The Battle of Two Kings:

Maximum Profit vs Optimal Profit
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Introduction

Every 21st-century company lives between two opposing forces:
one pushing it to earn **as much as possible**,
and another inviting it to earn **optimally**.

The first force is inherited from the industrial age: filling every available space, squeezing every last cent, operating with a "grow even if it hurts" mentality, and optimizing for short-term results regardless of human or reputational cost.

The second force is more subtle and more recent. It arises from automation, declining marginal costs, ubiquitous transparency that exposes abuse in seconds, and a society that now expects higher standards. In this new environment, mediocrity no longer goes unnoticed, and customer experience can elevate or sink a business instantly.

This paper studies that tension: the old king of **maximum profit** versus the new king of **optimal profit**, and why the digital economy demands that the customer —not the brutal margin— reclaim the throne.

The Anecdote that Changed My Perspective

During my youth, I worked at Starbucks. I still remember the day of the famous "2×1 Frappuccino" promotion. The store felt like a stadium during a championship game: endless lines, constant orders, supplies running out, and absolute chaos behind the bar. The whipped cream ran out, syrups vanished, and quality collapsed.

For baristas, it was one of the worst service days ever: irritated customers, long waits, and overwhelming stress.
And yet, by the end of the shift, we heard:

"Congratulations! We broke the sales record today!"

That sentence stayed with me.
From the top, it had been a triumph.
From the floor, it had been a disaster.

That day I understood for the first time that the maximum-profit model celebrates numbers even when it destroys the customer experience and erodes worker dignity.

On that day, the wrong king received the applause.

The Problem with the Maximum-Profit Model

Many industries remain trapped in this logic. The clearest example is aviation: hidden fees, shrinking seats, minimal services, and recent proposals to let passengers "travel standing" to increase density per square meter.

The equation seems flawless:
If more people fit, we earn more.

But this calculation ignores the essentials:

- the accumulated humiliation of the user,
- the emotional exhaustion of employees,
- the erosion of reputation,
- the loss of loyalty,
- the silent but constant rejection.

Worse yet, we must ask: do these sacrifices actually result in lower prices for consumers? Usually not.
A lack of competition enables abuse disguised as efficiency.

This pattern repeats everywhere.
A recent case is **Tulum, Mexico** — an extraordinary destination affected by pricing strategies that bordered on the absurd. For years the market squeezed tourists with inflated rates. But in the digital ecosystem —where abuse is exposed and punished in real time— the backlash came fast. The result: an unprecedented low season driven by reputational collapse.

Maximum profit may be profitable today,
but it is almost always toxic tomorrow.

Toward a New Model: Optimal Profit

The alternative is not "earning less."
The alternative is **earning intelligently**.

Optimal profit is not a romantic ideal or an act of charity.
It is a mature economic strategy.

It can be defined this way:

Optimal profit is the revenue level where the customer enjoys an exceptional experience, the business remains stable, employees operate without burnout, reputation grows, operations reinvest in continuous improvement, and margins remain strong enough to fund growth without betraying the essence of the service.

This point reveals itself through unmistakable signals:

- customers are genuinely satisfied,
- the experience is fluid and consistent,
- prices are reasonable, understandable, and transparent,
- the business has resources to improve without cutting quality,
- employees operate in calm, not survival mode,
- the relationship between company and customer feels dignified and human.

Optimal profit does not seek to extract the maximum —
it seeks to **serve at the maximum**.

The goal is not to squeeze the customer,
but to respect them.
And in today's market, nothing communicates respect better than transparency — in costs, in margins, and in intention.

New Economic Rules Shift the Incentives

Throughout the 20th century, profitable businesses were built on:

- labor-intensive operations,
- operational friction,
- slow processes,
- limited access to information,
- opacity as a competitive advantage.

But the 21st century operates under a radically different paradigm:

- **Artificial intelligence reduces human cost**, eliminating repetitive tasks.
- **Automation removes frictions** that once justified high prices.
- **Information is transparent and immediate**, making failures impossible to hide.
- **Competition is global**, forcing local businesses to meet global standards.
- **Digital marginal cost approaches zero**, redefining pricing logic.
- **More stable, deflationary economic structures reward excellence**, not opportunistic extraction.

In this environment, trying to earn "as much as possible" without considering experience is a symptom of an outdated model. The digital economy punishes abuse with abandonment and rewards dignity with permanence.

Users vote with their consumption.
And in an abundant market,
their vote always goes to the superior experience.

Circular Economics as a Sustainability Strategy

Optimal profit does not simply improve operations.
It builds a system where value circulates instead of leaking.

This involves:

- reinvesting continually in the customer experience,
- maintaining proportional and honest pricing,
- keeping reserves for unexpected events,
- rewarding loyalty,
- creating long-term relationships rooted in trust, not dependency.

This is not a trend.
This is a more sophisticated way to capture value:
when customers perceive fairness, transparency, and humanity,
they stay.

Customer Experience as the Center of Gravity

In the automated businesses of the 21st century — where processes run themselves and human intervention is minimal — a single differentiator remains: **customer experience**.

You can sell an artisanal service, a digital product, or a massive operation.
It doesn't matter.
The king is the same: the user.

And if the customer is king,
your prices, processes, and incentives must reflect that reality.

The businesses that survive will not be those that maximize profit,
but those that maximize harmony between
operation, reputation, and experience.

Not the ones that squeeze more,
but the ones that **serve better**.

Conclusion: The Right King for the 21st Century

The old king — **maximum profit** — still exists.
It still governs many industries.
It still delivers immediate results.

But it no longer inspires.
It no longer builds loyalty.
And it no longer works in a digital economy where transparency is total and marginal cost approaches zero.

The new king — **optimal profit** — demands a different vision:
more intelligent, more sensitive, more human,
and more aligned with a future where processes automate themselves and users have endless alternatives.

This is the king that deserves to rule the 21st century.
A king who understands that the customer is not part of the business —
the customer is the heart that sustains it.