able to implement an interactive and social dialogue with the customers. Consequently, the company fails to provide information to their customers through interactions (Echeverri and Skalén, 2011, p. 368). Then, customers can be reluctant to the process because they do not have all the necessary information to be committed to the project and the company. Further, misunderstandings can be produced between the company and the customer, which could arise from miscommunication and bad community management. During the co-creation process, people need to be informed in order to have a clear view of the project and then be committed to the project. Then, if there is misunderstanding between the parts involved, there is a collaborative co-destruction of the value (Echeverri and Skalén, 2011, p. 368), which hinders the achievement of the expected outcomes.

7.3 Relationship, Trust and Commitment

Moving on from the general discussion about co-creation and its downsides, we would like to discuss some of our results and analysis concerning the variables that we have identified in our theoretical frame of reference, which are trust, commitment and relationship. Indeed, the theoretical frame of reference of this thesis provides an extensive overview of those three variables and an explanation of our choice of certain factors that we found important to analyze along this thesis. The empirical findings allowed us to discover that the variable trust and commitment are interrelated and also that these two variables added to relationship are impacted when we analyzed our results pertaining the downsides and their effects.

In our theoretical frame of references, we have defined using different standpoints the notion of trust and commitment. The notion of trust has been described as the willingness to rely on a exchange in whom one has confidence (Moorman et al., 1993, p. 83; Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). We highlighted the importance of the notion of willingness. The reason is by being trustworthy while being unwilling to rely on a partner impact and limit trust (Moorman et al., 1993, p. 82). We indicated that trust has always been important for a company, especially in order to gain the loyalty of customers (Reichheld and Scheifter, 2000, p. 107). Indeed, implementing a trustworthy identity within a company is seen as a crucial task (Keh & Xie, 2009, p. 735). Then, we also defined commitment as when a relationship is important enough to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). We highlighted the importance of three components of commitment, which are the stake of value from relationship, the identification and attachment, and the temporal component by maintaining a relationship (Gundlash et al, 1995, p. 80). We end up claiming that, as Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 22) theorized, commitment is as paramount to every relational exchange as trust, concluding that an unsuccessful integration of the effects of trust and commitment in any relationship studies would inevitably result in an improper conclusion regarding the impact of relationship commitment and trust on outcomes of the research (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 31). In our research, we did include and benchmarked the variables trust and commitment since our research purpose is to investigate the downsides of customer’s involvement during the development of a new product and obtain a global overview of their effects on the relationship between the customer and the company during the co-creation process. The
research question includes the variables of relationship. It is for this reason that we include trust and commitment on benchmark since authors stated that the relationship commitment and trust is paramount to successfully create a relationship marketing with customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22).

Hence, trust and commitment have been assessed and our results show that those variables appear important during co-creation. Indeed, we are able to demonstrate the existence of a vicious circle when it comes to create and improve trust and commitment in the relationship during the process of co-creation. Those two variables are interrelated in a way that they are affecting directly each other according to the attitude of either the company or the customer. As explained in our analysis, if the company does not commit, then the customer will not trust the company. Vice versa, if the customer does not commit to the project, then the company will not trust the customer. For this reason, we are able to claim and confirm what our theoretical frame of references expressed concerning the importance of trust and commitment within a relationship. Moreover, when it comes to those two variables, we are able to demonstrate more than being elements of the relationship; trust and commitment can directly be related to the downsides of the co-creation. Indeed, as we have demonstrated the importance of trust and commitment during the relationship, it appears clear that a lack of trust or a lack of commitment will head the process of co-creation for a fail. In order words, a mismanagement of trust and commitment affect the relationship impacting the co-creation itself. But the co-creation process itself can, by being mismanaged, impact the relationship.

According to our results and analysis, we argue that the downsides presented on the Figure 4 and Figure 6 gathered in four categories such as mismanagement of the environment, misbehavior, miscommunication and mismanagement from the company of the process of co-creation that would affect directly the relationship between the company and the customers. Those downsides cause different effects on the relationship between the company and customers as presented in Figure 5. Indeed, we are able to show that the downsides that we have found, affect the relationship upon several aspects such as emotionally impacting both the company and the customer, or affecting the customer satisfaction, it will also result to other effects that we will explain later. Our results allow us to claim that by not creating a trustworthy environment, by not being committed enough to the relationship, by not willing to participate, you will create a lack of trust and commitment that will result to frustration, anger, disappointment or a feeling of being used from the customer, less creativity, or poor insights while for the company it will result to stressed employees, an unsuccessful or failed product, loss of resources, and a fear to commit to another project involving their customers. We claim that a lack of trust and commitment from both the customer and the company is a downside of co-creation causing negative effects on both the relationship and the co-creation itself. Hence, we confirm the idea that trust and commitment are Key Mediating Variable (KMV) due to the importance those variable have on relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22) and that both commitment and trust, putting together, develop a better productivity and effectiveness (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22).

We noticed that other downsides of the co-creation process (Figure 4 and Figure 6) besides trust and commitment can also impact the relationship. Our results show the importance for the company to be authentic, to be clear with their expectations, to
clearly state the goals of the co-creation process in order to avoid any misunderstanding from the customers during the process and make sure that the customers perceive the project as feasible. This aspect fits with the first phases of awareness and exploration of the relationship development described by Dwyer et al. (1987, p. 15). We noticed also the importance of a win-win situation where both the customers and company understand that by being involved in the process of co-creation they will gain benefits through that relationship and by committing, their relationship will be beneficial for them, which are the expansion and commitment phases of the relationship development (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 19). Following Dwyer et al. (1987, p. 19), the last stage of the relationship development can be the dissolution of the relationship by disengagement. Concerning dissolution during the process of co-creation it can occur when one of the downsides stated previously happens such as a lack of commitment, lack of trust, causing a lack of willingness. This lack of willingness is important as explained in our theory, also called cooperation, it is directly influenced by commitment and trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25), but our results show that it can even be influenced by a mismanagement of the whole environment of co-creation provoking less creativity and less relevance of the inputs provided by the customers.

We can claim that the development of a relationship during the process of co-creation is similar to any other relationship development; however, we do think that the phases of awareness and commitment are the most important. Indeed, following our results, a lack of authenticity, a lack of clarity on the expectations or even lacks of personal contact are part of one category of the downsides concerning the miscommunication. For us, the phase of awareness is really dependent of a good and relevant communication between the company and customers. Hence, we confirm that a miscommunication is a downside of co-creation affecting the relationship and the process. This result has a resonance with one our variables we included in our theory stating that communication is an element that encourages trust by adjusting the perception and expectation into the relationship (Moorman et al., 1993, p. 84). Then, it appears for us that the phase of commitment is important and that the implementation of a relevant environment has to be done in order to commit people. Even if commitment first results from the awareness phase when the customers and the company define their expectations, the company has to develop a concrete and relevant environment to create a feeling of community with the customers and the company to stimulate their willingness to participate and their creativity. Moreover, this environment has to be respectful when it comes to judge the ideas and insights of the customers. For the same reason than the miscommunication, we claim that mismanaging the environment of the process will cause a lack of commitment, and by interrelation, a lack of trust and will lead to a bad experience of the co-creation process, hence a poor quality of the information provokes no value creation.

In our theoretical frame of reference, we explained our willingness to benchmark other variables that have been described as having an influence on the relationship. The idea of shared values has been brought in our results by some of our participant as important. Indeed, it appears significant that the customers share the same value that the company during the process of co-creation which will result in an increase of commitment and trust. This is validated by our theory from Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 25) claiming that if there are shared values between the partners, then commitment and trust will increase. Moreover, we want to push the concept of sharing values a bit further by highlighting the importance of sharing the values of the co-creation as an
outcome of it. Indeed, by sharing inputs, ideas, information and knowledge, both customers and the company create value. This value has to be shared between them in order to get a win-win situation out of the co-creation process. Our results show that a win-win situation is important during the process of co-creation. We have found that our results confirm our theoretical frame of references concerning the importance of a relational benefits brought by Hennig-Thurau et al (2002, p. 234) stating that during a relationship both customers and the company must benefit in order to get involved in a long term relation. We do think that this variable of the relationship is relevant since our results show the importance that both the company and the customers have to benefit from the process of co-creation.

In the case of a lack of win-win situation, if the value creation is not shared between them, then it will affect the relationship by having an effect on the commitment and trust. This idea of not creating a win-win situation can be linked to our second variable which is opportunistic behaviors. Our results show that opportunistic behavior can occur during the process of co-creation by not creating a win-win situation, by keeping information, or by hiding certain elements. Even though, it is interesting to notice that while our theory claims that opportunistic behavior, if happening during the relationship, it can impact negatively the relationship commitment and the trust to the partner (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 23; Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25). Our results allow us to say that opportunistic behavior does not necessarily represent a negative impact but instead it is seen as a normal element of co-creation since everyone in the process has to fight for their ideas and due to the selfish characteristic of the process of co-creation. Nevertheless, we decide to keep this variable as an element of the downside misbehaviour of the company since we do think that if for any reason the process of co-creation loses the characteristic concerning the win-win collaboration, then it will negatively impact the relationship. In other words, opportunistic behavior is a natural element of the process of co-creation but if it is mismanaged by the company, it becomes a threat to the relationship as explained in our theoretical frame of references.

Hence, according to this discussion we know that the downsides of co-creation impact the relationship through the variable of trust and commitment. We are able to confirm that aspects such as communication, cooperation, shared value, opportunistic behaviors and also relational benefits will affect the relationship if mismanaged and by being part of the downsides of the co-creation. In other words, those variables, if they become a downside of co-creation, will have several effects on what we have called the relationship quality, described as being composed by trust, commitment and customer satisfaction (Baker et al, 1999; Hennig-Thurau et al, 2002).

In our theory, we expressed that customer satisfaction is a consequence of co-creation process (Grönroos, 2008, p. 299). This has been emphasis by Jaworski & Kohli (2006, p. 117) stating that there is a high probability to increase the customer satisfaction when a product or service is co-created and to build a stronger relationship between the customer and the company (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 13). Moreover, customer satisfaction has been described just as well as future intention as being mediated by trust and commitment (Randall et al., 2011, p. 7). We already explained and confirmed that by involving the customer within a co-creation process, a company creates a service or a product that fits with the customer’s needs. Our results confirm that the process of co-creation positively impact the customer satisfaction by sharing the value of the co-creation. Nevertheless, as a result of the downsides of co-creation, if the
process is unsuccessful, our results show that customer satisfaction will be impacted and it will result in a bad perception of the brand from the customers and in bad feedbacks. Those bad feedbacks from the customers are important to take into consideration for the company since it has been stated that negative experiences are spread faster than the positive experiences and can result in a negative future engagement. Hence, in our theoretical frame of references we found relevant to express that during a high co-created service, there is an important amount of time, effort and knowledge provided by the customers (Hoyer et al., 2010, p. 288). For these reasons, Heidenreich et al. (2015, p. 281) the more the customer gets involve and invest in the process of service co-creation and the more the failure is likely to generate greater negative impact on satisfaction. The customers can experience a feeling of blame themselves as a response of the failure (Heidenreich et al., 2015, p. 289). Interestingly, we also found in our theory that during a failure of a service co-creation, the customer is most likely to take credit than blame himself or herself in case of negative results (Hoyer et al., 2010, p. 293). Our findings allow us to compromise this principle, by showing the tendency we found in our results, in which the customers will not blame themselves if the process of co-creation fails since the co-creation process is a full responsibility of the company. For this reason, self-blaming of the customers does not occur during the process of co-creation in new product development.

Finally, we can discuss the term of failure during the process of co-creation. Indeed, our results allow us to rethink the term of failure since some of our participants claimed that maybe when we are talking about co-creation, we should not use the term “failure” but express more the term “unsuccessful”. The reason of this wording matter is because for some of our participants, co-creation does not fail since it is whether a success, or an unexpected outcome. In this case, the process of co-creation is a learning process due to the knowledge gained from it. Then, co-creation has to be only perceived as a failure if nothing has been learned from it.

![Figure. 6: Downsides of the co-creation process](image-url)
8. Conclusions and recommendations

In this chapter we answer our research question that has directed our research and address the purpose of this study. The chapter explains the theoretical contributions from our study. We offer recommendations for managers in particular those who aspire to engage in the co-creation process. Further, we address the limitations we encountered during this research and present suggestions for future research.

8.1 General conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to gain a deeper understanding of the downsides and the elements that compose these downsides, and to investigate the effects of these downsides on the relationship between the company and the customer. In order to fulfill this purpose, we have conducted a qualitative study with eleven interviewees from experts in co-creation to designers and researchers. We have explored their visions of the co-creation process through their experiences, knowledge and researches. By conducting a qualitative study, we have been able to gain an extensive understanding of our subject from diverse perspectives, and to answer our research question, which is:

What are the downsides of the co-creation process and their effects on the relationship between the company and customers during new product development?

The findings from our qualitative interviews showed that co-creation is a complex process to implement. We found out that this process is not standardizable, there is no formula to execute this process and trying to formalize the process will head the project for fail. Hence, this process depends of the context, the value and the budget of the company willing to integrate co-creation. Through a thematic network analysis, we could derive three global themes that served as a basis for our analysis. The three themes were labeled co-creation, downsides and effects. With these three global themes, we have been able to find out specific categories of advantages of co-creation and the downsides, their causes and effects that helped us to answer our research question. Indeed, we have been capable to collect the advantages and the requirements to implement a co-creation process. This part of our result does not directly answer our research question. However, it allows us to discuss the wide range of advantages that the process of co-creation provides and what sets of skills and requirements a company needs to implement the process.

The second theme that we came up with, does provide a part of the answer of our research question. Indeed, the second global theme concerns the downsides of co-creation. We are able to indicate that four categories of downsides that have been identified which are miscommunication, mismanagement of the environment, misbehavior and mismanagement from the company. In our discussion, we connected our findings with our theory showing that trust and commitment are interrelated whatsoever the position of the company and the customers. If one of them lacks of trust, then the other one will lack of commitment and vice versa. We demonstrated that variables such as cooperation, communication, shared values, relational benefits, previously chosen in our theory, are indeed affecting trust and commitment and the relationship between the customers and the company. We also showed using our third thematic network the effects that the downsides have on certain aspects of the relationship such as the customer satisfaction, the company itself, the product. We
introduce the potential emotional impact that downsides can produce. We have been able to discuss the effects of the downsides on the variables of relationship such as the effects upon trust, commitment, and customers satisfaction. We have been capable to compromise the notion of self-blaming of the customers in case of failure of the process claiming that the responsibility of the company always overtakes the responsibility of the customer. Finally, we are apt to rethink the term “failure” when it comes to co-creation process by arguing that the process of co-creation only fails if nothing has been learnt from the process of co-creation even in case of unexpected outcomes.

8.2 Theoretical contributions

In our first chapter, we have determined a gap in the existing literature leading us to study the downsides of the co-creation process and their effects on the relationship between the company and customers. We reviewed the few articles coming from Echeverri and Skalen (2011), Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres (2010), Smith (2013) Gebauer et al. (2013), Heidenreich et al. (2015) which are connected in a way to another to our topic. We highlighted the fact that understanding the negative consequences of value co-creation is ranked number three out of six in the research priorities (Ostrom et al., 2015, p. 138).

We contribute to the knowledge of the literature field by getting a deeper understanding of the downsides of the co-creation process. Additionally, our study allows us to discuss the effects of those downsides on the relationship between a company and its customers. Then, we assume that we expand the field of the co-destruction and broaden the knowledge into new product development field. Through our findings, we highlight the fact that the process can lead to a co-creation value or to a co-destruction value. We identify the downsides leading to a mismanaged co-creation and its effects on the relationship. Through our theoretical framework, we have been able to show that the co-creation process has a direct impact on customer satisfaction, trust and commitment. With the findings, we can contribute to the theory field by affirming that the downsides of the process we found, have a direct impact on trust and commitment and thereby customer satisfaction. Hence, we outline the aspects that could hinder the relationship between the customer and the company with a practitioner perspective. Then, we contribute the existing literature by testing variables that have not been considered before. We believe that our theoretical framework can be submitted for further investigation within the fields of co-creation and co-destruction.

By conducting a qualitative study, we have been able to interpret different opinions of practitioners of the co-creation field. As far as we know, a qualitative study has not been conducted in the context of negative consequences of the co-creation. Hence, we contribute to an understanding of the downsides and their effects on the relationship between the customers and the company when co-creating together to develop new products.

8.3 Managerial implications

The purpose of this thesis has been to gain a deeper understanding of the downsides and their effects on relationship between the company and the customers. In addition to our theoretical contributions, we are able to provide recommendations to managers,
designers or any company willing to involve their customers in a process of co-creation. Through our findings, we are capable to show the complexity of the co-creation process to the companies. With our paper, we certify that the downsides that could occur during co-creation are miscommunication between customers and the company, misbehavior of the company, mismanagement of the environment and mismanagement from the company. Then, it is important to consider that each process has always a degree of uncertainty. Hence, we recommend to the companies to be aware about the possibility that co-creation can result in unexpected negative outcomes and affect the relationship with the customers. Hence, we advise companies to be attentive to provide enough clarity to the customers involved before to start a co-creation project in terms of role, rewards, expectations, length of the project etc. We suggest to focus on the communication around the co-creation project. Moreover, it is important to ensure that these customers involved have a strong level of trust and commitment to run the project to the end. In other words, the company has to select the right customers to participate.

On the other hand, through our study, we highlight the effects of the downsides on the relationship between customers and the company. In order to mitigate negative reactions from the customers, we recommend to the company to take its responsibilities. Additionally, it is important for the company to provide feedbacks in order to strengthen the relationship between the customers and the company. By doing so, the company keeps customers involved informed and can reach the larger group of customers. Furthermore, as we already pointed out, we recommend to the company to implement training for employees in order to be able to manage the community of customers and the conversations with them. By doing so, we believe the interactions between employees and customers could be improved as the employees would behave in the right manner with the customers. By being aware of these elements, we believe that the company could implement a co-creation process that will reinforce the relationship between the customers and the company.

8.4 Limitation & Further research

While accomplishing our thesis, we have encountered some difficulties when conducting the interviews. As we studied the co-creation process with a practitioner perspective, we wanted to have another perception in interviewing few customers who already have been involved into a co-creation process. Indeed, we believed that our study would be more relevant and rich by having two perspectives. However, we tried to get this perspective but we did not succeed. We assume that some authors (Gebauer et al., 2013; Smith, 2013) already studied the customers’ perspectives in listing the consequences of a co-destruction process on the customer behavior. However, they did not rely their findings on the relationship. To attend this limitation, we recommend to conduct a mixed-methodology study with a qualitative study with an internal management’s perspective and a quantitative study aiming to understand the customer’s perspective in order to complete our results. In doing so, we believe it could provide a relevant theoretical contribution concerning the consequences of the downsides on the relationship between a company and the customers.

Furthermore, we have had mixed answers concerning the blame of customers or the company, even if our participants were localized worldwide. Some of the interviewees
explained the difference of thoughts between a Scandinavian individual and a German individual. Then, we believe that extending the study to a specific culture or country could lead to different results.

On another topic, we concluded the thesis is highlighting the need for employees to be involved in training in order for them to manage the interactions with the customers. Thus, we believe that it could be interesting to highlight the management of the interactions between employees and companies in order to strengthen the relationship and how employees integrate the resources from the customers. Further it would be very relevant to study the influence of the trainings on the co-creation process.

As a general question, which attracts our curiosity, we are wondering what process will eventually come after the co-creation process? Indeed, lately we noticed that the process of co-creation was booming in the business world. Then, we are wondering what could happen in few years, as trendy as this process.

8.5 Societal Implications

From a societal perspective, we can notice that the market place becomes a concern about the changes in the relationship between a firm and consumers. Indeed, 27% of CEOs think that customers are looking for relationship with organizations that address wider stakeholders needs. This figure will increase from 27% to 44% in 5 years (PWC, 2016). Hence, organizations are looking to maintain a relationship with their customers. For most of the companies, innovation becomes a driver in order to be able to compete over the marketplace. Thus, co-creation process is a way for companies to innovate while maintaining a relationship with their customers. Nowadays, companies pay more attention to the customers’ opinions in order to develop products and services that fit their needs. By interacting with customers, companies are able to have information about their wants and expectations. By doing so, companies gain in efficiency and effectiveness while customers can obtain products that correspond to their needs. Thus, we may believe that co-creating allows to maintain a sustainable relationship between customers and company, when both parts benefit from the process.

On the other hand, customers become increasingly curious about the marketplace. By co-creating, companies give the opportunity to the customers to have a certain access to the company’s information. By doing so, the customers feel part of the company and even can feel privileged. However, companies should not forget that customers become more and more exigent. Indeed, when a customer is disappointed, the word of mouth is faster and reach more people. For this reason, and for the sake of the society, implementing co-creation appears relevant but it has to be done properly to avoid any repercussions on the different parts involved. Our study contributes to bring an awareness of the downsides and their effects in order to avoid these potential negative repercussions on the society.
9. Truth criteria

We believe it is paramount to assess the quality of our research. In this chapter, we discuss the quality criteria in order to highlight that we have met the requirements for quality. We start introducing and discussing each criterion concerning the quality of a study and then evaluate them in relation with our study.

According to Umeå University Thesis Manual (2016, p 20), a qualitative and quantitative study do not have the same criteria to assess the quality of a study. Then, we follow these four criteria, transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability to evaluate the quality of our thesis.

9.1 Credibility

According to Easterby-Smith et al (2002, p. 53), credibility corresponds to internal validity of our study, “whether the research design is capable of eliminating bias and the effect of extraneous variables”. It is determined through the effort and capability of the researcher (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600) to provide a research made based on good principles, while justifying that the results validate that researchers understood the social world who was studied and their actors involved. Then, we can define credibility as the trustworthiness of our study. To ensure the credibility, we have collected our data through a semi-structured interview allowing us to clarify with follow up questions some fuzzy answers. Further, we ensured the credibility by summarizing at the ends of interviewees. By doing so, we verified that our understandings and their answers were aligned while letting the possibility to the participants to correct their answers. Therefore, we have avoided misunderstandings and bias answers. Moreover, we obtained interviewees by self-selecting them. Then, we have interviewed participants with various backgrounds and experiences. The credibility of the participants’ answers and the relevance of their experience and knowledge are respected in their field.

9.2 Dependability

Dependability corresponds to the reliability for quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219). It concerns the complete records all along the thesis keeping in an accessible manner, such as keeping all the data, selection of investigated participants, interview guide, interviews’ notes and records, transcripts and analysis of data,. Additionally, we have ensured to the participants the ethical matters. We have informed the participants of all the information about the research, the privacy concern, and thereby we avoided to harm them and disappointment them. Moreover, we have explained all the methods such as sample choice and collection data methods. When collecting the primary data, we have followed the recommendations of methodological books and journals. In our study, our primary data have been collected from eleven individuals involved in the co-creation process in a way or another, with an average of 1 hour per interview. Pertaining the literature review, we have selected articles and theories in order to have a complete review around our topic. We believe that the analysis of the research has reached the purpose.
9.3 Transferability

When conducting a qualitative study, it appears important to be aware of the use of transferability. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985, p. 316), this aspect of a qualitative study is related to the type of framework used for collecting the data and if the framework can be seen as being manipulated. Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of a research can be applied to different contexts and sceneries (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). Indeed, when conducting a qualitative study, the research provides data of a certain richness that have to be transferable (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398). Throughout our research we have been clear on our theoretical and our methodology that we used. Indeed, it is stated by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 334) that these two elements of a research are very important for the transferability of the research. To ensure this, we have provided a clear methodology concerning our philosophical standpoints and also our practical standpoints in which we explained thoroughly our process. We do think that by providing a well explained methods concerning the choice and conduction of our interviews, we are increasing the transferability of our study. We also provided relevant information concerning our participant concerning their name since only one wanted to remain anonymous, their position, their background and their experience with co-creation. By providing these information, we think it helps the reader to have a better understanding of the data and their relevance. Then, the reader, researcher or manager, is able to build on our results others researches or use it practically.

9.4 Conformability

The concept of conformability is the validity and objectivity of the qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 395). We conducted the majority of our interviews by phone and Skype. As claimed by Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 207) conducting interviews using phone will reduce the potential manipulation of the answers of our participants. Moreover, while conducting our research we tried to be unbiased as much as possible by avoiding preconceptions, our motivation has been explained in the methodology of our thesis by claiming that due to our different backgrounds and experiences, we were aware of the potential bias that the thesis can encounter. For this reason, we decided to have ensured to have an open-minded ongoing discussion to avoid any impact of the pre-understanding throughout the whole process of the study (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2011, p. 345).
Reference List


Appendix 1: Information of the participants

Dear participant,

We are students enrolled in a Master program at Umeå School of Business and Economics. We both have a background in marketing with our bachelor. Currently, Guillaume Pera is enrolled in the MSc in Business Development and Internationalization while Charlotte Chéron is studying in the MSc in Marketing. We want to investigate the co-creation because we do think that co-creation is a game-changer for a company by bringing new knowledge and ability to create product aligned with the customer’s needs. We believe that creating value with the customer can be a relevant method for companies to gain in competitive advantage and maximize profit rather than developing new products without taking into consideration their customers. Thus, we believe co-creation process is not effortless and we do think that it could harm a relationship between the customer and the company. For this reason, we think it is interesting for both of us and for the field of research to investigate on the potential downsides of the co-creation process during new product development.

The main purpose of this study is to pinpoint, and understand the potential dark sides of co-creation during a new product development. Indeed, knowing the potential advantages of co-creation for a company to co-create, we do think it is important to have an understanding of the downsides of this process on the company and customers during the product creation. Since researches have been done for the co-creation of services, we want to fulfill the literature gap by investigating the field of new product development. To do so, we use our theoretical framework established after our theoretical review, and our empirical data collected during our interviews with experts of the co-creation. Therefore, our research question for this study is “What are the downsides of the co-creation process and their effects on the relationship between the companies and customers during new product development?” This research question aims to investigate the potential side effects of customer’s involvement during the development of a new product and obtain a global overview on the relationship between the customer and the company during the co-creation process. Therefore, we will examine the variables arising from the customer satisfaction and affecting the relationship with the company. Thus, we want to know what are those downsides, which can harm the relationship between the customer and the firm and impact these variables during new product development.

We would like to inform you that the interview will be used for academic purposes and we therefore ask you for your kind assistance in this endeavor. The study will be
published in an online database for master thesis’s, meaning that it will be accessible to the public. If you agree to participate in this project, please answer the interview questions as best you can. It should take approximately 1 hour to complete. We wish to do the interview either by phone or Skype. As the participant, you will be given the opportunity to read the presentation of the interview as well as the recorded information gathered and give your approval before any material is to be published based on the interview.

If you are willing to remain anonymous in our research, a confidential agreement will be signed between the researchers and the participant.

Once the thesis approved, you will be able to have access to the results.

If you have any questions about this project, feel free to contact us.

Guillaume PERA  
Umeå School of Business and Economics  
MSc Business Development and Internationalization

OR

Charlotte CHERON  
Umeå School of Business and Economics  
MSc Marketing

Thank you for your assistance in this important endeavor.

Sincerely yours,

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Guillaume PERA  
Charlotte CHERON

..........................  ..........................
Appendix 2: Interview Guide

**Background question:**
- How long have you been working with the co-creation process?

**Theme: Co-Creation**
- How does the co-creation provide value to customers?
- How does the co-creation provide value to the company?
- What is the most important aspect to take into consideration for developing a product with customers?

**Theme: Co-destruction**
- Could you describe the process as always being successful?
- How does a company can prepare/avoid/ or survive the downsides of co-creation?
- What is a mismanaged co-creation process?
- What are the reasons of a failed co-creation?
- What are the consequences of a failed co-creation?
- Have you already experienced unsuccessful co-creation projects?
- How does the co-creation process can be harmful for the relationship between companies and customers? What are the factors that harm this relationship?

**Theme: Relationship**
- Do you think that the relationship can be influenced by the co-creation process? If yes, how?
- For you, what are the most important steps to build a relationship during the co-creation process? (include dissolution or not?)
- What could be the reasons for the dissolution of the relationship?
- Would you say that co-creation could play a role in the dissolution of the relationship?
- Would you say that opportunistic behavior can exist during co-creation? if yes, does it harm the relationship? (Follow-up question, Does the opportunistic behavior come from the customers or the company?)
- How do trust and commitment impact the quality of the relationship during co-creation? What about customer satisfaction?
- How important are trust and commitment during the co-creation process?

**Theme: Trust**
- How does a company create trust with its customers?
- If there is a lack of trust, would you say, is it from the customers or the company? (Follow up question, why?)
- What are the elements that jeopardise trust during the process?

**Theme: Commitment**
- How does a company create commitment with its customers?
- If there is a lack of commitment, would you say, is it from the customers or the company? (Follow up question, why?)
- What are the elements that jeopardise the commitment?

**Theme: Customer Satisfaction**
- How does co-creation has an impact on the customer satisfaction?
- Would you say that co-creation is more an investment rather than an expense to increase customer satisfaction?
- How does customer satisfaction can be impacted during co-creation?
- If the co-creation fails, how would you define the reactions of the customer?
• Would you consider the low level of customer satisfaction during co-creation as a downside?

**General questions:**
• What is for you a failed co-creation process during NPD?
• Is there something I forgot to ask about and you think I should know about, regarding what we have been discussing?
Appendix 3: Thematic Network Analysis

**Global theme: Co-creation**

**Organizational theme:** Sharing
*Basic theme:*
- Information
- Value
- Respect
- Ideas

**Organizational theme:** Skills and Requirements
*Basic theme:*
- Training
- Communication
- Identification and selection of customers
- Management skills

**Organizational theme:** Organizational Environment
*Basic theme:*
- Attitude of the company
- Community
- Creativity
- Clear the past
- Closing the loop
- Open & honest relationship

**Organizational theme:** Benefits for company
*Basic theme:*
- On the market
- On the product
- On the process
- On the company
- Learning process

**Organizational theme:** Benefits for customers
*Basic theme:*
- Social benefits
- Valuable contribution
- Get credit from company
- Participation of the peers

**Organizational theme:** Emotional impact
*Basic theme:*
- Source of enjoyment
- Source of pleasure
- Feeling rewarded
- Feeling valued
- Feeling involved
- Proud of themselves
Global theme: The downsides of co-creation
Organizational theme: Miscommunication

Basic theme:
- Lack of feedback and update
- Liars, lack of transparency and authenticity
- Low community management

Organizational theme: Mismanagement from the company

Basic theme:
- Mismanagement of the process
- Lack of leadership
- Lack of trainee

Organizational theme: Misbehavior of the company

Basic theme:
- Opportunistic behavior
- Mismanagement of the customers
- Mismanagement of the inputs
- Do not take the customers seriously

Organizational theme: Mismanagement of the environment

Basic theme:
- Lack of commitment
- Willingness to participate
- Lack of clarity and misunderstanding of the process
Global theme: The effects of the downsides

Organizational theme: Affect the company

Basic theme:
- Loss of resources
- Stressed employees
- Afraid of opening doors
- Learning process

Organizational theme: Product

Basic theme:
- Do not fit the customer's' needs
- Product failure

Organizational theme: Emotional impact

Basic theme:
- Frustration
- Anger
- Disappointment
- Feeling of being used
- Blame the company
- Hating the company

Organizational theme: Lack of trust and commitment

Basic theme:
- No value
- No information
- No result
- Bad experience

Organizational theme: Affect customer satisfaction

Basic theme:
- Future engagement
- Bad perception of brand image
- Bad feedbacks
- Fast spread of negative experience