

A review of the impact of marketing mix in decision making process of consumers when buying food products

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Abstract

A systematic review was conducted of available literature pertaining specifically to the impact of marketing mix in the decision-making process of consumers when buying food products. A protocol was devised for the search, selection and eligibility criteria of the selected research works. That protocol was applied to a search conducted on the open source internet using Google Search's 'Scholarly Articles' function. Finally, five articles were found this process that were subjected to the systematic review. The review found that there was a surprising dearth of adequate research on the specific topic despite the significant share of food products in the global consumer market. All of the studies explored the subject matter through the prism of a geographic setting and also, it was evident from the research results that no one attribute of the 4 Ps (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) of the marketing mix model could be solely attributed as the determinative or most influential factor in the purchasing decision of the consumer. The result varied depending on the type of customer surveyed, the type of food product that was in questions and possibly even the methodologies used. Moreover, it was clear that only a few of the studies aspired to make concrete recommendations to food retailer and manufacturers on how their research can be used to improve the marketing mix to better target the customer. Recommendations for future research concluded the article, with ideas to close the research gap in this area.

Keywords: Marketing Mix, Food Purchase, Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Decision-Making

Introduction

For many years now, marketing experts have been investigating and studying the factors that influence purchasing decisions of consumers, in order to better tailor retail experiences for the customer, and of course, increase buying. One of the areas that has received attention is the influence of marketing mix in the decision-making process of consumers.

The aim of this review article is to conduct a systematic review on a specific aspect of this phenomenon – as it relates to the purchase of food products.

In order to do so, first, the concept of marketing mix will be explained in brief so as to enable easier understanding of the review section. Next, the search process, including search criteria, filters used and final selection, will be explained. Subsequently, the shortlisted articles will be reviewed in a systematic manner. Finally, observations that were readily visible as well as final conclusions, including recommendations for further future research will be made.

What is Marketing Mix?

Essentially, 'marketing mix' is a term used to define a model of marketing that is considered foundational or seminal to the marketing industry. Broadly, it is defined by Philip Kotler as

follows: “Marketing mix is the set of marketing tools that the firm uses to pursue its marketing objectives in the target market.” (Kotler, 2000)

The most popular understanding of the marketing mix model is known as the 4 Ps. These refer to the following: Product, Price, Place and Promotion. Product refers to the physical good that the consumer is purchasing, including details of its type, variety, design, packaging, quality and features. Price refers to the cost or monetary sum that any consumer might believe that a product is worth and how much they are willing to pay. Place refers to an avenue for the customers to access and purchase a good or product. Initially, this would have referred to stores but now increasingly also refers to e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, as significant portion of purchasing on the part of customers has shifted online. The last of the Ps refers to promotion, i.e. the marketing or advertising of the product. (Kareh, 2018)

However, as times have evolved, so too has the understanding of marketing mix. The 4 Ps have now evolved to the 7 Ps, including Physical Evidence, Process and People to the concept (Kareh, 2018). In the 1990s, a new version of the model was posited called the 4 Cs, of which actually a few different iterations came to be known. The latest of these models is Robert F. Lauterborn’s 4 Cs model, where the alphabet C represented the following tenets – Consumer, Cost, Convenience and Communication (Hanlon, 2016).

With the advent and increasing usage of e-commerce, as well as other developments in the market and sale of products, the models used in marketing mix will likely continue to evolve in the coming years.

Review

In order to conduct a systematic review, search criteria were created to suit the relevant research consideration of this article. Rather than use any specialized database, the search terms were applied to the open sources of the internet via the search engine Google. The search terms were entered into Google Search. Then, a number of criteria were applied to narrow down the list of articles. These criteria were created to closely match the exact research parameters and considerations of this review article and also due to practical constraints.

First, the following search terms were entered into Google Search:

1. ‘Impact of marketing mix in decision making process of consumers when buying food products’
2. ‘Marketing mix and consumer decision making’
3. ‘Marketing mix and sale of food products’
4. ‘Impact of marketing mix on consumer purchasing of food’

Following this, the filter on Google Search that allows isolation of ‘Scholarly Articles’ was applied, so that only such works would be visible and other works, such as articles in newspapers and periodicals and videos, would be eliminated.

Next, due to practical constraints, search results beyond page number 3 of Google Search in Scholarly Articles, were not considered. As this is a short review article, it was not possible to include too many results. Moreover, once all criteria were applied, it was evident that there were not too many articles that fit all of the necessary parameters. After eliminating results beyond page 3 of Google Search, articles not focused on assessing the impact of marketing mix on decision-making of consumers, and those focusing on other aspects, such as provision of

marketplace options to consumers, were eliminated. Next, works were further narrowed to include impact of marketing mix on decision making among consumers, specific to the purchase of food products. Thus, any studies that worked on different types of consumer products, including cosmetics, clothing and appliances, were eliminated from consideration.

Using these criteria, five studies in total were shortlisted to be further examined and analysed for the systematic review.

1. 'Marketing mix influencing organic foods purchase of Mexican consumers' – This is a study conducted by authors Dr. Lizbeth Salgado-Beltrán, Dr. Joel Enrique Espejel-Blanco, and Dr. Luis Felipe Beltrán-Morales. The authors' primary aim was to provide evidence obtained from the marketplace on how Mexican consumers' purchasing of organic goods was influenced by marketing mix. The idea was that this would enable understanding of the decision making process of the Mexican consumers and how marketing mix plays into this process, thereby enabling companies to better understand their customers. The authors approached the issue using the following factors of marketing mix – price, product, and communication and distribution strategies. A structured questionnaire was devised using a five-point Likert scale, which was distributed to 383 persons in the demographic age group of 18-65. The collected data was then analysed using structural equation models or SEM. The authors concluded that the data analysis revealed that there was a significant positive influence of the product and distribution strategies attributes to purchasing decision of consumers towards organic food. One interesting aspect to notice in this study is that the authors have geared the study towards not only food products, but specific food products in the marketplace available to Mexican consumers – i.e. organic food products. (Salgado-Beltrán, Espejel-Blanco, & Beltrán-Morales, 2012)
2. 'The Impacts of Marketing Mix on the Consumer Experience in Fast Food Industries' – this study was conducted by authors R.Uma Maheswari and G.Nagamuthu. The authors selected a fast food company, namely, that of McDonalds. The authors decided to analyse the marketing mix of the company and evaluate how that impacted consumer experience. Geographically, the study was focused in the South Indian city of Coimbatore. The authors interviewed one hundred and twenty respondents and then the collected data was subjected to analysis in the form of percentage analysis, weighted average rank analysis and chi-square test analysis. Some notable results from the study include that 81% of the customers interviewed agreed that the restaurants of McDonalds were located at prime locations and 79% agreed that the promotional strategies used by the brand induced the customers to purchase the product. Apart from this 77% of the interview subjects agreed that the price of the product reflected the good quality of food they had purchased. Meanwhile, 60% agreed that the location of the McDonalds restaurant aided them in easy accessibility. This study was notable in its approach to studying fast food products, as opposed to retail purchasing by consumers. (Maheswari & G.Nagamuthu, 2014)
3. 'The Impact of Marketing Mix Elements on Food Buying Behavior: A Study of Supermarket Consumers in Vietnam' – this study was conducted by authors Nguyen, Phan, and Vu (2015). The authors of the study aimed for it to analyse the impact of marketing mix on the food purchasing or buying behaviour of consumers shopping at supermarkets in Vietnam. Specifically, the authors looked into the purchase of frozen

foods. The authors devised and conducted paper-based surveys in the Vietnamese city of Hanoi using a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. The surveys were distributed randomly at five supermarkets in Hanoi, where the authors received 222 appropriate responses that they were able to use. Apart from this, the authors also conducted ten in-depth interviews to ensure the validity of the questionnaire with both marketing experts and consumers of frozen food items. The results of this study were found, by the authors to be consistent with findings in studies of food buying behaviour in other parts of the world, including studies conducted in Turkey, India and Denmark. Overall, this study found that there was a significant positive relationship between marketing mix variables and consumers' actual purchase of frozen food. In particular, the product, i.e. the frozen food items, was found to be the most important attribute of the marketing mix to influence the customers' purchasing decision. It is interesting to note that this study had a geographic focus, and then a further focus on not only consumer behaviour in supermarkets, but also consumer behaviour towards the purchase of frozen foods, which is an added level of narrow focus. (Nguyen, Phan, & Vu, 2015)

4. 'Analysis the effect of marketing mix in purchasing decision of Growing Up Milk (GUM) on three socio-economic classes in Malang' – this study was conducted by authors Sunardi Sunardi, Jabal Tarik Ibrahim, and Anas Tain. The authors wanted to analyse the effect of marketing mix in purchasing decision of Growing Up Milk (GUM) on three socio-economic classes. Further, they focused on the geographic area of Malang, Indonesia. Apart from the geographic focus, the authors also attempted to link the purchasing behaviour and impact of marketing mix to the socio-economic class of the consumer or customer. The authors wanted to delineate the differences between the purchasing behaviour of the three socio-economic classes and what might the impact of marketing mix be on each of the three identified socio-economic classes of lower class, middle class and upper class. The authors collected data using questionnaires and the data was then subjected to partial least squares or PLS, instead of structural equation modelling, or SEM. Across all three socio-economic classes, the marketing mix attribute of 'product' was found to be significantly influential in the decision to purchase GUM products. The attribute of 'price' was found to be significantly affecting only at the lower and upper class levels, whereas the attributes of 'place' and 'promotion' did significantly affect purchasing decision of GUM products across the three classes. It was found that consumer who were upper class tended to purchase GUM products primarily due to quality of product, rather than factors like product design or packaging, understandably, discounted prices or other means of lowered prices were not determinative for the purchasing decision of consumers from the upper class. This study's interesting aspects include the specific focus not only on GUM products but also on the linkage it revealed between marketing mix, purchasing decision of consumers, and the socio-economic class of the consumer. (Sunardi, Ibrahim, & Tain, 2016)
5. 'Relationship between marketing mix of whey protein and consumer buying decision in Bangkok Metropolitan' – this is a study by authors Naruebodin Voravudhi, Chalita Srinuan and Opal Suwannamek. The study was focused on the influence of marketing mix on the purchase of whey protein by consumers who regularly exercised in the Bangkok metropolitan area. Two hundred and seventeen consumers were chosen for the reasons that they exercised regularly and had been consuming whey protein for more than six months. They were administered a questionnaire and the collected data was then

analysed using multiple regression technique. Of the commonly considered marketing mix attributes, the one that showed to have the most significant relationship with the purchasing decision making of the consumers was promotion. This was followed by the attribute of place and then by price, leaving the product factor, which did not show a significant relationship with influencing the purchasing decision of the consumers. This study was noteworthy for not only a geographic focus, but also a focus on the type of consumer and type of food product that was chosen as a focus of the study. (Voravudhi, Srinuan, & Suwannamek, 2016)

Conclusions

Some observation and analyses were evident from the systematic review that was conducted. They are outlined below.

- It was evident from the search process that there is a paucity of adequate research on the specific topic of the impact of marketing mix on the decision-making process of consumers when buying food products.
- All of the studies explored the subject matter through the prism of a geographic setting.
- It was evident from the variety of research results that no one attribute of the 4 Ps of the marketing mix model could be solely attributed as the determinative or most influential factor in the purchasing decision of the consumer. The result varied depending on the type of customer surveyed, the type of food product that was in questions and possibly even the methodologies used.
- The first study revealed, for example, that product was the most influential factor. Meanwhile, study showed that the maximum number of respondents were happy with the location – or place – of the consumer product, followed closely by the promotion of the product. In the third study, the product was found to be the most important attribute of the marketing mix to influence the customers' purchasing decision. In the fourth study, across three socio-economic classes, product was found to be significantly influential in the decision to purchase GUM products. And finally, in the fifth study promotion was found to be the marketing mix attribute that was most influential in purchasing decision of the consumer.
- Very few of the studies aspired to make concrete recommendations to food retailer and manufacturers on how their research can be used to improve the marketing mix to better target the customer.

As mentioned, there is a real dearth of research in this area, which is noteworthy as consumer foods are a major market in the world. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct more research in order to fill this gap. Moreover, of the research studies that are available in the specific narrow focus of impact of marketing mix on the purchasing decision of consumers when buying food products, it is clear that there is a wide variety of the attributes of the 4 Ps model of marketing mix that are considered the most influential. This disparity itself is an interesting aspect to be studied. It would be valuable to understand what factors determine which attribute of the 4 Ps would be most determinative. For example, is it more likely that a lower class or middle class consumer of food products would be more influenced by the price attribute? Or in another case, when it came to the food product for the health of a child, would the attribute of 'product', i.e. the quality or reliability, be the most crucial? Moreover, there needs to be a greater effort to link the research conducted with concrete recommendations made to food manufacturers, retailers,

and advertising companies that operate in real-world marketplace scenarios as they may find this research most beneficial.

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