



EVOLVING THE 4P'S: A DEBATE ON CRITICISMS AND SUPPORT IN THE SHIFT TO CUSTOMER-CENTRIC MODELS

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Abstract

The list of components that make up the marketing mix has been hotly debated, and the ability of these components to propel aggressive marketing initiatives has been steadily declining. New trades are being created as a result of the world's constant change. In the past, the speed at which these revolutions have occurred may have occurred every few years or every 10 years, but now, every year or month, we are seeing new products and items that have never been before. It is imperative that every business maintains a positive customer base in order to carry out the Ps of marketing, which comprise proper planning and targeting of people, the right product or service, the right place or distribution, the right price, the right promotion, the right physical and psychological evidence, the right amount of productivity, and quality performance. There have been numerous critiques regarding the efficacy of these conventional marketing tools and their applicability in the current dynamic marketing environment, but there have also been doubts about the efficacy of the four Ps of marketing in terms of their effectiveness in modern marketing jargon. In order to support the gradual ineffectiveness of the traditional 4ps of marketing concepts and the need to redesign a new, more inclusive philosophy that can help business organisations offer their products to the potential market given the current market narratives, which have shifted from the best offering of a firm's product to the more critical demands of value creation on the part of the consumers, this paper conducted an extensive literature review of previous studies related to the concept of the marketing mix and the critical arguments posited.

Keywords:

Marketing Mix; 4p's; Customer-Centric Models; 21st Century Marketing tool.

1.1 Introduction

In congruent with Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), the experience economy, increased consumer agency, and technical developments have all contributed to a dramatic shift in the modern corporate environment. Gummesson (2007) and Kotler and Armstrong (2016) both point out that the traditional product-centric marketing strategy, which comprises the 4Ps (Product, Price, Promotion, and Physical Distribution), is becoming more and more ineffective in this complex context. In congruent with Grönroos (2008) and Vargo and Lusch (2004), clients are no longer content to merely receive marketing messages; they are now seeking personalised solutions, easy access, tangible value, and pertinent information. In order to engage with today's tech-savvy consumers, organisations need to go beyond the limitations of old multichannel tactics (Darvidou, 2024) and provide them with seamless, integrated experiences. Brands must now concentrate on how their products and services add to the customer's unique story in order to capitalise on this transition (HEC Paris, 2022).

In congruent with Grönroos (1994), the 4Ps marketing mix is thought of by most conventional marketers as both a transactional marketing toolset and a model for operational marketing planning. Despite a lack of data on the Mix's precise function in driving business success, multiple studies have shown that practitioners tackling tactical and operational marketing problems rely on the 4Ps (Sriram and Sapienza 1991; Romano and Ratnatunga 1995; Coviello et al. 2000).

In spite of the 4Ps marketing mix's long history and prominent position in modern marketing theory and practice, a number of scholars have voiced concerns about the model's continued usefulness and have offered solutions ranging from tweaks to do away with it entirely. It is clear from reading marketing textbooks and scholarly articles that many authors and researchers believe the traditional marketing mix is insufficient to handle certain marketing challenges, such as the promotion of industrial goods, the management of relationships, or the marketing of services.

1.2 Contextual evaluation of the Marketing Mix (4Ps) Paradigm: The Foundation of the Contention

Many marketing theorists have sought out new theoretical frameworks to solve particular marketing challenges and broaden the scope of the marketing mix idea in response to changes in the business environment, customer preferences, and organisational attitudes throughout the past forty years.

Several criticisms directed at the 4Ps framework arise from the divergence of its foundational ideas from those of the Management School of Marketing, which serves as the guiding philosophy for the marketing mix. "The marketing concept and market orientation are seen as equally significant as the marketing mix, as asserted by the management school that identified it as one of its "most important conceptual breakthroughs" (Sheth et al., 1988; Kotler, 1984). Nevertheless, the Marketing Concept and Market Orientation principles indicate that marketing endeavours should focus on discerning client demands and desires, which are generally external and hence beyond anyone's control. This sharply contrasts with the four P's, which are manageable or controlled aspects, and the model's clear lack of market input (Kotler 2003).

Dixon and Blois (1983) and Grönroos (1994) are notable researchers who have highlighted this difficulty.

Recognising the need to comprehend the management effects of ongoing changes and to pinpoint the origins of exceptional business performance in dynamic competitive landscapes, marketing theory has broadened its theoretical scope. Recent discussions have centred on how environmental complexity, changes in consumer and organisational behaviour, and the role of technology as a marketing facilitator have evolved. (Beinhocker and Kaplan 2002; Brown and Eisenhardt 1998; Kaufman 1995).

In examining these nascent marketing domains, scholars often enquire if the Marketing Mix, particularly in its original, reductive version, is an appropriate basic framework. The 4P framework as a marketing management tool has several shortcomings, highlighted by the growing significance of services, the need to cultivate long-term client relationships, the escalating demand for marketers to comprehend and address the evolving needs of customers and industries, and the imperative to achieve this.

1.3 Dimensions of Criticisms of the 4Ps Marketing Mix Concept

1.3.1 The Marketing Mix and the Consumer's Marketing

Consumers' wants, requirements, and habits have changed drastically due to fast technical advancements and major cultural, social, demographic, political, and economic shifts in the later decades of the twentieth century. There has been talk about how the new customer is more existential, less receptive to conventional marketing messages, and less brand- and cue-conscious, all while the impact of social networks like families is shifting or disappearing (Christopher 1989). Research by Capon and Hulbert (2000) and Lewis and Bridger (2000) supports the idea that today's consumers are unique in many ways, including being more critical, demanding, active, autonomous, and well-informed.

The proliferation of low-cost personal computers and the ease with which people may access online commercial businesses, networks, databases, communities, and marketplaces are driving forces behind the shift. Marketers are under increasing pressure to abandon mass marketing strategies in favour of ones that facilitate customisation, connection, and genuine, direct dialogue with the consumer as a result of these advancements. Marketers may enhance their interactions with target groups, respond swiftly to competition moves, and properly forecast market trends by utilising these tactics. Additionally, they can discover client demands, which are continuously changing and evolving. The majority of the authors in the review feel that the 4Ps framework should not be utilised as the basis for consumer marketing management anymore due to the Advertising Mix's many flaws.

1.3.2 The Marketing Mix and the Relationship Marketing

The importance of customer loyalty as a metric for marketing efforts was long overshadowed by the emphasis on sales volume brought about by the rise of big commercial enterprises, the utilisation of intermediaries, and mass marketing in the 1960s and 1970s. The clear focus shift from transaction-oriented exchanges to connection building, from acquisition-oriented to retention-oriented marketing, is one of the notable developments in marketing thought that has occurred recently (Parvatiyar and Sheth 1997). It appears that marketers have remembered the benefits of offering personalised offers and lifelong customer value. They have also come to

realise that retaining current customers and fostering customer loyalty are just as important as attracting new customers and growing their business (McKenna 1991; Rozenberg and Czepiel 1992).

This shift in perspective did not occur suddenly. The relationship movement is being propelled by a number of factors, including but not limited to market saturation, economic crises, rising global competition, and consumers' inconsistent and unexpected conduct. Numerous scholars contend that a change in marketing paradigm is necessary for relationship-orientation, or at least different ways of approaching customers (Wolf 1998; Grönroos 1994; Gummesson 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995; Healy et al. 2001). There has been a lot of discussion and study on whether or not the 4Ps Marketing Mix can handle relationship marketing. Alsem et al. (1996) found that 60% of the companies surveyed see customer relationship management as their primary marketing focus, a 20% increase from the previous year. In contrast, Ailawadi et al. (2001) cast doubt on the effectiveness of promotions and advertising as retention marketing tools.

Regarding the 4Ps' function within Relationship Marketing, the vast majority of authors have been rather explicit: the framework is not suitable for retention-based marketing. The majority of the focus is on a few distinct Mix limitations:

- (i) **Product orientation rather than customer orientation and focus** (Lauterborn 1990; Rozenberg, & Czepiel 1992): Customers' opinions and interactions, which form the backbone of relationship creation and retention, are undermined by the Mix's overt emphasis on internal operations. The Mix does not take into account the unique requirements of each consumer when it comes to relationship development.
- (ii) **One-way orientation:** Given the mix's history and nature as a mass marketing age notion, there is little room for interaction and customised communication (Gummesson 1994, 1997; Grönroos 1994; Goldsmith 1999).
- (iii) People see the 4Ps framework as antagonistic rather than constructive (Patterson and Ward 2000).

When it comes to the 4P paradigm's theoretical and practical merits, advocates of relationship marketing are quite sceptical". The novel conceptual frameworks proposed by all of the evaluated writers centre on interaction, customisation, and communication.

1.3.3 The Marketing Mix and the Services Marketing

In their writings, Branton (1969) and Wilson (1972) make early allusions to the distinctions between the intangibles and tangibles that form the basis of services marketing. The unique nature of the services was further highlighted by researchers in the 1970s. Since then, a number of competing approaches and marketing theoretical frameworks for services marketing have been advanced (Blois 1974; Bessom and Jackson 1975; Shostack 1977). Among the many branches of marketing, the services marketing domain emerged as a unique field throughout time. This shift occurred for two reasons:

- (a) In post-industrial Western countries, services have grown into huge moneymakers for corporations and drivers of economic activity.

(b) As a component of the augmented product dimension, service became an integral aspect of tangible products. (Jobber 2001; Kotler et al. 2001). Therefore, service became a key differentiator for products and a foundation for competitive advantages.

The inclusion of people as a new variable in the services marketing mix is a major differentiator between service marketing and the marketing of tangible goods. (Meltewar and Saunders 2000; Grove et al. 2000; Heuvel 1993; Booms and Bitner 1981; Cowell 1984). The human element emphasises the one-on-one character of service marketing. Service providers are integral to the marketing process in two ways: first, as service deliverers; second, as persuasive tools for customers; and third, as a key factor in how customers rate the quality of the service they received.

It is well acknowledged that the 4P paradigm neglects two important aspects of service marketing—interaction and quality. In addition, quality standardisation is a demanding and difficult process due to the personal nature of services. In congruent with Rushton and Carson (1989), Fryar (1991), and Beckwith (2001). In congruent with Doyle (1994) and English (2000), the 4Ps fail to fully cover two essential aspects of service marketing: one-on-one communication and relationship development. As a result, the majority of opponents are against utilising the 4Ps as a standalone tool for service marketing design and instead advocate for either expanding the Mix or offering alternative methods.

1.3.4 Marketing Mix and the Retail Marketing

Barely twenty years ago, had the majority of consumer goods makers seen communicating with the end user as a crucial part of their marketing strategy. The manufacturers, as the undisputed rulers of the market, would launch massive advertising efforts to raise consumer consciousness about their products and services in the hopes of generating more demand. The marketing process largely ignored retailers and other middlemen, whose roles were limited to product stocking and resale (McCarthy 1978). A number of factors, including retail sector consolidation, globalisation, and private branding, have altered the retail scene. As influence shifted down the supply chain, merchants faced rising levels of competition while also gaining greater say over their marketing strategies.

Retailers, in their pursuit of dominant market positions and competitive advantages, progressively shifted from being wholesalers and in-store merchandisers to being actual marketers through the adoption of more professional and aggressive commercial tactics (Mulhern 1997). Numerous retailers' marketing strategies currently focus on supply chain management, operational efficiency, customer retention, and client lifetime value (Reichheld and Sasser 1990; Rosenberg and Czepiel 1992). Retail formats, personnel, service, and presentation have become the paramount elements of retail marketing, as the focus shifts from the passive implementation of the 4Ps to "execution" (Salmon 1989) in a continuous endeavour to cultivate enduring relationships with customers (Alexander and Colgate 2000).

One need only apply the same critiques levelled against the 4Ps in respect to retail marketing to the service and relationship industries (Mulhern 1997; Kotler 2003). Physical proof, the shopping experience, the ambiance (van der Ster 1993; Boekema and al. 1995; Mulhern 1997; Kotler 2003), and tailored rather than mass connections (Wang et al. 2000) are other, specific features of retail marketing that the Marketing Mix also neglects. When it comes to organising marketing efforts in this arena, the authors of the modern marketing paradigm concur that the

4Ps do not provide an acceptable foundation. New ideas or components should be added to the mix, or even replaced, in congruent with most academics. Differentiation and retention are based on providing customers with an exceptional experience, which is influenced by personnel, presentation, and retail format.

1.3.5 The Marketing Mix and the Industrial Marketing

The bulk of modern marketing textbooks devote an entire chapter to business-to-business (B2B) marketing and the purchasing habits of industrial groups, which is a theoretical topic that quickly gained recognition as its own sub-discipline of marketing. While there are scholars who hold the view that consumer and industrial marketing are not inherently different, the majority of researchers agree that there are several ways in which industrial marketing differs from consumer marketing. These comprise the unique nature of the industrial customer, more formalised decision-making processes, different purchasing behaviours and rationale, and more recent work by Coviello and Brodie (2001) and Smallbone (1969).

Other critical success variables comprise comprehension of client requirements (Shaw, 1995), service (Cunnigham and Roberts, 1974), and long-term relationships built on empathy, mutual benefit, and cooperation (Flint et al., 1997). As a practical management tool, the 4Ps of marketing are under-mentioned in industrial marketing literature. From an industrial marketing perspective, the following are the key points of criticism about the marketing mix:

(i) In contrast to industrial marketing's focus on collaboration and personalised approach, The Mix is mass-oriented, acquisition-oriented, and impersonal (Turnbull, Ford and Cunningham 1996). An integral part of Industrial Marketing has always been the interdependence and tight ties that exist between industrial buyers and sellers. Historically, the primary industrial marketing tool in this context has been personal selling, as opposed to mass communication and promotion. The foundation of industrial-commercial cooperation is trust and the perception of shared personality traits (Dion et al., 1995). In addition, the Buyer-Seller connections in industrial markets tend to be long-term, which highlights two further weaknesses of the Marketing Mix as a tool for Industrial Marketing: its focus on operations and its absence of strategic components.

(ii) Customers' needs must be addressed in order for industrial partnerships to be successful, and this is dependent on both parties' ability to comprehend and provide value (Parasuraman 1998; Andersen and Narus 1999).

1.3.6 The Marketing Mix and E-Marketing

As the Internet became more accessible to the general public, a new type of virtual company emerged, E-Commerce (R), that participated in a wide range of for-profit and non-profit online endeavours. While not fundamentally different from traditional forms of commerce in terms of the supported practices and activities, E-Commerce did bring new problems to the field of marketing, such as the following: increased market transparency, new ways of communicating and interacting with customers, the need to operate globally and continuously, and the difficulty of retaining competitive advantages (Weltz 1995; Seybold and Marshak 1998; Porter 2001).

The World Wide Web appeared to be the next great corporate frontier in the second part of the 1990s, when both Internet companies and internet users exploded throughout the globe. Unfortunately, the Internet gold rush of the 1990s came to a close due to the enormous failures

of ambitious web initiatives, which were not prevented by the initial enthusiasm and too optimistic expectations. The dot-com bust (Webmergers.com 2002) proved that the New Economy's idealistic claims were mostly false and impractical from a business perspective.

Many Internet pioneers seemed to have a hard time capitalising on the online economy in the 1990s, and the reasons why are still up for discussion and investigation. Many factors have been proposed as explanations for the dot-com busts by academics, consultants, and industry experts. Many sources have pointed fingers at inexperienced management, flawed technology, inadequate funding, unsustainable business models, and an outdated focus on products as causes of the dot-com crash (Colony 2000; Innosight 2001; Porter 2001; Owen 2001; Pew Internet 2001; webmergers.com).

Cash (1994), Hoffman and Novak (1997), and Constantinides (2002) all point to the Marketing Mix as a technique of E-Marketing that may have helped create dot-com disasters by leading to the construction of unsustainable online company models. From 1995 onwards, a growing body of academic literature has focused on the E Marketing Mix and the 4Ps' role within it. Topics covered comprise:

(a) When compared to criticisms levelled at "traditional" marketing, it appears that a relatively high proportion of researchers and writers support the 4Ps as the E-Commerce marketing paradigm, even in its most basic and original form (Peattie 1997; O'Connor and Galvin 2000; Bhatt and Emdad 2001; Allen and Fjermestad 2001). Alternately, some writers (Aldridge et al., 1997; Lawrence et al., 2000) advocate for tweaks that would most likely adapt the framework to the online world.

(b) Unlike Mosley (1997), Evans and King (1999), Chaffey et al. (2000), Kambil and Galvin (2000), Schultz (2001), and Constantinides (2002), the majority of writers clearly support whole new methodologies. Some of the most common criticisms levelled against the 4Ps marketing mix are its inward focus, its lack of customisation and interaction, its absence of strategic components, and its inability to foster community development.

Several writers in this emerging field of marketing appear to be wary of utilising the Marketing Mix framework, in contrast to the more strident opposition to the Mix in more "conventional" marketing contexts. Given the novelty of the topic and the paucity of prior study, this seeming contradiction makes sense. Still, E-Marketing is a complex landscape that incorporates aspects of the aforementioned critique categories—consumer, retail, service, and relationship marketing—along with some distinctive characteristics; thus, it can be argued that the criticisms voiced in the other domains covered here are equally applicable.

1.4 Conclusions

The Marketing Mix (4Ps) has been the subject of much academic discussion rather than practical dispute in the long-running marketing management tool debate. This is because there is a dearth of information on the precise impacts of the Ps on the achievement or failure of marketing initiatives, and there is also an absence of credible research data regarding the manner in which practitioners utilise the Mix when addressing marketing challenges. This suggests that more study and discussion is needed to get a definitive conclusion on the mix's viability as a marketing strategy in the modern day.

Therefore, by reviewing the academic literature on a particular aspect of the marketing environment, this study aimed to ascertain the current state of this debate. The overwhelming majority of writers and academics polled in these domains who have expressed serious doubts about the usefulness of the Mix as a marketing management tool have proposed a variety of alternatives, such as changing the original Mix's specifications or doing away with it entirely. Scepticism over the Mix's usefulness as a teaching tool is mirrored by doubts about its practicality as a marketing toolbox.

The study found that the 4Ps had certain domain-specific shortcomings, such as an attacking stance, a lack of interaction, a lack of strategic aspects, and an omission of the human element. However, the lack of customisation and the model's internal orientation appear to be two shortcomings that are shared throughout all assessed categories.

1.5 Recommendations

i) In congruent with Porter (1985), marketers need to study up on the laws and dynamics of the modern marketing environment if they want marketing to continue being a major value-adding business activity in the years to come.

ii) Managers shouldn't worry so much about overseeing the 4Ps-defined procedures; instead, they should concentrate on the elements that contribute to customer value and work to create organisations that are market-oriented, adaptable, and imaginative. Such businesses can keep up with the ever-shifting market conditions by always innovating.

iii) Businesses and customers alike benefit from an endless supply of new technologies, which lower transaction and switching costs while simultaneously providing consumers with more options, access to products and services on a global scale, and novel ways to meet their unique and specialised demands. Service and a tailored approach to each customer are now necessities in this industry, so it stands to reason that 21st-century marketing will be more interactive and customised than ever before.

iv) Whether dealing with consumer or institutional markets, any business's success hinges on the quality of the seller-client relationship and the seller's capacity to hold on to their consumers. Hence, businesses and marketers should work to strengthen this personal connection in order to guarantee the dedication and allegiance of customers.

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