ID AA - OVER SERVICE & CUSTOMER (DIS)SATISFACTION: THE EFFECTS OF THE SELF-REFERENTIALITY OF CUSTOMER-CENTRIC COMPANIES

Laura Iacovone
Dept. of Economics, Management and Quantitative Methods
Università degli Studi di Milano
Via Conservatorio 7- 20122 Milano, Italy
e-mail: laura.iacovone@unimi.it
Orcid 0000-0003-3588-4902

Abstract

Overservice refers to the provision of service levels that exceed the actual needs or expectations of the customer, often resulting in inefficiencies, unsustainable resource allocation, and even reduced customer satisfaction. Although well-intentioned, overservice often generates excessive costs without equivalent value, undermining the organization’s cost-effectiveness and long-term sustainability. From a managerial perspective, this phenomenon reflects a misalignment between service delivery and customer-centric value creation. Moreover, contrary to common assumptions, exceeding customer expectations is not always perceived positively; excessive attention or redundant service interactions may lead to frustration, perceived inefficiency, or a loss of trust. As such, overservice represents a critical area for reflection in service design and customer experience strategies, particularly in resource-constrained environments where maximizing impact with optimal service levels is essential.

From a critical perspective, overservice may not only result in economic inefficiency but also pose serious challenges to social equity and sustainability. In highly competitive markets, organizations often seek differentiation through service upgrades that go far beyond customer expectations—such as same-day or early-morning deliveries on weekends, or food deliveries under extreme weather conditions. While these practices are often framed as premium service enhancements, they frequently rely on the intensification of labor and unsustainable work rhythms imposed on frontline workers, such as warehouse staff, couriers, and riders.

Crucially, these service features are not always perceived by end-users as essential or value-adding; rather, they may be the result of conditioned consumer expectations shaped by hyper-convenience models.

When the pursuit of overservice is driven by market pressure rather than actual user needs, it risks reinforcing unfair labor practices and fostering forms of "invisible exploitation"—where the social cost of service excellence is externalized onto precarious or underpaid workers.

Thus, overservice should be critically examined not only through the lens of organizational performance but also in relation to the ethical and societal implications it generates. A more sustainable service logic would call for a rebalancing between customer satisfaction, employee well-being, and systemic equity, recognizing that "more" is not always "better" when it comes to service quality.

KEYWORDS (max 5): Overservice, Customer Dissatisfaction, Service Social Sustainability, Equality, Customer Value System