

THE SERVITIZATION PARADOX: MARKETING'S ROLE IN THE TRANSITION FROM PRODUCT-CENTRIC TO SOLUTION CENTRIC BUSINESS MODELS

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Abstract

The transition from product-centric to solution-centric business models has become a strategic priority for organizations seeking competitive advantage in increasingly complex markets. This shift, commonly referred to as servitization, involves integrating products and services to deliver comprehensive customer solutions. However, many firms encounter the “servitization paradox,” where increased service offerings do not necessarily result in improved financial performance. This study examines the role of marketing in addressing this paradox and facilitating successful business model transformation. Drawing on a conceptual and qualitative review of literature on servitization, marketing, and business models, the paper identifies key challenges related to cost structures, capability gaps, and organizational misalignment. It argues that marketing serves as a critical value integrator by aligning customer needs with solution offerings, enabling value co-creation, and supporting the shift from transactional to relational engagement. The findings highlight the importance of redefining value propositions, strengthening customer relationships, and managing the customer lifecycle effectively. A conceptual framework is proposed to illustrate how marketing-driven strategies can mitigate the servitization paradox and enhance firm performance. The study contributes to both marketing and servitization literature by offering an integrated perspective on value creation and delivery. It concludes that strategic marketing capabilities are essential for achieving sustainable outcomes in solution-centric business models.

Keywords: *Servitization; servitization paradox; solution-centric models; marketing strategy; value co-creation*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, organizations—particularly in manufacturing and industrial sectors—have undergone a significant shift from product-centric to service- and solution-oriented business models. Traditionally, firms focused on designing, producing, and selling physical goods, with value creation largely embedded in the product itself (Frank et al., 2019). However, increasing competition, market saturation, and changing customer expectations have driven companies to differentiate themselves through services and integrated solutions. This transformation, often referred to as servitization, involves augmenting products with value-added services such as maintenance, consulting, and performance-based contracts (Kohtamäki et al., 2019). As a result, firms are moving toward offering comprehensive solutions that address broader customer needs rather than isolated products. This shift reflects a deeper transition toward customer-centricity and long-term value creation. Consequently, servitization has become a strategic priority for many organizations seeking sustainable competitive advantage. The rise of

servitization is particularly evident in manufacturing and industrial sectors, where firms are leveraging services to create new revenue streams and strengthen customer relationships. Companies are increasingly adopting advanced service offerings, such as outcome-based solutions and digital services enabled by technologies like IoT and data analytics (Paiola & Gebauer, 2020). These developments allow organizations to monitor product performance, predict maintenance needs, and deliver customized solutions. Servitization also enables closer collaboration with customers, fostering long-term partnerships rather than one-time transactions. However, this transition requires significant changes in organizational structure, capabilities, and mindset. Firms must integrate product and service offerings while aligning internal processes with customer-centric strategies (Martín-Peña et al., 2019). As a result, servitization represents not only a business model shift but also a transformation in how value is created and delivered.

Despite its strategic importance, servitization presents a critical challenge known as the “servitization paradox.” While firms invest heavily in developing and delivering service-based offerings, these efforts do not always translate into improved financial performance (Torre & Sanchez, 2022). In some cases, increased service complexity leads to higher operational costs, inefficiencies, and reduced profitability. This paradox arises from factors such as misaligned capabilities, inadequate pricing models, and difficulties in managing service delivery (Paschou et al., 2020). Additionally, organizations may struggle to effectively communicate the value of integrated solutions to customers, limiting their willingness to pay. The transition to service-oriented models can also create internal tensions, as traditional product-focused cultures may resist change. These challenges highlight the complexity of servitization and the need for a more strategic and coordinated approach (Favoretto et al., 2022). Addressing the servitization paradox is therefore essential for realizing the full potential of service-based business models. In response to these challenges, this article aims to explore the role of marketing in overcoming the servitization paradox and facilitating the transition to solution-centric business models. Marketing is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between organizational capabilities and customer needs by generating insights, shaping value propositions, and managing relationships. It plays a critical role in communicating the benefits of integrated solutions and aligning offerings with customer expectations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Servitization Concept

Servitization refers to the strategic transformation whereby organizations, particularly in manufacturing sectors, shift from selling standalone products to offering integrated product–service solutions. This concept has evolved over time, beginning with basic after-sales services such as maintenance and repair, and progressing toward more sophisticated, value-added offerings (Favoretto et al., 2022). Initially, services were seen as supplementary to products, primarily aimed at supporting product functionality. However, as markets became more competitive and customer expectations more complex, firms began to view services as a core component of value creation. This evolution reflects a transition from a goods-dominant logic to a service-dominant logic, where value is co-created with customers rather than embedded solely in products (Nicoletti & Appolloni, 2023). As a result, servitization has become a key strategy for differentiation and long-term competitiveness. It also requires organizations to rethink their capabilities, processes, and customer relationships.

Servitization can be categorized into different levels based on the complexity and value of service offerings. Basic services include installation, maintenance, and repair, which primarily support product use. Intermediate services extend to more customized offerings such as training, technical support, and consulting, which enhance customer experience and product performance (Tronvoll et al., 2020). Advanced solutions, often referred to as outcome-based or solution-oriented services, focus on delivering specific results or performance outcomes for customers. These may include integrated systems, managed services, or performance contracts where payment is linked to outcomes. As firms move along this spectrum, the level of customer involvement and value co-creation increases. Advanced servitization requires deeper integration with customer operations and a stronger emphasis on long-term relationships (Tronvoll et al.,

2020). This progression highlights the increasing strategic importance of services in modern business models.

The Servitization Paradox

The servitization paradox refers to the phenomenon where firms invest in service-based strategies but fail to achieve the expected financial returns. Despite the theoretical benefits of servitization, such as increased customer loyalty and new revenue streams, many organizations struggle to realize these advantages in practice. The paradox arises because the transition to service-oriented models often introduces additional complexity and costs (Kowalkowski et al., 2025). For example, delivering integrated solutions requires new capabilities, systems, and organizational structures, which can strain resources. Additionally, firms may face challenges in pricing services appropriately or demonstrating their value to customers. As a result, the anticipated profitability gains may not materialize (Palo et al., 2019). This paradox highlights the gap between strategic intent and operational execution in servitization efforts.

Several factors contribute to the servitization paradox, including cost structures, capability gaps, and organizational misalignment. Service delivery often involves higher and more variable costs compared to product manufacturing, particularly when customization and ongoing support are required. Capability gaps arise when firms lack the necessary skills, processes, or technologies to effectively deliver and manage services (Mavitha & Das, 2024). Organizational misalignment can occur when traditional product-focused structures and cultures are not adapted to support service-oriented strategies. For instance, sales teams may be incentivized to prioritize product sales over long-term service contracts. Additionally, inadequate coordination between departments can hinder the integration of products and services (Raddats et al., 2019). These challenges underscore the need for a holistic approach that aligns strategy, capabilities, and organizational structures. Addressing these underlying issues is essential for overcoming the servitization paradox.

Product-Centric vs Solution-Centric Models

Product-centric and solution-centric business models differ fundamentally in their approach to value creation, revenue generation, and customer interaction. In product-centric models, value is embedded in the physical product, and the primary focus is on efficiency, quality, and cost competitiveness. Revenue is typically generated through one-time sales transactions, and customer interactions are often limited to the point of sale (Kamal et al., 2020). In contrast, solution-centric models emphasize delivering comprehensive solutions that address broader customer needs. Value is co-created through ongoing collaboration and integration of products and services. Revenue logic shifts toward recurring income streams, such as service contracts or performance-based payments. Customer interactions become more continuous and relationship-oriented, reflecting a deeper level of engagement. This shift requires organizations to adopt a more customer-centric and long-term perspective (Kamal et al., 2020).

The transition from product-centric to solution-centric models has significant implications for organizational structure and capabilities. Firms must move away from siloed, function-based structures toward more integrated and cross-functional arrangements. This includes closer collaboration between departments such as marketing, sales, operations, and service delivery (Khanra et al., 2021). Additionally, organizations need to develop new capabilities in areas such as customer relationship management, data analytics, and service design. Leadership and culture must also evolve to support a service-oriented mindset, emphasizing collaboration, flexibility, and customer focus (Baines et al., 2020). Incentive systems and performance metrics may need to be redesigned to align with long-term value creation rather than short-term sales. Overall, this transformation requires a comprehensive reconfiguration of organizational systems and processes. Successfully managing this transition is critical for achieving the benefits of solution-centric business models (Ciasullo et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a conceptual and qualitative review design to examine how organizations can create a cohesive employee lifecycle journey from onboarding to offboarding. Given the broad and integrative nature of the topic, a conceptual framework approach is employed to synthesize insights from human resource management, organizational behavior, and employee experience literature. The research draws on a diverse range of sources, including academic studies, HR reports, and real-world case studies, to ensure both theoretical rigor and practical relevance. Source selection is guided by their relevance to employee lifecycle stages and HR practices that influence integration and continuity. By incorporating perspectives from both scholarly and practitioner-oriented sources, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of lifecycle management. This approach enables the identification of best practices and emerging trends across different organizational contexts. As a result, the methodology supports the development of a holistic view of employee experience.

The analytical approach is based on thematic synthesis, which involves identifying and organizing recurring themes across the selected literature. This method allows for the integration of diverse findings into a coherent framework that highlights key dimensions of lifecycle integration. However, the study is subject to certain limitations. Variability in organizational contexts may affect the generalizability of the findings, as HR practices can differ significantly across industries and regions. Additionally, the evolving nature of HR practices means that new approaches and technologies may not be fully captured in the existing literature. Differences in definitions and conceptual frameworks across studies may also present challenges for consistency. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides valuable insights into creating cohesive employee lifecycle journeys. It also lays the groundwork for future empirical research to further validate and refine the proposed concepts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding the Servitization Paradox

Understanding the servitization paradox requires examining both the drivers behind servitization and the challenges that accompany its implementation. Organizations are driven toward servitization by the need for differentiation, competitive pressure, and the desire to create stable, recurring revenue streams. Customers increasingly demand integrated solutions rather than standalone products, pushing firms to expand their service offerings. However, these drivers are accompanied by significant challenges, including increased operational complexity, higher service delivery costs, and the need for new capabilities (Ciasullo et al., 2021). Firms often underestimate the resources and organizational changes required to successfully implement service-based strategies. Additionally, internal resistance and misaligned incentives can further complicate the transition. These challenges create a gap between the intended benefits of servitization and actual outcomes (Chen et al., 2021).

The impact of the servitization paradox on firm performance is mixed and often contradictory. While some organizations achieve enhanced customer loyalty and long-term profitability, others experience declining margins and operational inefficiencies. The added complexity of managing service operations can strain existing systems and reduce overall efficiency (Chirumalla et al., 2023). Furthermore, difficulties in pricing and communicating the value of services may limit revenue potential. In some cases, firms may fail to fully integrate services into their business models, resulting in fragmented offerings. This inconsistency can weaken customer perception and reduce competitive advantage. Therefore, understanding the paradox is essential for identifying strategies that align servitization efforts with sustainable performance outcomes (Kohtamäki et al., 2020).

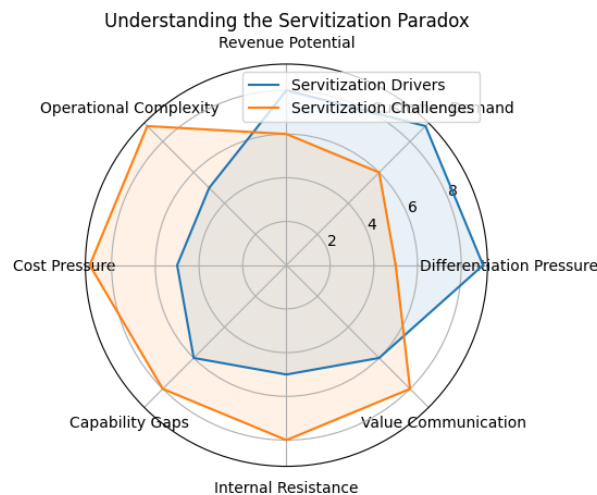


Figure 1. Double Radar Chart of Servitization Drivers vs Challenges

The chart highlights the contrasting forces that define the servitization paradox by comparing key drivers and challenges. Servitization drivers—such as differentiation pressure, customer demand, and revenue potential—show high intensity, reflecting strong motivations for firms to adopt solution-oriented models. In contrast, challenges such as operational complexity, cost pressure, and capability gaps dominate the opposing spectrum, illustrating the difficulties in execution (Daraojimba, Gloria, et al., 2024). The largest gaps appear in operational complexity and cost pressure, emphasizing how implementation challenges can outweigh strategic intent. Additionally, internal resistance and value communication issues indicate organizational and market-level barriers that hinder success (Budrienė & Diskienė, 2020). The overlap in some areas, such as capability gaps, suggests that drivers and challenges are interconnected rather than isolated. Overall, the chart visually reinforces that the servitization paradox emerges from the imbalance between strong strategic drivers and equally significant operational challenges (Elufioye et al., 2024).

Marketing as a Value Integrator

Marketing plays a crucial role as a value integrator by aligning customer needs with solution-oriented offerings. In servitized environments, value is no longer embedded solely in products but is co-created through interactions between the firm and its customers (Cayrat & Boxall, 2023). Marketing functions such as market research, customer segmentation, and value proposition design help identify and address evolving customer needs. By understanding customer contexts and challenges, marketing can guide the development of tailored solutions that deliver meaningful outcomes. This alignment ensures that service offerings are relevant and valuable to customers (Afolabi et al., 2023). Additionally, marketing helps communicate the benefits of integrated solutions effectively. As a result, it bridges the gap between organizational capabilities and customer expectations.

The role of marketing in value co-creation extends beyond communication to active collaboration with customers. Through ongoing engagement, feedback, and interaction, customers become partners in the development and refinement of solutions (Abuhantash, 2023). Marketing facilitates this process by creating platforms for dialogue and collaboration, such as customer communities and co-design initiatives. This approach enhances customer involvement and strengthens relationships. It also enables firms to continuously adapt their offerings based on real-time insights (Apascaritei & Elvira, 2022). By fostering co-creation, marketing contributes to more innovative and customer-centric solutions. Ultimately, this role is essential for maximizing the value generated through servitization strategies (Beurden et al., 2020).

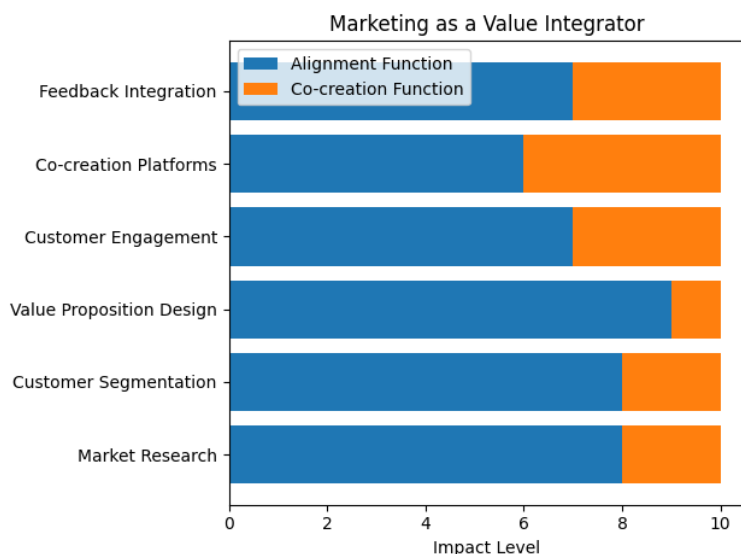


Figure 2. Double Stacked Horizontal Bar Chart of Marketing's Role in Value Integration

The chart illustrates how marketing operates through two complementary layers: alignment functions and co-creation functions. The alignment layer (base) is strongest in areas such as market research, customer segmentation, and value proposition design, highlighting marketing's foundational role in understanding and matching customer needs with organizational capabilities (Hongal & Kinange, 2020). The co-creation layer (stacked portion) is more prominent in customer engagement, co-creation platforms, and feedback integration, reflecting marketing's role in fostering collaboration and continuous value development. Notably, co-creation platforms show a relatively higher contribution from the co-creation layer, emphasizing the shift toward interactive and participatory value creation (Daraojimba, Jason, et al., 2024). The visualization demonstrates that marketing is not limited to communication but actively integrates and co-develops value with customers. Overall, the chart reinforces that successful servitization depends on balancing structured alignment with dynamic co-creation (Okatta et al., 2024b).

Transition to Solution-Centric Models

The transition to solution-centric models requires a fundamental redefinition of value propositions. Instead of focusing on product features and specifications, organizations must emphasize outcomes, performance, and customer value. This shift involves understanding how products and services can be integrated to solve specific customer problems (Itam & Ghosh, 2020). Value propositions become more holistic, addressing not only functional needs but also operational and strategic objectives. Marketing plays a key role in articulating these new value propositions and ensuring they resonate with target customers. This requires a deep understanding of customer contexts and the ability to translate complex solutions into clear and compelling messages (Plaskoff & Frey, 2024). As a result, firms can differentiate themselves through their ability to deliver comprehensive solutions.

In addition to redefining value propositions, the transition involves shifting from transactional to relational marketing approaches. Traditional marketing focuses on one-time sales and short-term interactions, whereas solution-centric models require ongoing engagement and relationship-building. Firms must develop long-term partnerships with customers, emphasizing trust, collaboration, and mutual value creation (Panneerselvam & Balaraman, 2022). This shift also impacts sales processes, which become more consultative and solution-oriented. Marketing and sales teams must work closely together to manage customer relationships throughout the lifecycle. Additionally, performance metrics should reflect long-term outcomes rather than immediate sales. This transformation enables organizations to build stronger, more sustainable customer relationships (Malik et al., 2022).

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Product-Centric and Solution-Centric Business Models Discussion

Dimension	Product-Centric Model	Solution-Centric Model	Implications for Marketing & Strategy
Value Proposition	Focus on product features and specifications	Focus on outcomes, performance, and customer value	Requires clear communication of integrated value
Customer Interaction	Transactional, short-term engagement	Relational, long-term partnerships	Emphasis on relationship management and trust-building
Revenue Logic	One-time sales	Recurring, service-based or outcome-based revenue	Shift toward lifecycle value and long-term profitability
Marketing Approach	Product-focused promotion	Solution-oriented and consultative marketing	Integration of marketing with sales and customer insights

The table as shown in Table 1 highlights the fundamental transformation organizations undergo when shifting from product-centric to solution-centric business models. It shows a clear movement from focusing on product features and one-time transactions toward delivering integrated solutions that emphasize outcomes, long-term value, and customer relationships (Malik et al., 2022). Customer interaction evolves from transactional exchanges to ongoing partnerships, requiring greater collaboration and trust. Similarly, revenue models transition from single sales to recurring and performance-based streams, reflecting a lifecycle-oriented perspective. The table also underscores the changing role of marketing, which moves from product promotion to a more strategic, consultative function that integrates customer insights and supports value co-creation (Tucker, 2020). Overall, the comparison illustrates that this transition is not merely operational but requires a comprehensive shift in strategy, mindset, and organizational capabilities.

Customer Relationship and Experience Management

Customer relationship and experience management are central to the success of solution-centric business models. Long-term partnerships replace transactional interactions, requiring organizations to invest in building trust and maintaining continuous engagement. These partnerships enable firms to better understand customer needs and deliver customized solutions (Deepalakshmi et al., 2024). Relationship management involves regular communication, proactive support, and ongoing value delivery. It also requires organizations to be responsive and adaptable to changing customer requirements. By focusing on relationships, firms can enhance customer loyalty and retention (Gustafsson et al., 2024). This approach is particularly important in servitized environments, where value is realized over time rather than at a single point of sale.

Customer lifecycle management further supports effective relationship and experience management by providing a structured approach to managing interactions across different stages. From initial engagement to long-term partnership and renewal, organizations must ensure consistency and quality at every touchpoint (Sahu et al., 2025). This involves integrating marketing, sales, and service functions to deliver a seamless customer experience. Data and analytics play a critical role in understanding customer behavior and optimizing interactions. By leveraging insights, firms can personalize experiences and anticipate customer needs (Okatta et al., 2024a). Additionally, continuous feedback mechanisms help improve service delivery and strengthen relationships. Overall, effective lifecycle management enhances both customer satisfaction and organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the complexity of the servitization paradox and underscores the critical role of marketing in enabling a successful transition from product-centric to solution-centric business models. While servitization offers significant opportunities for differentiation, customer loyalty, and long-term revenue generation, it also introduces challenges related to cost structures, capability gaps, and

organizational alignment. The findings suggest that these challenges often stem from a disconnect between value creation and value communication. Marketing, as a value integrator, plays a central role in bridging this gap by aligning customer needs with organizational offerings and facilitating value co-creation. By redefining value propositions and fostering deeper customer relationships, marketing helps firms overcome the limitations of traditional product-focused approaches. Ultimately, the study emphasizes that servitization success depends not only on operational capabilities but also on strategic market orientation.

From a practical perspective, organizations must adopt a holistic and integrated approach to servitization that aligns marketing, operations, and organizational structures. The shift toward solution-centric models requires a transformation in mindset, moving from transactional exchanges to long-term relational engagement. Firms must invest in developing marketing capabilities that support customer insight generation, relationship management, and value communication. Additionally, effective customer lifecycle management and experience design are essential for sustaining competitive advantage. Future research should explore empirical validation of marketing's role in overcoming the servitization paradox and examine industry-specific dynamics. By leveraging marketing as a strategic driver, organizations can better navigate the complexities of servitization and achieve sustainable performance outcomes.

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