

# Service Orientation and Innovation Results: Theoretical Development based on Service-Dominant Logic

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## Resumo

This paper aimed to differentiate service orientation as a service-dominant (S-D) concept from outdated ideas of service orientation related to goods-dominant (G-D) logic. Grounded on the foundational premises of S-D logic, we argue that despite its importance, value co-creation is a lacking concept on the studies of service orientation. Considering that the customer is always a co-creator of value, we propose a theoretical framework that explains how service innovation and product innovation can be developed in service-oriented firms. We also shed light on a neglected topic of S-D studies by explaining how product innovation can foster service innovation. The proposed framework may contribute to the extant literature on service-dominant logic and innovation management.



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#### **Abstract**

This paper aimed to differentiate service orientation as a service-dominant (S-D) concept from outdated ideas of service orientation related to goods-dominant (G-D) logic. Grounded on the foundational premises of S-D logic, we argue that despite its importance, value co-creation is a lacking concept on the studies of service orientation. Considering that the customer is always a co-creator of value, we propose a theoretical framework that explains how service innovation and product innovation can be developed in service-oriented firms. We also shed light on a neglected topic of S-D studies by explaining how product innovation can foster service innovation. The proposed framework may contribute to the extant literature on service-dominant logic and innovation management.

**Keywords:** Service Orientation. S-D logic. Service Innovation. Product Innovation.

## 1. Introduction

Service-dominant logic (S-D) is probably the most influential theoretical scheme published in the last decade in the marketing field (González-Cruz, Roig-Tierno, & Botella-Carrubí, 2018). S-D logic departs from the idea of value creation as a firm responsibility and holds that the value creation always depends on the interaction among firms, customers, suppliers or other stakeholders (Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008). This change of perspective in value creation is related to the transition from a goods-oriented logic, in which tangible attributes and isolated exchanges are central, to a service-oriented one, in which value creation is related to intangible processes and long-term relationships (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008).

In this regard, service orientation is defined as the extent to which services are an essential element of the firm's marketing strategy (Homburg, Hoyer, & Fassnacht 2002). Service orientation is a hard-to-imitate culture that is a result of the service co-creation by customers and employees (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Following this perspective, services are more prevalent than goods in service-oriented firms, and goods should be considered as a medium for the firm's service (Camarero & Garrido, 2012).

However, it is necessary to differentiate the definition of service orientation that follows the S-D logic from the service orientation definition which understands service as an element that adds value to the firm's products. The latter definition is related to a set of organizational policies, practices, and procedures intended to reward service-giving behaviors that deliver service excellence (Lytle & Timmerman, 2006). This concept is based on employee behavior towards service provision, as it focuses on the degree of empowerment, autonomy, and proactivity of employees in delivering services to customers (Peillon, Pellegrin & Burlat, 2015).

Although the S-D's understanding of service orientation does not deny the definition above, we believe it complements the idea of service excellence by explicitly including the customer in the process of value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Such addition seems an incremental arrangement, however, considering the importance of S-D lexicon (Brozovic, Nordin, & Kindström, 2016; Vargo & Lusch, 2008) it represents a significant change in the way the value is set (from value-in-exchange to value-in-use) and on the understanding of how value is (co)created.

Value co-creation is described as the "interaction and integration of resources within and among services systems" (Vargo *et al.*, 2008, p. 146). The notion of value co-creation suggests that offerings must be integrated with resources from other firms and public actors for



value to be created (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2006). Thus, in value cocreation, the value is derived from the participation of the beneficiary through the processes of acquisition, usage, and disposal (Holbrook, 1987).

Cocreation enables firms to understand and respond to broader customer needs and reduces the inherent risks of innovation (Maklan, Knox, & Ryals, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). Therefore, we understand that firms with a higher service orientation (higher predisposition to service cocreation) would achieve higher innovation rates (Santos-Vijande, González-Mieres, & López-Sánchez, 2013).

In this regard, it is crucial to develop a deeper understanding of service orientation from an S-D perspective. According to Nuutinen and Lappalainen (2012), it is difficult to define and establish the results of service orientation. All well-established conceptualizations of service orientation are based on the traditional definition of service (Laudien & Daxböck, 2017). Therefore, they do not match the suggestions of more recent - S-D oriented - literature discussed above. Besides that, there is a dearth of studies in marketing literature exploring how firms are involving ordinary customers in their service and product innovation processes (Filieri, 2013; Mahr, Lievens, & Blazevic, 2014). Accordingly, we argue that there is a need for new ways of looking at the roles of actors and mechanisms creating value. Thus, we suggest that there is a gap in marketing literature concerning the understanding about how service orientation under an S-D logic lead to firm innovation in product and service considering value co-creation as an inherent part of this process.

In order to fulfill this gap, the purpose of this study is threefold: (1) to shed light on the definition of service orientation as a concept of S-D logic; (2) to establish the theoretical relationship between service orientation and product and service innovation by highlighting the role of value co-creation; and (3) to theoretically articulate the relationship between product innovation and service innovation. Although it seems contradictory to investigate a product dimension in a study focused on S-D logic, we argue that the service-centered view represents a philosophy that applies to all marketing offerings, including tangible outputs (products/goods), in the process of service provision (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

This paper is aligned with recent studies on innovation and service management (Vargo & Lusch, 2017; Vargo, Wieland, & Akaka, 2015). From the S-D perspective, customer-contact becomes a valuable opportunity to sense and seize new and untapped customer needs, resulting in the creation of innovative value propositions (González-Cruz *et al.*, 2018). Accordingly, it seems to be a consensus among theorists that innovation is both an information and knowledge creation process that arises out of social interaction with stakeholders (Skaalsvik & Johannessen, 2014). However, scant attention has been devoted to exploring the relationship between service orientation from S-D perspective and innovation results.

To set the context for the present study, we briefly summarize the theoretical background on service-dominant logic, service orientation, value co-creation and innovation results. Then, we discuss the relationship between these issues and develop the theoretical propositions on the link among service orientation, product innovation, and service innovation. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of findings for the service marketing and innovation disciplines.

# 2. Theoretical Background

# 2.1 Service-dominant logic

In the marketing field, decisions at strategic-level of analysis have been facing a shift from the focus on the goods being offered in the marketplace to the services attached to products, and finally placing the service in the center of customer experiences. This transition



from-goods-to-service orientation led to a new stream of research called the Service-Dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The shift from a goods-dominant logic (G-D) to a service-dominant logic (S-D) is considered as one of the most prominent phenomena of contemporary marketing research and practice (González-Cruz *et al.*, 2018). It is noticeable that "the process of changing dominant logic is important to any firm that encounters a rapid change in the structure of the industries in which it competes" (Prahalad & Bettis, 1986, p. 497). In this regard, it is possible to claim that the willingness to stay put with the old goods-dominant logic, "is inappropriate for the current environmental circumstances [...], and would, of course, likely lead to failure of the firm as a competitively viable entity (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995, p. 12).

However, when describing the two kinds of resources existing in firms operation, *operand* - static resources that cannot create value by themselves, such as appliances - and *operant* - resources that act on other resources and create value, such as human resources-, Lusch and Vargo (2014), recognize that although being educated in G-D logic, managers usually perceive operant resources (more aligned with S-D logic) as the most valuable for the firm. Moving towards S-D logic demand efforts of unlearning (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995) the G-D logic principles inculcated in their mindsets.

To guide managers and executives in the transition from a G-D logic to an S-D logic, Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2008) formulated eleven foundational premises (FPs) of an S-D logic that can be summed up in five axioms (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, 2017).  $A_1$ , service is the fundamental basis of exchange, specifically through operant resources - knowledge and skills.  $A_2$ , the customer is always a co-creator of value, that is, there is the belief of the value-in-use instead of the value-in-exchange as in the G-D logic.  $A_3$ , all social and economic actors are resource integrators, which in turn leads to new resource creation.  $A_4$ , the value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary, that is, the value is experiential by nature; and  $A_5$ , the co-creation of value is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements, recognizing the agentic character of market actors.

It is also noteworthy that recent trends towards zooming out the level of analysis to macro-systems (e.g., innovation ecosystems and business ecosystems) also reached out to S-D logic studies through the proposition of service ecosystems as locus of interaction among actors-environments and service exchange, value co-creation, and resource integration practices (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2016, 2017). Thus, S-D logic motivated recent efforts of marketing scholars towards a service orientation and the co-creation of value through collaborative initiatives among generic-actors inhabiting the service ecosystem.

## 2.2 Service orientation and value cocreation

The concept of service orientation considering the S-D perspective first appeared on a paper published by Lusch and Vargo (2006) on *Marketing Theory*. At that time, the authors were concerned about refining the concepts presented in the seminal paper (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and detailing the transition from goods-oriented to service-oriented thinking. They presented service orientation as a strategic orientation needed to understand the service-dominant logic (Brodie, Saren, & Pels, 2011). Strategic orientation refers to organizational shared believes which guide all the firm's actions, strategies, behaviors, processes, and competences (Siguaw & Simpson, 2006). Thus, service orientation should be viewed as an embracing culture that allows firms to properly focus on service excellence as an instrument through which value can be (co)created with a myriad of stakeholders, such as beneficiaries, employees, suppliers, and stockholders (Lusch & Vargo, 2014).

Moreover, given Lusch and Vargo's (2006) concern regarding the misunderstanding of S-D concepts due to the words chosen in texts, we intend to put closer attention on the meaning of service orientation from the S-D perspective. In this regard, we define service orientation as



a distinctive way of implementing the marketing concept (Cheng & Sheu, 2017), a new organizational culture that places services at the center of any exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Service orientation should be viewed as an operant resource crucial to a firm's ability to engage in collaborative service innovation (Cheng & Sheu, 2017). It is noteworthy that S-D logic views marketing as a social process, in which the concept of value co-creation is central. Value co-creation is "the processes and activities that underlie resource integration and incorporate different actor roles in the service ecosystem" (Lusch & Vargo, 2015, p. 162). Thus, service orientation and value co-creation should always be considered together.

Few studies have addressed service orientation the way we defend in this paper. Closer to our understanding, Queiroz and Coltman (2014) define service orientation as a focus on service excellence and customer intimacy. They argue that service-oriented firms create value based on knowledge transfer mechanisms with customers due to the advancements in technological systems. Laudien and Daxböck (2017) see service orientation as a portfolio of capabilities that facilitate the implementation of service-oriented business logic. Among these capabilities, we highlight the individual interaction capability and the relational interaction capability, directly related to the ability to interact closely with the customer in value co-creation. Finally, Nair, Paulose, Palacios, and Tafur (2013) emphasize the influence of service orientation on organizational performance. According to them, the concept of service orientation addresses adaptability and flexibility, and thereby promotes all necessary mechanisms for innovation results.

In the next section, we present service innovation and product innovation as significant results of service orientation.

# 2.3 Service innovation and product innovation

In this paper, we adopt an S-D definition of service innovation. The S-D logic is appropriate for studying service innovation because it moves away from perspectives rooted in traditional product development (Ordanini & Parasuraman, 2011). Service innovation is defined as an offering not previously available to customers that require adjustments in the sets of competences that are applied by service providers and customers (Menor & Roth, 2007).

Ordanini and Parasuraman (2011) indicate that, in other to achieve service innovation, firms should (i) be customer and innovation-oriented; (ii) develop collaborative competences, in collaboration with customers and business partners; and (iii) provide knowledge interface mechanisms, which must incite knowledge integration and employee collaboration. Accordingly, service innovation can be considered an outcome of collaborative value creation processes (Baldwin & von Hippel, 2011). Nuutinen and Lappalainen (2012) point out that the prerequisites for innovation are not static objects, but something socially constructed when different parties meet or come into contact.

In today's complex and technologically-guided environment, service "can help ignite a new market, [...] accelerate industry shakeout, improve the financial performance of firms competing in mature industries with declining product businesses, or even create a market disruption" (Cusumano, Kahl, & Suarez, 2015, p. 572). Therefore, we indicate that S-D logic does not exclude delivering goods, but instead considers them a particular case of service provision (Michel, Brown, & Gallan, 2008). Goods are transmitters of operant resources, which means that goods are distribution mechanisms (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) which can be necessary for service delivery. Following this reasoning, we believe that for a more in-depth explanation on the relationship between service orientation and innovation results, it is necessary to understand the role of both product and service innovation under an S-D logic framework.



# 3. Towards an integrative view of service orientation and innovation

Understanding innovation under the S-D logic is imperative for advancing in the direction of a sustainable competitive advantage in the modern service economy (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). For S-D logic scholars, "innovation is not about inventing things but about developing systems for value co-creation" (Vargo & Lusch, 2017, p. 54). Given this definition, our aim in this section is to define how service-orientation and value co-creation may foster both product and service innovation under an SD-logic.

Because innovation is such a significant value driver for organizations, economies, and individuals alike, S-D logic research needs to address more explicitly aspects related to innovation in its conceptualization, particularly because innovation has not yet been elevated to the status of a central theme (Wilden et al., 2017, p. 354).

Furthermore, S-D logic's relationship to prior service literature and its potential for future development in this field have not been empirically examined (Wilden et al., 2017). The early work on innovation in S-D logic is tied to the creation of new markets and the need to develop a theory of markets (Wilden et al., 2017, p. 352). The concept of service orientation is often applicable in service-related business activities and focuses on synergistic effects that are important in collaborative service innovation (Cheng & Sheu, 2017). Moreover, collaborative service innovation is only possible to be achieved through firms' service orientation and value co-creation, considering that creating value "involves innovation that establishes or increases the consumer's valuation of the benefits of consumption (i.e., use value)" (Priem, 2007, p. 220). Figure 1 represents the theoretical framework developed in this paper.

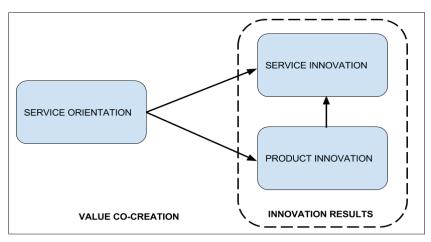


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

Based on the theoretical framework, we urge firms to shift their attention from value capture (Priem, 2007), often emphasized in traditional innovation efforts, to value co-creation. We understand that the network of companies and consumer communities are critical in both product and service innovations based on the experience space, that is, the interactions among actors derive both the experience and the value derived from it (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003, 2004). Additionally, service orientation can be considered as grounds for the interaction flexibility needed in value co-creation. Flexibility has the potential to transform the firm into a culture that supports innovation by creating a corporate climate in which the firm better assimilates and uses new information (Brozovic, Nordin, & Kindström, 2016). The service-oriented culture contains the values and behaviors associated with entrepreneurial orientation, real problem-solving eagerness, innovativeness and flexibility (Nuutinenn & Ojasalo, 2014).



Taking the S-D logic premises and axioms as a starting point (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016), it is possible to claim that service-oriented firms place knowledge and skills (operant resources), as sources of strategic benefit (FP<sub>4</sub>). S-D logic also assumes the co-creation of value by multiple actors, being oriented to the beneficiary and with a relational aspect (FP<sub>6,8</sub>), which leads to collaborative efforts to improve and stimulate innovation in the service offering (Lusch, Vargo, & O'Brien, 2007). Resource integration is also part of the process of innovation (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). Given that all social and economic actors are resource integrators (FP<sub>9</sub>), it is suggested that operant resources enable the innovative results linked to service offerings, allowing firms to compete in markets through effective new service development (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This argument leads to our first proposition:

**Proposition 1:** S-D logic's service orientation enables the development of service innovation.

Traditional marketing research found that factors such as market-orientation and cross-functional collaboration are resources that enable firms to gather higher product innovation performance (De Luca & Atuahene-Gima, 2007). Previous research shows that "the marginal effect of service innovation on innovation performance is greater for service-oriented than non-service-oriented firms" (Feng & Sivakumar, 2016, p. 257). Thus, we claim that service-oriented strategy is also valuable for firms to increase the outcomes of product and goods innovation. In this regard, value co-creation and intensive collaboration with customers are means to accomplish up-to-date product innovations that are delivered along with service-oriented efforts (Fjeldstad, Snow, Miles, & Lettl, 2012; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003; Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

Our argument is aligned with the foundational premises of S-D logic since Vargo and Lusch (2004) stated that goods are mechanisms for service provision (FP<sub>3</sub>). Thus, we argue that the scant attention given to product and goods innovation by S-D logic scholars may be rooted in the narrative that puts G-D logic as a villain for service-oriented scholars since traditional marketing and innovation studies emphasized new products creation as innovation (Michel, Brown, & Gallant, 2008). Still, this neglection throughout the years created a gap in the understanding of how product innovation may take advantage from service orientation, since product and service innovation through co-creation are substantially different, requiring unique methods, tools, and capabilities (Gemser & Perks, 2015).

We also argue that manufacturing firms operating under a service orientation and cocreation logic (S-D) are more likely to get noticed by customers and have their products perceived as highly valuable since part of the value was co-created by the beneficiaries. In this regard, "manufacturing firms could differentiate their products by adding a new component, namely, new services that are the output of service innovation" (Feng & Sivukamar, 2016, p.278). Such differentiation transforms goods (operand resource) into excellent service provision (operant resource), conferring to those firms a sustainable competitive edge over their competition (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2016).

According to the established literature, goods and product innovations are expected to occur through manufacturer's research and development (R&D) efforts (Becheikh, Landry, & Amara, 2006; Sawatani & Fujigaki, 2014). However, empirical evidence suggests that when firms adopt R&D strategies aligned with service orientation and value co-creation, firms may benefit from new insights and ideas for future R&D activities (Filieri, 2013; Sawatani & Fujigaki, 2014). In turn, it may lead to new product development, open innovation initiatives in products and service, and superior supply chain performance (Demir & Sezen, 2017). Furthermore, when manufacturing firms develop necessary service orientation, they can integrate the knowledge and feedback from customers and network partners, improving their internal process of development and triggering product innovation (Laudien & Daxböck, 2017). Thus, we present our second proposition:



**Proposition 2:** S-D logic's service orientation enables the development of product innovation.

The S-D perspective does not exclude goods such as mobile phones but instead considers them a particular case of service provision (Michel, Brown, & Gallan, 2008). The S-D logic asserts that offerings are not the end-product of the production process but that "goods are best viewed as distribution mechanisms for service provision" (Vargo & Lusch 2004, p. 9). In this regard, we understand that although products are not the central element of firm's offerings, in some contexts it can determine the features needed for service innovation.

The recent market enthusiasm for individual coffee machines (e.g., Nespresso, Dolce Gusto) provides an enlightening example of our argument. The offering of coffee in capsules probably is one of the most significant innovations in this branch of activity. The opportunity for customers to prepare their coffee represents a demonstration of S-D value-in-use. Also, this new offer represents a service innovation that was only possible thanks to the technological innovations in products, specifically, improvements that lead to new coffee machines and capsules.

Accordingly, Brentani and Ragot (1996) established that new product development could delineate success factors for service innovations. Lukas and Ferrel (2000) found that service orientation could increase the development of innovative products, which is consistent with the customer and relational premise of S-D perspective (Camarero & Garrido, 2012). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that recent findings suggest that long-term increases in performance require firms to reconcile service-oriented innovation and product-oriented innovation in their business models (Visnjic, Wiengarten, & Neely, 2016). Thus, we state our last proposition:

**Proposition 3:** Under the S-D logic, product innovation may affect service innovation.

# 4. Concluding remarks

The aim of this study was to establish the definition of service orientation as a concept of S-D logic and to provide a theoretical framework regarding the relationship between service orientation and innovation results regarding service and product innovation by highlighting the role of value co-creation. Our framework resulted in three major propositions. The first proposition is that under a value co-creation character of the S-D logic, strategic orientation provides firms with ideal conditions to develop innovation results regarding service innovation. The second proposition is that despite being different from service innovation, innovation results regarding product innovation would also benefit from firms' service orientation under the value co-creation definition of S-D logic. Finally, the third proposition is that under an S-D logic of value co-creation, product innovation can also result in service innovation.

The proposed framework contributes to the extant literature on service-dominant logic and innovation management. First, we provide a fine-grained understanding of service orientation, which may help researchers correctly addressing the construct when developing studies under the service-dominant paradigm. By highlighting the importance of value co-creation on the development of service orientation, we also established the relationship between service orientation and different types of innovation results, which was neglected by previous studies that considered an outdated definition of service. Lastly, our theoretical framework sheds lights on a little-discussed topic by S-D theorists, the role of products in service provision. We agree that goods are operand resources that can be used as a mechanism of service delivery. However more research is needed on the role of products to the success of service innovation.

Our framework also presents managerial and practical implications. Managers from service industries may become aware that service orientation and co-creation of value are



sources of service innovation. In this regard, when co-creating value with beneficiaries, firms may discover new forms or service offering, delivering to beneficiaries what they perceive as true value and not what firms assume is valuable for them. On the other hand, manufacturing managers could introduce service-oriented and co-creation efforts in their firms, enhancing the likelihood of successful product and service innovation, and, in consequence, gaining the competitive fight against their competitors.

We encourage future studies providing empirical evidence for our framework. Comparative studies between innovation results in service and manufacturing firms could be helpful to elucidate the actual distinctions between the effects of service orientation and value co-creation in service industries and manufacturing ones. Furthermore, cross-country studies should also be performed, since cultural and contextual variables could influence the strategic orientation of firms (e.g., open societies such as the United States could be more prone to present cocreation initiatives than more closed societies such as China, for instance).

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