The rise and fall of the Marketing Mix. The evolution of and the debate surrounding the concept

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Abstract
The objective of this paper is to revise and analyse a traditional concept of marketing science, the marketing mix. The paper is structured as follows: in the first part, we undertake a revision of the definition of the concept; in the second part we examine the origins and historic evolution of the marketing mix. The third part deals with the debate around the concept, from the theoretical, pedagogic and practical points of view. Finally, we reflect upon the current situation of the concept and where it may go from there.

Key words: marketing mix, marketing concept, literature review, debate.

JEL code: M31.
1. Introduction
The marketing mix paradigm has been the core of the marketing concept during nearly forty years. During that period, it has received support, but also criticism and suggestions for modifying it. Among all the proposed definitions of the marketing mix, the most popular has been the one by McCarthy (1960), which revolves around the 4 Ps: product, price, place and promotion. Notwithstanding its popularity, the validity and usefulness of this definition for lecturing, researching and applying marketing strategy has been questioned.

The objective of this paper is to revise and analyse a traditional concept of marketing science, the marketing mix. The paper is structured as follows: in the first part, we undertake a revision of the definition of the concept; in the second part we examine the origins and historic evolution of the marketing mix. The third part deals with the debate around the concept, from the theoretical, pedagogic and practical points of view. Finally, we reflect upon the current situation of the concept and where it may go from there.

2. The Marketing Mix concept
With the aim of facilitating the application of the marketing mix concept, early researchers on marketing mix sought to itemize the large number of influences on market response that marketers must take into account (Oxenfeldt, 1962). Tables 1 shows some of the most referred marketing mix definitions. With the aim of encompassing all the ideas contained in the different definitions, we propose the following one: marketing mix is the set of variables, instruments or tools, controlled by or available for the marketing manager that can be coordinated, managed, manipulated or combined in a marketing programme with the following objectives: produce, get or influence the target market, reach the marketing objectives, or satisfy the target market.

In elaborating this framework definition of the marketing mix, we noticed there is agreement between the authors on some aspects but disagreement on others. Most of the authors agree about the what (set of
variables that the organization can control), who (the marketing manager), and how (by combining them in a marketing programme).

Table 1. Marketing mix definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>MARKETING MIX DEFINITIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borden (1964)</td>
<td>Companies have a list of variables under their control that can be manipulated to achieve marketing objectives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frey (1956)</td>
<td>Variables under the control of the marketing manager that allow the exchange to take place</td>
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<td>McCarthy (1964)</td>
<td>Combination of all the factors at a market managers’ command to satisfy the target market.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kotler (1976)</td>
<td>Mixture of elements, under the firm control, useful in pursuing a certain market response. Like a checklist.</td>
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<td>Shapiro (1985)</td>
<td>Set of controllable variables or tool kit at the marketing manager’s disposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>McCarthy and Perreault (1987)</td>
<td>Controllable variables that an organisation can coordinate to satisfy its target market</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kotler and Armstrong (1989)</td>
<td>Set of controllable marketing variables that the firm blends to produce the response it wants in the target market.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Davies and Brooks (1989)</td>
<td>Marketing mix is a combination of factors which contribute to the brand. Given two products, the marketing mix for each product was radically different, yet both brands had succeeded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotler (1991)</td>
<td>Set of tools that the firm uses to achieve its objectives in the target market.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waterschoot and Van den Bulle (1992)</td>
<td>Instruments controllable by the firm that influence the demand and can be combined in a marketing programme to reach a certain level and type of response from the target market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotler et al. (1995)</td>
<td>Set of marketing tools that the firm use to achieve its commercial objectives in relation to a target market.</td>
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(1) Although Borden’s article is from 1964, it is based on the studies by Culliton (1948) and and he referred to the mix is his book: Borden. N. (1942): The Economic Effects of Advertising, Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin. This is the reason why he figures in the first position.

We find conflicting positions regarding the composition of the marketing mix and its objectives. According to most of the authors, almost every
component of the marketing mix can be classified within the 4 Ps (product, price, place and promotion). However, some authors suggest additional variables that should be placed at the same level of the 4 Ps: market research (Borden, 1964), packaging (Nickels and Jolson, 1976), customer service (Lovelock, 1979), public relations (Mindak and Fine, 1981), participants, process and physical evidence (Booms and Bitner, 1981; Magrath, 1986; Collier, 1991; Rafiq and Ahmed, 1992), persons (Judd, 1987), service and sales (Davies and Brooks, 1989), service, processes and personnel (Cristopher, Payne and Ballantine, 1991; Palmer, 1994), sales induction-promotion (Waterschoot and Van den Bulte, 1992), persons and presentation (Ellis and Mosher, 1993).

Regarding the objectives of the marketing mix, even stronger discrepancies can be found. For some authors (Borden, 1964; Kotler and Armstrong, 1989; Kotler, 1976; Kotler, 1991; Waterschoot and Van den Bulte, 1992) the marketing mix tries to influence the market (from organization to market, production or selling orientation), for others (McCarthy and Perreault, 1987; McCarthy, 1964) it attempts to satisfy the market (from market to organization, customer orientation).

Therefore, we can conclude that there is no consensus about what the marketing mix is. This has been the cause of great controversy in the marketing field, and has led academics to study the usefulness of the concept and its contribution to marketing theory, and also to express some criticism at the the concept and suggestions for improving its situation.

3. Historical development

The term marketing mix was made popular by Borden (1964) although it was Culliton (1948) who first used it. According to Borden (1964:p.2), *The business executive is a “decider”, and “artist”, a “mixer of ingredients”, who sometimes follows a recipe as he goes along, sometimes adapts the available ingredients to a recipe, and sometimes experiments with or invents ingredients no one else has tried.* The “mixer of ingredients” was accepted as a convenient and easy to understand concept.
Thus, the marketing mix would be the set of variables an organization can control and manipulate to reach its marketing objective. This approach considers marketing as a managing function where the executive manipulates the mix to satisfy the consumer and get a profit in return. The basic unit of analysis is the transaction in a competitive market, where organizations control the production factors (Arndt, 1979; Thorelli, 1986).

Borden’s definition (see figure 1) includes a set of internal variables, or manufacturer’s ingredients, and a set of external forces that the mixer must adjust in order to find a successful mix that takes advantage of the available resources. This definition was considered wide enough and useful for every sector, and consequently numerous authors developed lists of ingredients that were easier to remember and therefore, to apply (see figure 2).

An early version of the marketing mix was suggested by Frey (1956), who distinguished two groups of variables: offer and tools, reflecting the object of exchange and the activities that facilitate it.

The definition most widely accepted was the one by McCarthy (1960), who reduced the list of ingredients to four variables: product, price, place, and promotion. During nearly a quarter of a century there has been a perfect marriage between the marketing mix concept and the 4 Ps, being the fusion so complete, that it has been difficult to separate both identities. The 4 Ps have been extensively used in marketing texts, which reflects their pedagogic appeal, and have also been widely accepted by marketing practitioners. However, the passing of time has mined its robustness and has revealed several weaknesses of the concept, as we will analyse.
The proposals of Kelley and Lazer (1973); Staudt and Taylor (1965) and Lazer, Culley and Staudt (1973), coincide in that they include three groups: product and service mix, similar to Frey's offer, as it is defined as a consumer perception of the company's offer (Kelley and Lazer, 1973), distribution mix (described in terms of physical distribution and intermediaries activities) and communication mix (which includes information flows in two directions). The idea of conceiving each variable as a mix, making them multidimensional factors, allows a wider classification than the 4 Ps does (Bruner II, 1988).

Lipson and Darling (1971) suggest a model of four elements: the product mix, the distribution mix, the terms of sale mix and the communication mix. In a similar way than the model by Kelley and Lazer (1973), each of the four elements or mixes contains four variables.
Figure 2. Different descriptions of the marketing mix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Frey (1961)</strong></th>
<th><strong>McCarthy (1964)</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Product</strong></td>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Packaging</strong></td>
<td>Distribution channels</td>
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<td><strong>Brand</strong></td>
<td>Outlet locations</td>
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<td><strong>Price</strong></td>
<td>Sales territories</td>
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<td><strong>Service</strong></td>
<td>Inventory levels and locations</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;The offering&quot;</td>
<td>Transportation costs</td>
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<td>&quot;The method and tool&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Lazer and Kelley (1962); Staudt and Taylor (1965); Lazer, Culley and Stautd (1973)</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Retailing mix</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Physical Distribution Mix</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Communications Mix</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Lipsom and Darling (1971)</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Marketing mix</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Component mix</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Terms of sale</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Component mix</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Kotler (1972)</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Configuration</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Marketing mix</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Symbolization</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Facilitation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Valuation</strong></td>
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<th><strong>Booms and Bitner (1981)</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Service 7 “Ps”</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Price</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Promotion</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Physical Evidence</strong></td>
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<td><strong>People</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Places</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Participation</strong></td>
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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MARKETING MIX.  
THE EVOLUTION AND DEBATE SURROUNDING THE CONCEPT
Kotler (1972) proposed a marketing mix model that sets apart from its predecessors. Kotler's objective was to count with a “generic” group of terms that could be applied to all sorts of exchange situations. He used the marketing generic functions for undertaking exchanges as the central point of his classification. Therefore, configuration, simbolization, facilitation and valuation correspond respectively to product, communication, distribution and price.

Finally, Booms and Bitner (1981) proposed a model that extended the 4 Ps to the services, and it is known as the 7 Ps. They added to the traditional 4 Ps the following three: participants, process, and physical evidence. Participants include the people who play a part in service exchange, that is, the company’s personnel (importance of their formación, selection, motivation, etc.), and the consumer (the buyer and others). Physical evidence refers to the environment in which the service is delivered, and includes all tangible goods that facilitate the performance and communication of the service. This is important because in the absence of tangibility, consumers use physical evidence as an indicator of service quality. Lastly, process refers to the activity flows, procedures, or mechanisms by which the service is acquired (queues, phone orders, etc.).

4. **Debate over the Marketing Mix**

The marketing mix paradigm has been largely accepted as the core concept of marketing theory (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1992). According to Schultz (2001) the 4 Ps are increasingly less relevant in today’s market, despite of what they are still learned in marketing courses, academics write and research about them, they are used as a management tool, and academics, marketers, consultants and editors continue doing proselitism about them. Nevertheless, some dissatisfaction with this concept has been growing in parallel. During the 70s, 80s and 90s many authors followed the 4 Ps but qualified its usefulness. Next, taking as a starting point the work of O’Malley and Patterson (1997), we reflect upon the different types of criticism towards the concept from the theoretical, empirical and pedagogical points of view.
4.1. Criticism based on the theoretical base of the Marketing Mix

The gap between the theory and practice of marketing is on the base of an essential confusion: the reduction of the marketing concept to the design, implementation and control of a simplified marketing mix. Thus, despite being the dominant marketing paradigm, the marketing mix concept has been frequently attacked. From the theoretical point of view, the bases of criticism are of three types: hypersimplification of Borden’s concept, never explained properties of the classification, and lack of cohesion with the marketing concept.

4.1.1. Hypersimplification of Borden’s original concept

Borden’s original concept included twelve variables, with no intention of being an exhaustive list. Despite that, several attempts to extend or group the original variables were made, reflecting the increased importance of a variable that was added to the list, or redefining some of the original variables that were grouped in one. In this sense, the variables were reduced to three (Staudt and Taylor, 1965; Kelley and Lazer, 1973; Lazer, Culley and Staudt, 1973; Renaghan, 1981) or two (Frey, 1956). They were also extended to five (Mindak and Fine, 1981; Judd, 1987), six (Ellis and Mosher, 1993; Kotler, 1986), seven (Booms and Bitner, 1981; Magrath, 1986; Collier, 1991; Cristopher, Payne and Ballantine, 1991; Rafiq and Ahmed, 1992) or even eight variables (Palmer, 1994). Given the nature of some of the added variables, together with the tacit rule of starting by “P”, some authors satirized (Gummerson, 1994) that words like “panacea” or even “plankton” could be added to the list assuming some vague marketing meaning could be attributed to them.

But Gronroos (1989) thought that the problem of the 4 Ps could not be solved by modifying the list. He argued that a list is not a valid way to define a concept, because it cannot be exhaustive, it cannot adapt to every situation, and it can become obsolete. In fact, the need to add new marketing variables during the 80s is a symptom of weakness of the marketing mix concept, and shows that, as a general marketing model, the marketing mix has failed. According to Gummerson (1994), by reducing the 12
variables of Borden to the 4 Ps, the mix gains elegance and simplicity, but it loses its essence and validity.

4.1.2. Properties of the classification

Waterschoot and Van den Bulte (1992; p. 85) state: “to our knowledge, the classificatory property(ies) or rationale for distinguishing four categories labeled “product”, “price”, “promotion”, and “place”, have never been explained”. Thus, considering the criteria for evaluating classificational schemata proposed by Hunt (1991), they conclude that the 4 Ps’ categories do not comply with the criteria of a good classification: they are not mutually exclusive (exclusivity criterion), not all the items are easy to classify as they can belong to more than one category (exhaustivity criterion), and the categories overlap. Therefore, the marketing mix paradigm is not robust enough to be the base of academic research (O’Malley and Patterson, 1997; p.685). Building on the ideas of this debate Bruner II (1989) and Waterschoot and Van den Bulte (1992) made their contributions (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Solutions to the marketing mix classification
Bruner II (1989) proposes the 4 Cs: Concept, Cost, Channel and Communication. The distinctive feature of this model lies on the fact that the four variables overlap, that is, they are not mutually exclusive. The author believed in the need to look for the synergies of integrating activities instead of searching for their individual optimization. Some examples of the overlapping are: concept-communication, through packaging and brand names, cost-communication, through sales promotion, channels-communication, through strategies push-pull, cost-channels, through location decisions, cost-communication, through prestige prices, or concept-channel, through services produced in the shop. This classification complies with Hunt’s four criteria, as Bruner II (19989) states: 1) the categories are individually and collectively wider than the 4 Ps, and they can be more easily applied to diverse exchange situations; 2) the categories minimize the negative connotations of the 4 Ps causing that their use by marketers decreased; 3) the categories’ names are familiar, known, are semantically coordinated, which gives them a high pedagogic potential; and 4) they include customer orientation.

Waterschoot and Van den Bulte (1992) think that marketing functions as proposed by Kotler (1972) are appropriate properties for clasifying the marketing mix, and that the list of marketing functions must be elaborated or interpreted in such a way that every marketing mix element can be assigned to one and only one function (exhaustivity and exclusivity). They differentiate between functions (output) and the specific tools (input) used in achieving those functions. Thus, each of the marketing functions (configuration, valuation, symbolization, and facilitation) can be accomplished through a variety of specific activities or tools and any specific marketing activity or tool can serve several functions simultaneously, adopting a main role in a generic function and a secondary role in others. One exception is related to sales promotion, which overlaps with other mix categories. To suppress the links between sales promotion and the generic marketing functions, a non generic marketing function, but a situational one, is proposed, the induction function: direct inducement or provocation is
in some situations a necessary condition for the exchange to take place. Then, they define a new expanded mix, integrated by the basic one and the promotional mix. This classification overcomes the three flaws of the 4 Ps scheme according to Waterschoot and Van den Bulte (1992): the classification criteria are specified, it is exhaustive, and exclusive.

4.1.3. Lack of cohesion between the marketing mix paradigm and the marketing concept

The marketing concept is in itself problematic (Houston, 1986) and has been called the Achilles’ heel of the discipline (Brownlie and Saren, 1992). In the 1985 AMA definition, marketing is described as: “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals”. Therefore, according to Gronroos (1989), all that is not conception, pricing, promotion or distribution, would be no marketing, by definition. To overcome this situation, he redefines marketing:

“Marketing is to establish, develop, and market long term relationships with the consumer, to get the objectives of the parties involved. This is done by mutual exchange and the fulfilment of promises. Company’s resources (personnel, technology, and systems) must be used in such a way that consumer trust and the company’s trust in itself maintain and strengthen.”

This definition highlights that the core of marketing is the relationship with the consumer. This definition is not saying that the traditional marketing mix is less important than it used to be, but is shows that, for marketing, it is much more important to establish and develop long term relationships.

Thus, one of the main criticisms to the marketing mix is that it fails to adapt to the concept of marketing (Dixon and Blois, 1983; Gronroos, 1994; Gummersson, 1987), particularly, as O’Malley and Patterson
(1997) point out, in the following three aspects: customer orientation, organization-wide dissemination of the marketing function, and relational marketing.

Thus, Dixon and Blois (1983) state that the marketing mix approach is not valid to accomplish the requirements of the marketing concept regarding customer orientation, and they conclude: “However, far from being concerned with a customer’s interests, the view implicit in the 4 Ps approach implies that the customer is somebody to whom something is done rather than somebody for whom something is done!”. In a similar vein, Gronroos (1989) suggests that the 4 Ps and the marketing mix are production-oriented definitions, because their starting point is the company and not the market. The marketing mix approach concentrates in the seller and gives the consumer a passive role (Gronroos, 1994).

Regarding organization-wide dissemination of marketing, Kent (1986) criticizes the marketing mix because it emphasizes structure (marketing department) over process (marketing concept). In a managerial approach, marketing departments were created with the full responsibility for the marketing function (Webster, 1992), understood as the application of the 4 Ps. This is in contradiction with Drucker (1954; p. 36) statement (from which the marketing concept evolved) that “concern and responsibility for marketing must permeate all areas of the enterprise”. It is increasingly recognised that non-marketing personnel interact with the customer far more frequently, and has a greater impact on customer perception of satisfaction than do “full-time” marketing personnel (Hakansson, 1982; Gummesson, 1987). Thus, Webster (1988) suggests that the marketing department’s functions cannot be the responsibility of only a few specialists.

Finally, Arndt (1983) questions the microeconomic theory lying beyond the 4 Ps paradigm because of its inability to provide tools that analyse the structure and processes of exchanges. In fact “if we limit our attention to the study of single, isolated exchanges, we ignore much of the heart of what we call marketing” (Houston and Gassenheimer, 1987; p. 10).
4.2. Criticism based on the practical application of the marketing mix concept

It seems appropriate to consider the marketing mix practical sufficiency, that is, to what extent this concept is useful for practitioners. The debate among different authors on this issue has found a few weaknesses of the concept. First, it does not seem to be adapted to the extensions of marketing. Second, it is difficult to apply to every geographical area. Third, changes in the competitive environment have caused the loss of control over marketing variables and resources. Fourth, changes in the demand side mean that the paradigm is not of applicable to the new post-modern consumer.

4.2.1. Lack of adaptation to the extensions of marketing

Criticism regarding this aspect reflects the difficult application of the 4 Ps to the extensions of marketing brought about by changes in the environment. Unfortunately, maturity has not done good to the the 4 Ps, the most clear examples can be found in non-lucrative marketing (Bruner II, 1988), services marketing and industrial marketing (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1992). It is in the latter two fields that more literature has been published.

Gronroos’ (1990) opinion is that in services and industrial marketing, often the marketing mix approach does not contemplate all the resources, activities and processes involved in the different stages of the relationships with customers. Especially, during the consumption process, there are several contacts between the service provider and its customers that lay beyond the traditional marketing function. The management of these contacts is the responsibility of the operations department and other departments not related to marketing. However, these buyer-seller interactions have a huge influence on future buyer behaviour and word of mouth communication, that is, they have marketing implications and therefore they should be considered marketing resources and activities and be managed as such. Regarding industrial marketing, the complexity of the industrial product and its buying process, a consequence of the interdependency bet-
ween buyer and seller, is not considered by traditional marketing. In industrial marketing, the essence of the exchange is in the buyer-seller relationship, more emphasis is placed on building the relationships than in manipulating the market through the marketing mix (Gummesson, 1987).

To overcome this weakness of the 4 Ps, Rafiq and Ahmed (1992) advocate for the use of Booms and Bitner’s 7 Ps, conceived for services marketing, in other marketing fields (consumer goods, industrial marketing and other extensions). The advantage of using only one marketing mix for every marketing situation is that it becomes a strong tool for designing marketing plans (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1992). Despite the applicability of the 7 Ps to different fields, each marketing mix element would have a different weight depending on the context of application. Rafiq and Ahmed (1992) justify the extension of the 7 Ps, first, on the lack of fundamental differences between services marketing and consumer goods marketing (Levitt, 1972; Shostack, 1977; Cowell, 1984), or between the marketing of consumer goods and industrial goods (Fern and Brown, 1984; Zaltman and Wallendorf, 1984). Then, Rafiq and Ahmed (1992) explain that the key elements of Booms and Bitner’s 7 Ps in services marketing are: participants, process, and physical evidence. In consumer goods marketing, particularly if the products are standardized, distribution, participants, process, and physical evidence tend to be the responsibility of intermediaries. According to these authors, the only difference between goods and services is their level of standardization. When a service is more standardized it will be more similar to a tangible good. In marketing tangible goods, participants, process, and physical evidence are in the hands of distributors, provided that product quality is not affected, in which case the intermediaries would be eliminated. In services marketing, the 3 Ps added by Booms and Bitner (1981) are under the control of the service provider, distributors not playing a role here, except when the service can be highly standardized without affecting its quality.

Webster (1978) states that industrial marketing must be considered like a process, not like particular characteristics of the product and communi-
cation. Thus, the concept of process, together with the concept of participant of Booms and Bitner (1981), can be used to emphasize the importance of long-term relationships in industrial marketing. Participants would include the buying centre, the sales force, whereas process would incluie the negotiation (instead of persuasión for consumer goods) and the fact that is the seller who goes to the customer and not the opposite, as it is the case in consumer goods. Finally, the marketing of products that require a lot of support from manufacturer or sellers because they are complex or not standardized, is going to be more similar to services marketing than to traditional consumer goods marketing.

4.2.2. Lack of adaptation to every country in the world
The marketing mix model is considered as the the general marketing model in the western world. Gronroos (1989) arguments that it has been for gotten that it was developed in North America, where there is large consumer market and well-developed infrastructure, to be applied to consumer goods, and that its validity has not been tested at a general level nor internationally. Despite a few attempts (Vandermere, 1989; Manso, 1991), it does not exist a marketing model or theory that takes into account European conditions, and the traditional marketing mix has been applied in Europe without considering the need to modify it. Consequently, its application outside North America has been questioned (Hakansson, 1982; Zeithaml et al, 1985; Gummersson, 1987; Gronroos, 1994).

4.2.3. Lack of control over variables and resources
The marketing mix concept assumes that the organization has the control of marketing variables and resources. In practice, it is not like that (Percy, 1986). Moreover, firms are not isolated from their environment. In fact, at present, organizations compete, not like individual firms, but like networks of firms (Ford, 1990). The network approach assumes that a firm cannot manipulate its environment, but can work under its restrictions. In a broad sense, firms are nowadays less interested in posessing and contro-
lling all the supply and distribution resources, as was the case in the 1970s and 1980s (Webster, 1992). In the 2000s, organizations need to be flexible, thus the emphasis is on changing internal activities by exchange activities and positioning in networks (Ford, 1990; Schultz, 2001).

The global competitive environment blurs the boundaries of an organization and favours the growth of new organizational forms, such as cooperation, partnerships, associations, shared ownership, alliances with distributor or suppliers, vertical marketing structures, subcontracting of key functions, etc. All this questions the belief that the 4 Ps remain under the control of the organization (O’Malley and Patterson, 1997; p. 689).

4.2.4. Lack of applicability to the postmodern consumer
Postmodernism advocates that products are not completely under the control of the producer, but that the consumer is an active part in the building of exchanges (Cova, 1996). The postmodern consumer rejects any attempt to be treated as a homogeneous group. The consumer is not anymore just the target of the offer, but he/she plays a fundamental role in developing the offer. Thus, concepts such as quality, strategy, and relationship, must move from manipulation of the consumer to commitment with the consumer (McKenna, 1991). Therefore, the marketing mix paradigm has lost strength even in consumer markets (Brady and Davies, 1993).

4.3. Criticism based on the pedagogical function of the marketing mix
Finally, we consider the criticism of the pedagogical role of the marketing mix model, based on the protection of the concept by editors and marketing courses’ directors, and the lack of time of University lecturers for reflecting on the best way to disseminate marketing knowledge.

4.3.1. Protection of the concept
Waterschoot and Van den Bulte (1992) revised several British texts from the 1970s and 1980s, and they concluded that the marketing mix paradigm
dominated almost exclusively the marketing education field. However, the
criticism that the concept has received does not affect the marketing
courses. The fact remains that the 4 Ps are a mnemonic concept, easy to teach
and easy to remember. “In marketing education, teaching students how to
use a toolbox has become a totally dominating task instead of discussing
the meaning and consequences of the marketing concept and the natural
process of marketing relationships” (Gronroos, 1994; p. 5).

Marketing literature continues to reinforce many of the thoughts, the-
ories, paradigms, and epistemologies of the discipline. Marketing students
are protected from the perils of marketing debate, they are told that mar-
keting is a healthy discipline according to some authors, with its organs in
good condition and applicable to any sector or situation. Perhaps it is now
time that marketing students be allowed to come to their own conclusions,
and we, as educators, surely have a responsibility to objectively present the
data (O’Malley and Patterson, 1997; p.688).

4.3.2. Lack of time of University marketing lecturers
Nowadays, the pressures on University lecturers because of publishing
requirements, consulting work, large numbers of students, leave them
with less and less time to prepare their lectures. Then, the lecturer may
resort to textbooks that standardize the accepted knowledge and facilita-
te his/her task. This makes it difficult to return to a starting point, with the
incorporation of readings, new research studies, and real data. One solu-
tion to this problem might be to encourage students to make greater use of
original articles in their learning, but, according to O’Malley and
Patterson (1997) the marketing mix paradigm is also pre-eminent in the
most popular academic publications.

5. Conclusions
Kent (1986) refers to the 4 Ps as “the holy quartet...of faith in marke-
ting...carved on stone boards”, and asserts that the mnemonic character
of the 4 Ps, which offers a simple tool for students, lecturers and marke-
tung users, has turned this paradigm in a faith dogma. Among the consequences of that, there is the lack of empirical studies on which the marketing variables are and how they are perceived and used by marketing practitioners. Despite all the criticism received, the 4 Ps are still in use. O’Malley and Patterson (1997; p. 690) say that the 4 Ps have long since outlived their utility, they are based on poor theoretical foundations, and they undoubtedly need to be replaced or, at least, radically revised. According to Brownlie et al (1994) is clear that we should reflect upon the marketing mix, in order to produce a new era of marketing users that would be prepared to receive fresh ideas and have the required discernement to evaluate them.

O’Malley and Patterson (1997) propose several alternatives for the current situation of the marketing mix concept: stand still, re-asphalt the current path, change direction, come back to the start, or take the least congested path.

1) Stand still. This posture allows a comfortable status-quo, but in the long term it could produce a divorce between academic and applied marketing, and consequently that nobody, student or practitioner, could learn from our discipline.

2) Re-asphalt the path, or put patches. Every now and then, a new versión of the original mix appears. However, McCarthy’s classification and its descendants suffer similar theoretical deficiencies. They are static models and cannot be expected to embrace the dynamic, interactive, co-creational and integrative nature of modern marketing.

3) Change direction. Relationship marketing is deemed by many authors as the new marketing paradigm, because it seems to be suitable to reject the old and embrace the new ideas. But it is still in an embronary state, and there is no consensus regarding if it competes with or complements the marketing mix paradigm (Gronroos, 1999).

4) Come back to the origins. Given the lack of new ideas, and the limitations of the 4 Ps recognized, maybe we should come back to

(2) For example, Goldsmith (1999) proposes the 8 Ps, that are the 7 Ps by Booms and Bitner (1981) plus personalization.
Borden’s original model, which is more flexible and avoids some of the problems of McCarthy’s simplification.

5) Take the less congested path. Marketing discipline needs a new paradigm and it seems more logical to make incremental changes than a total revolution. For this to happen, students, practitioners, and academics must be ready for the change and be open-minded. O’Malley and Patterson (1998) think that the new paradigm should be flexible, open, interactive, participative, able to connect the parties, conscious of its social role and its consequences, and inclusive of the exchange experience.

At this point, and while we decide which path to take, we consider that the marketing mix concept should be presented in an objective way, showing its strengths and weaknesses, and being consistent with a discipline that aspires to legitimize its academic status (Seth et al, 1988).

6. References


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