

An Approach Of The Product View Through The Perspective Of The Marketing - Mix

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Abstract

Beside other elements, the product belongs to that category known as marketing – mix, by which, on a large scale one may understand the optimal combination of the marketing variables a firm disposes in order to influence the target market [Ph. Kotler, B. Dubois: *Marketing Management, Publi-Union Editions*, Paris, 1992, p. 72]. From this definition it results that all the elements influencing in a way or another, the consumer’s behavior in the market is linked to the marketing – mix. Making a synthesis of them, E.J. McCarthy arrives at the conclusion that these are four, presenting them under the form of the vector 4P: P1 (product), P2 (price), P3 (placement), P4 (promotion) [E. J. McCarthy: *Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach*, 9th Edition, Homewood, III, Richard D. Irwin Inc., 1981, p. 39].

The vast and complex problematic forming the object of the preoccupations of the Marketing – mix are very evident, there also being the tendency to detail and restructure it [J. Lendrevie, D. Lindon: *Théorie et pratique du marketing*, 4^e édition, Dalloz, Paris, 1990, p. 144-367].

Keywords mix-marketing, product view, branding

INTRODUCTION

The approaching the marketing problems under the mix form offer the possibility to investigate and know the response variants of the firms for the environment exigencies in which they develop their activity, all the four components of the vector which we have mentioned (including product) being variables predominant (or exclusively) hexogen belonging to their external environment (market). Each of them, by the content of the supposed problematic, make up sub-mixes (known under the name of *politics* or *strategies*), presenting large and complex action programs, indispensable for the attaining of the fundamental objectives of the firms.

1. **Definition.** Among all the four components of the marketing – mix, the product tends to occupy the central place, being already launched the idea that, in fact, “in future, there will not be marketing directors, the new function will carry the denomination of “ product development *director*” (s.n.) [M. J. Tomas: *Manual de marketing*, Editura CODECS, București, 1998, p. 22].

Being the result of a natural or artificial process, the product is, before all, an assembly of attributes or physical and chemical tangible characteristics, reunited in an identifiable form [W. J. Stanton: *Fundamental of Marketing*, 3th Edition, McGraw Hill, Toronto, 1972, p. 192].

In marketing, the produce is defined both as a physical expression of the firm’s response to demand [P. L. Dubois, A. Jolibert: *Le Marketing: Fondaments et Pratique*, 2^e édition, Economica, Paris, 1992, p. 317] (because when it proposes the realizing of a product, the enterprise must start from the consumers’ desires), *or as everything is launched on the market, in a way in which the product is remarked, purchased and consumed, in order to satisfy a need* [Ph. Kotler, B. Dubois: *Lucr. cit.*, p. 480] , *concretizing in a good, a service, a person* (a star which wants to be imposed in the show biz or a political leader in an election campaign), *an organization, a place* or even an idea. In his opinion, its main components can be classified as follows [C. G. Niță: *Bazele marketingului*, Editura Economică, București, 2003, p. 146]:

- *Corporate components* concretized in parameters technical- functional (form, composition etc.);
- *A – corporate components* or *symbolical* ones (name, brand, price);

- *Image components* (the reflection of the product in the mental representations of the clients);
- *Communication components* (the information sent to users).

Taking into consideration all these components, one may say that the product is on one side, a *physical – chemical entity*, including the corporate components and the majority of the symbolic ones, and on the other side a *psychological entity*, it being on the market at the extent in which it is perceived and remarked by the potential clients. Any performing it could be from a physical- chemical point of view, the product will not be sold as long as it does not communicate, under the most divers forms, with its potential clients.

The marketing is about the product from at least five different points of view (or five levels), (Figure 1), each of them putting into evidences certain aspects.

At *the first level* (the basic one) there is situated the *nucleus* of the product, this one being regarded as a response to the question: What does the consumer buy?, by product understanding *what does it offers* (the main advantage or service that the person buying it could have). A loaf of bread, for instance, is before all something to be used when being hungry (not only a long shaped, soft material body, eventually hot and having an attractive smell). That is why, the marketing responsible of the company producing it must be preoccupied in first place not to sell such *characteristics*, but of the selling of the *advantages* or *services* which it offer to buyers (and which, obviously, derive form the characteristics of the product).

At *the second level* there is the *product itself* or the *generic* one, with all its characteristics, and by means of which it can be separate from others.

The *expected product* is the form of a product when it is looked at from a *third level*, being defined by all the characteristics that clients expect from it (the bread to be hot, roasted, fluffy etc.).

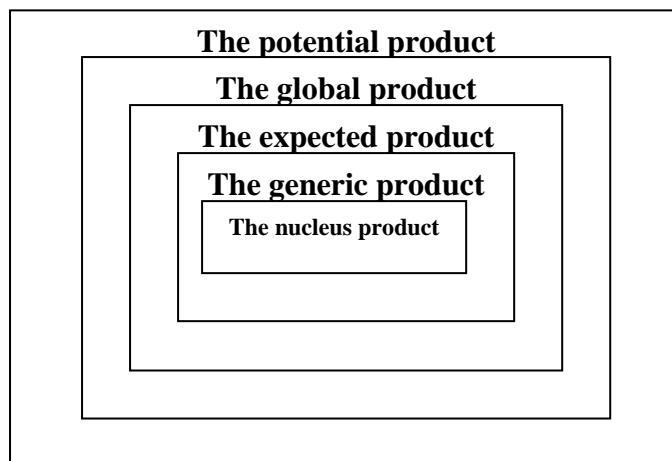


Figure 1. The levels of the product

The global product, also called mega – product, is the product regarded from the perspective of all that the firm can offer to the client in order to satisfy all the needs (not only the generic product, but also the annexes, the exchange parts, the use instructions, the service and maintaining services, the services of forming the exploitation staff etc.). Under this vision the product appears as *a system* (and not as an isolated good).

At *the fifth level* there is situated the *potential product*, defined, in addition from the previous one, by all the imaginary improvements and changes which it can record in future.

From the point of view of marketing, the product notion imposes itself to be taken into consideration and on a certain *scale of hierarchy*, thus arriving at the following echelons:

- *the article*, representing the basic unity, defined by its very concrete characteristics (Borsec non – sparkling mineral water in 500ml recipients);
- *the product brand*, meaning the name or the sign associated to many articles, which permits the identification of the origin and characteristics (Borsec water);
- *type*, constituted from articles which are presented in a distinctive form (non-sparkling water);
- *range*, including the products belonging to the same category, which are very tightly connected because they are used in the same way or are sold to the same kind of clients, in the same place and with close prices (mineral water);

- *category*, comprising all the products of the same family representing a certain functional coherence (water);
- *family*, constituted by all the categories of products which have as destination the satisfaction of the same needs (refreshments);
- *type of need*, representing the fundamental need to which there is a response represented by an assembly (a family) of products (drinks).

For some goods, a part of the seven steps of the hierarchy scale can miss their place in the remaining echelons becoming a simpler operation.

2. **Functions.** For consumer, a product proves to be necessary only if it is utile. In turns, the utility of a good does not manifest than through its functions. That is why it is said that, in fact, *a client does not buy products pure and simple, but their functions*. If the customer could buy directly the functions of the product, probably he/she would renounce the product. Thus, if only the movement into space of a vehicle could be bought, probably the vehicle would not be bought any longer.

The functions are those generating satisfaction after consuming, using or only possessing the product, being classified into two large categories: basic and auxiliary.

The *basic function* of a product is that which makes it necessary to the majority of consumers, having a direct correspondence to the social need which imposed its making up. For example, the basic function of a vehicle is that of assuring the movement into space of its user.

The *auxiliary functions* of the same product are linked (or not) of the basic ones, being treated with a special attention from the part of the marketers. This thing happens because, no in few occasion, the buying decision is taken by the clients first of all on their account (the basic function being purely and simply ignored). In the case of the above-mentioned vehicle, the auxiliary functions are those assuring: a certain speed; a certain surety in traffic; a certain comfort; a certain image of the owner social position etc. As a result, some clients will choose the vehicle according to its constructive speed, others according to the style, to the comfort, and others according to the color etc.

Different from the basic function, without which the product would never sell, many of its auxiliary functions can miss without registering any complaints from the part of the clients in this direction. As a result, the expenditures the producer makes for such auxiliary functions are not recognized by the consumers as being absolutely necessary, they preferring to get rid of some function in order to buy a cheaper product. As a rule, the more a product is able to exercise more functions the more desired it will be from the part of the consumers.

3. **Components.** *The set of functions* which a product can exercise for the the benefit of consumers is assured by its constitutive elements. Leaving beside the product itself, it means here: name, brand, label, package, using instructions, guarantees, accompanying services etc.

a) **Name.** The marketing approaches the product as a *living entity*, which, first is born, growth etc. In this sequence of phases the *baptized* is also included, as necessary and common act, without which the product would remain without a name, a disadvantage in its competition on the market.

Far of being something ordinary, attributing a name to a product for the market is an unimaginable important operation, thing insistently underlined especially by the American marketers [Șt. Pruteanu, C. Munteanu, C. Caluschi: *Inteligenta Marketing Plus*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 1998, p. 120]. We must not forget that *a bad name can definitely compromise a business*. We may also state that *a good name does not cost more than a bad one*. In this direction, we believe it is sufficient to remind what the attribute *nova* meant when attached to some automobiles designated, among others, to the markets in Latin America (where *no* suggests the idea that they are able to work) or the English noun *mist* attached to a sort of alcoholic Irish drink designated inclusively to the German market (where it has the significance of *manure*).

In order to check the impact of the name upon sales, we propose you the following experiment which is a very simple one: offer to a sample of 10 men (having the same age) the same product (wild berries tea) under two different names (Marghioala and Ana). After tasting it (on turns), you will be able to find out that the majority of options will be in favor of the type Ana tea. That is why, many firms (among the most famous) allot impressive amounts of money to research aiming to find out successful names for their businesses.

The American literature recommends a series of *rules for attributing a name* (to a product, a brand, or a business) [Ph. Kotler: *Managementul marketingului*, Ediția a III-a, Teora, București, 2003, p. 606-608]. According to their opinion, it must be conceived in such a way that:

- suggest the destination (utility) of the product (as in the case of *ASIROM*, which sends us to the idea of the Romanian assurance service);

- indicate an attribute (advantage) essential (definitely) of this one (as in the case of *Duracell* – meaning “*long-lasting battery*”)
- be unique, respectively distinct (of the kind “*Ursus*”), in order to be easily remarked and not create confusions unfavorable to the firm;
- be as short and simple as possible (kind “*Pepsi*”) making it easily to be pronounced and memorized;
- have a sole sense and be pronounced in a single way in all languages (kind *Kodak*), respectively do not need translation from one language to another (and in this way unacceptably alter its the sense);
- do not be offensive or obscene;
- be pleasant (the case of archaisms and regionalisms) etc.

At last, the choice of the name remains a matter of inspiration [T. Gherasim, A. Gherasim: *Cercetări de marketing*, Editura Economică, București, 2003, p. 145-151]. Before being launched on the market, the name must be submitted to some tests, such as: the tests regarding the associations of ideas; tests regarding the facility of learning; tests for the ease of memorization etc.

According to the type of products, the producers frequently attribute to goods their family names of their first names (the case of automobiles or fashion items), the names of the plants or animals (case of foodstuff), names of some characters beloved by children (case of sweets or toys), names of some regions or locations (case of wines or beer) etc.

b) **Brand**. The brand concept derives from the verb *to brand*, respectively from the action of *branding*, by means of which the person executing it (producer or seller) offer certitudes or guarantees on the market as regards quality, competences, reliability etc.

By *branding one can understand a name, a term, a sign, a symbol, a drawing or all the combinations serving to the identification (recognition) of the material goods and services of a seller or a group of sellers and to the differentiation of them by compared to those of the competitors*. It represents the essential element of the product strategy, increasing the value of the offer.

The brands can be dressed in a multitude of **forms**, the problem of their identity making the object of numerous preoccupations [P. Vuibert: *Le secteur tertiaire*, , Paris, 1991, p. 99-135], being put into evidence an entire series of solutions, such as:

- *logotype*, which is a representation of the brand by a word, respectively by a name (Ford, Philips, Honda);
- *siglotype*, which is the visual representation of the brand through the initials of the name or the expression which designates the object of the firm (FIAT, IBM);
- *phytotype*, concretized in the image of a plant (such of the palm – tree in case of the Palmolive soap);
- *zoo - type*, based upon the image of an animal (that of a lion in the case of the automobiles Peugeot);
- *genotype*, (appealing to the representation of the brand by means of a geometrical figure – the diamond in the case of automobiles Renault);
- *anfotype*, representing the brand by a combination comprises several of the enumerated elements (as in the case of Mercedes automobiles, in which it is appealed a name and to a geometrical form);
- *phonotype*, rarely met, when the brand is presented by certain phonic signals (kind melody);
- *spatial brand*, represented by a tri - dimensional corpus (bas-relief, statue) etc.

Each of these solutions presents a series of characteristics: specificity, clearness, force of attraction, capacity to be easily memorized, re-production, perenity, capacity to evolve, esthetics, capacity to cover all the mission of the product or firm etc.

The extension without precedent of brands can not be explained but only by its particularly important **role** promoting the interests of the firm financing them, and of the consumers, too.

In favor of **producers and distributors**, the brand plays a multitude of roles.

1) First of all, it is the one conferring a clear identity to the products (bearing it), making a visible differentiation against those of the competitors, a thing giving them a certain history, a good position on the market and making them to be easily identified by the clients.

2) Once registered, the brand assumes its role to protect the products of the firm against imitations or fakes, giving *the right to industrial property*.

3) *Consumers loyalty* is another task of the brand, knowing the fact that, as a rule, the products bearing a brand constitute a great attraction for a large majority of the clients (obviously after the brand imposed itself on the market).

4) In case of the unique brands, they are *a real support* for launching the new products on the market, as consumers got trust in a brand and accept easily to buy them.

5) The brand has also the role *to grow the economic force of the company*, contributing to *enlarge patrimony* (being, like the product, an *economic good* which can be sold or rented).

This last aspect is very important in taking the decision of using a brand. The expenses (in many of the cases) very big are justified from an economic point of view just because of this kind of effects.

As regarding the *consumers*, the brands are decided for their support also, assuming thus a set of roles.

1) Thus, approaching the clear identity of the products and making a clear difference between them, the brands *can simplify the process of identification and choice*, this one becoming (in the end) even a reflex act.

2) At the same time the brands assure the *diminishing of risks* which the choice of a product implies, their imposing on the market offering to the buyers a certain *guarantee* opposite their quality.

3) At the same time, brands *create a supplementary satisfaction* to the buyers who will want to put into evidence the privileged status offered by the possibility to buy braded products.

Being protected by law, the brands offer some guarantees and certitudes to the producers and consumers. The advantages which producers get by using the brands are well worth, they being the ones bearing the supplementary efforts for their imposing and administration. This does not mean though that the advantages of which the consumers of branded products beneficiate are worthy, as it could be interpreted at a first sight. On the contrary, they are well worthy, because for their valorization *the buyers pay a (supplementary) price*, branded products being cheaper than the anonymous one. If part of the investment for a brand does not cover this extra – price, it will be covered from the revenues brought by the increasing of the demand (also through the buyers contribution).

The management of a firm has to solve a series of problems linked to the brand [Ph. Kotler: *Managementul marketingului*, Ediția a III - a, Teora, București, 2003, p. 597-615].

Making a balance between the supposed *expenses* (conceiving, testing, launching, publicity and positioning, protection etc.) and the *effects* generated by using a brand (the most important of them consisting in the reinforcement of its position on the market), the first decision that the board of a firm must take against it is that linked to the following question: ***Is the brand necessary or not?***

There are numerous products (like: salt, wheat, sugar or some clothing items etc.) becoming common, which producers deliver without any brand, they being unable to be differentiated in a visible way from one producer to another. On the other hand, there exist goods whose constructive and qualitative characteristics are extremely different from one producer to another, the firms producing and trading them being obliged to analyze the opportunity of applying some brands (this tendency manifesting more and more visible since the end of the last century). In the situations in which, according to the analyses that have been done, the producer arrives at the conclusion that the *brand is not appropriate*, the whole decision process regarding the brand being seized. It is not the same in the case of the *distributor*, as this one is also obliged to analyze the same thing. Not infrequently, the distributors purchasing goods without brands put them into sale under their own brands. It is the case of distributors launching on the market, under their own brands, products bought “without a brand”, at a lower price, in special packages, by means of some stores that offer certain facilities etc.

There also exist situations in which even distributors are the ones determining the producers to manufacture the goods under their own brand, considering that thus they could be a guarantee of their selling.

If to the initial question, the analyses indicate the fact that *brand is necessary*, it immediately rises the second one: ***To whom it might it belong?*** As concerns the ***holder of the brand***, the firm has the option between:

1) *the own brand*, this one reserving only to the producer all the expenses and the effects that can appear after using it;

2) *the distributor brand*, when the expenses (and the risks) linked to the use of the brand are supported exclusively by the trader, he/she enjoying of the advantages offered by it – the producer (remaining anonymous) beneficiating only of the possibility to place the merchandise faster and more sure – but at a lower price);

3) *the brand under license or rented*, this solution being more comfortable and cheaper than the first (buying the license meaning less than creating and imposing its own brand), the actual producer of the merchandise remaining anonymous;

4) the *combinations* between the first three variants.

When the brand proves to be appropriate, a second decision that must be adopted is the choice between:

1): *unique brand* for all the products of the company, which presents two big advantages:

a) lower expenses for each brand (included when the total expenses caused by the use of the brand are relatively big);

b) the support offered by a well known brand to new products launched on the market;

2) *individual brands* for each product of the firm, a thing which means a big effort, offering in exchange two enormous advantages:

a) the non-affecting of other products in case when the brand of a product is compromised from a certain reason;

b) Facilitating the difference between products offered by the same producer, in his benefit and of the consumers' benefit too.

There exists this time too the possibility to make an appeal to some slightly different situations. For example, the unique brand can be *even the commercial name of the firm*. Also, besides of the unique brand and the individual ones there can be found the *common brands (a family of products)*, also called *mega-brands*, this last variant trying to valorize advantages (and diminish disadvantages) of the first two solutions.

In the situations in which the firm has already adopted one of the solutions at which it has been made reference, when being launched on the market the firm has to choose between adding new individual brands to the existing ones or continue using the unique or common brands.

The first option does not raise any special problems to the firm as those with which it confronted at the beginning (when it was made the option for such a solution). In the second case, the firm has to take a decision of *extending the brand*. By adopting it, the launching of new products on the market becomes easier as benefiting of the already notoriety and image of the same product of the same producer. More precisely, once the extension of a brand, the firm relies on two main categories of effects:

- an effect of "*adequacy*", consumers accepting the new product as something logical, being used with the fact that under the given brand appear new products;

a lever effect, clients, by their product awareness, being convinced that its extension equals with the improving of the characteristics of the already existing products [E. M. Tauber, B. Leverage: *Strategy for Growth in a Cost-Control World*, Journal of Advertising Research, no. 28/1988, p. 26 - 30].

On the other hand, one must not forget the fact that this way of working may lead to confusions among buyers (especially when the new product is badly adapted to the existing brand). That is why, such a decision is not easily to be taken and adopted.

When launching new products on the market, one can use two more solutions: that of *combined brands*, called (or carrying the signs) of other brands already known of the same firm, and that of *double brands*, a case in which the two brands under which the new product appears belong to some different firms.

In spite of all that it has already been told about brand in a pleasant way, lately there has been launched a new idea, which comes to put into shadow all the advantages of using brands. The new concept is that of the *no brand. No brand is the new brand!* is a slogan at which more and more marketers have adhered, whether they are Americans, Europeans or Asians. As long as the brands (even the most famous) come on the market with series products, for many consumers with "high levels of expectations", buying such a thing becomes a common way, totally un-attractive. In exchange there become very attractive the products absolutely anonymous, which by "*something*" apart, can pure and simply fascinate you. For the non-conformist German or American, a straw hat from the Maramures region (in the north-western part of Romania), a folk Chinese armchair or a traditional peasant blouse from Bucovina, found absolutely by chance in a little shop in their country can anytime (and with great success) take the place of similar products offered under the name of the most famous brands in the world.

d) **Label**. In spite of the fact that, at first sight, label can be "labeled" as being an absolutely common thing, the marketers know that in order to take buying decisions (or of non-buying ones) of a product it proves sometimes to be an indispensable element. If the use of it does not cost the buyer

anything, ignoring it can cost him/her a lot. There are sufficient buyers not willing to make a special effort (by commodity) to contact the sales staff in shops in order to ask information about a product in order to purchase it. In the absence of product awareness the probability to renounce buying the product is big. That is why the label should not miss, it being the *identity card* of the product, respectively the element that should *communicate* (first of all) with the client, offering him/her essential *information* (of which he/she needs) about: name and brand of the product, the fabrication date and guarantee period, composition, quality class, sale price, the way of using it etc. By means of them, the label also contributes to the *promotion of the product*.

e) **The package.** Beyond the *protection function*, which is the object of the preoccupation of builders and marketologists, the package fulfills a very important *function of information and promotion*. In order to underline its importance the marketologists considered it even more *important than the product itself or the best seller of the product*.

In order to do its information-promotion function under best conditions it is necessary that the package:

- *replace etiquette* or contain all its information (and further more);
- has a *pleasant design* ;
- by shape, color etc., *attract* rapidly the *attention* of potential buyers (included those who entered the store without the intention to buy the product);
- permit *the visualization of the product* or incorporate (at sight) its image (picture or design);
- reinforce *the principal competition advantage* which the product offer to the buyers;
- starting from the characteristics given to the product, offer to buyers a further motif to purchase it (by the possibility to be used in another situation independently from the product - as recipient, shopping bag, trinket, sweepstakes participation etc.).

As a result, through its importance, the promotion function often over – classes the technical function of the package.

f) **Instruction manual.** Many of clients' discontents are linked to the fact that they do not know how to use properly the product because they do not become well acquainted with it by studying first the instruction manual. Though, it would be a great mistake from the part of the producer to accuse the client for a bad utilization (even when they are directly responsible) because, irrespective who the guilty is, the real losers are those who sell the products (discontent buyers are in any moment willing to renounce the product and the competitors will be satisfied). Producers must very careful in offering their clients all the necessary information and instructions in order to be sure that the clients will use properly the product. Labels and packages must contain such kind of information even for the most common products. If the product is more complex it will be an attached instruction manual.

Beside the instruction manual there will be other *accompanying* documents (invoices, shipping documents, quality certificates etc.)

g) **Guarantee and service.** The *guarantee certificate* is today an intrinsic component of the product. If this kind of document is missing the buyer will refuse to purchase the product.

Conclusions

Exchange parts and other additional ones must also accompany the products (batteries, protective covers, protective materials etc.). These kinds of things always create a good impression on the buyers. To all these we add the divers service activities offered to the clients included in the purchasing costs.

The *quality certificate* is a component of the guarantee.

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