

The “Myth of the Mix”

Classic marketing courses still use the traditional marketing mix, or 4 Ps, as the basis for teaching. The critical question however, is how relevant is the traditional marketing mix in a world that is in a state of dynamic and constant change? Furthermore, and more importantly, where does the brand (both the internal and external brand) fit into the marketing mix, and how does the classic marketing mix apply to the changing customer?

In his book *Basic Marketing, A global-Managerial Approach*, Professor Jerome McCarthy states that there are many possible ways to satisfy the needs of target customers, and that there are numerous variables that impact on the ability of an organisation to satisfy these target customers needs. McCarthy says that it is useful to reduce all the variables in the marketing mix to four basic ones namely, product, price, place (distribution) and promotion. His classic diagram depicts the customer shown as *surrounded* by the four Ps, but not being *part* of the marketing mix, but rather the *target* of all marketing efforts.

While it may be assumed the McCarthy’s original purpose in depicting the marketing mix in this manner was simplicity, the reality of marketing today requires that marketing and brand strategists need to acquire a profound knowledge of the markets in which they choose to operate, as well as the consumers and their own customers within these markets. Furthermore, McCarthy’s classic marketing mix ignores other critically important Ps, such as people, profit, performance, etc, as well as other important “non-P” factors. The classical marketing mix as advocated by McCarthy and other mainstream marketing authors such as Philip Kotler, provides basic marketing information about the topic of marketing which may be perceived by readers of these textbooks as something that is “*done to*” a target market. While this is definitely not the intention of these authors, there is the very real danger that these classic “textbooks on marketing” may be interpreted by readers as “*the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*”, in the field of marketing.

One of my own personal problems that I have with some of these so-called mainstream marketing textbooks, is the lack of emphasis placed on three areas of marketing:

- The lack of meaningful *content* in terms of brands and branding
- The lack of emphasis on *people* within the organisation (what I refer to as the *internal brand*)
- The lack of emphasis on the *evolving customer* – the impact of generational theory on classical marketing approaches to positioning, market segmentation, brands and branding

Let’s examine some of these critical areas of marketing.

In his book *Basic Marketing* mentioned above, McCarthy allocates a mere six pages to the critically important concept of brands and branding, and these pages are confined to definitions and simple descriptions. Market segmentation dimensions are still defined in the classic manner of geographic, demographic and behavioural dimensions, and have been described in this manner for several editions. Consumer and buyer behaviour is described in terms of a *classical model*, which tends to depict consumer behaviour and decision-making as some form of orderly linear progression. Positioning, as described by Ries and Trout in Philip Kotler’s book *Marketing Management*, is stated as “*what you do to the mind of the prospect – that is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect*”. This implies that positioning is something that is “done to consumers”. How wrong in terms of the changing and dynamic world in which we live!

My purpose is not to *bash* these authors, all of whom have made an invaluable contribution to the development of marketing as an important organisational discipline, but rather to highlight the fact that building long-term brand sustainability in a dynamic and frequently changing business environment requires both knowledge and the creation of meaningful relationships with consumers and customers. This implies that successful organisations of the future will of necessity need to have a profound knowledge of how their customers think and interact with their organisations and in particular, with their brands.

I believe that knowledge of generational theory and its application from a brand perspective, will become a prerequisite for long-term sustainability of any brand and organisation in the future. This is clearly demonstrated by Martin Lindstrom in his book, *BRANDchild*, who highlights that in today’s world, many marketers are finding that their tried and tested “rules” (marketing mix) no longer always apply. This is particularly so in relation to the *tweens* – a new generation group aged between 8 and 14 years old, a group referred to by Lindstrom as being “*weaned on special effects and digitised soundtracks*”.

According to Lindstrom, no other generation has ever before had as much disposable income as this one. This is the first generation that’s been born and bred with an understanding of today’s economic world. Brands are an important part of their lives and they have developed an internal filter, which absorbs, selects and adopts brands in a way never seen before.

To categorise these *tweens* (and even their slightly older counterparts) according to traditional segmentation dimensions such as demographics, or even LSM groups is a sure recipe for disaster, as they exhibit new independent thinking and group characteristics that do not comply to the traditional forms of market segmentation.

LSM's (in my humble opinion), do not provide anywhere near enough insight into the hopes, dreams and aspirations of potential target markets (particularly when it comes to *tweens*), and therefore new ways of thinking need to be adopted by marketing and brand strategists in order to identify more meaningful ways of understanding the minds of these consumers.

Brands also come under the critical microscope of *tweens* and they are very sceptical and instantly question things that don't feel right to them. Lindstrom emphasises the fact that brands are as hot as ever among *tweens* and the familiarity of brands adds security and offers a framework for their world. Brands have become symbols for an identity, offering the opportunity to be trendy, cool, rich, outrageous, rebellious or just plain stylish.

So what is the significance of this young group of new generation consumers and their relevance to the traditional marketing mix? Well, simply stated, this group is both a major current and future purchaser of your brands. Lindstrom states that this is why it is so important for brands to establish a relationship at this age rather than later on in life, when views are more established and inertia takes hold.

So how do *tweens* feel about brands? Patricia Seybold, co-author of *BRANDchild*, says that *tweens* have a deeply passionate relationship with brands and brands are extremely important to *tweens*, both for what the brand itself means to them, and even more so for what the brand means *about* them, to themselves and to others. Branding becomes more about personality, and about creating brands with which people (and *tweens* in particular) can identify: brands that are human, that have opinions and attitudes, and that can honestly portray strengths and weaknesses.

Seybold emphasises the importance of correctly identifying brand communities with strong characteristics, and that contrary to general belief, age, gender and demographic correlations are not necessarily the primary factors that determine a community's membership. Often it's an *interest* or *passion* that proves to be the uniting force.

So what's the relevance to me, or my organisation you may be thinking? I'm in the motor market, or I sell property, and *tweens* cannot purchase a motorcar or a property. If you think like this, then you may need to read up on the research conducted by USA researchers Millward Brown, who conducted the research that provided the launching platform for Martin Lindstrom's book *BRANDchild*.

The traditional marketing mix as identified and defined by traditional mainstream marketing authors such as McCarthy and Kotler (amongst others), may no longer be totally appropriate in an era of relationships and dynamic connectivity. More emphasis needs to be placed on researching and understanding the consumer of the future, their moods, loyalty, fickleness and aspirations.

I predict that more research and emphasis in the future will need to be placed on understanding the emotions and the emotional states of the mind and emotional drivers of new generation consumers. One of the most profound statements that I have read in recent years comes from Tom Asacker, a marketing and brand specialist in the USA, and co-member of *globalbrandnetwork.com*, who writes in his book, *A Clear Eye for Branding*, as follows:

"It doesn't matter what customers think or feel about you or your brand. What matters is how you make them feel about themselves and their decisions in your brand's presence".

Keep on dreaming!

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