

Direct and Indirect Customer Orientation in Multi-Sided Platforms: A Stakeholder Perspective

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Abstract

Traditional views of customer orientation emphasize firm-centric processes targeting uniform customer groups. This study instead examines how customer orientation is enacted and coordinated across multiple stakeholders in multi-sided platforms. Using a qualitative multi-method case study of Airbnb, based on platform content analysis and 23 host and guest interviews, we identify two complementary forms of customer orientation: direct customer orientation, the customer-facing behaviors of platform and providers, and indirect customer orientation, platform mechanisms that enable and amplify these behaviors. We (1) conceptualize customer orientation as a capability distributed across stakeholders, (2) provide empirical evidence distinguishing direct and indirect forms, and (3) show when indirect customer orientation complements or clashes with direct customer orientation, creating synergies and tensions. Managerially, we show how stakeholder-centered governance and enabling infrastructures can align actors and strengthen customer experience.

Track: Service Marketing & Service Innovation