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## A New Perspective on Marketing Mix Elements in the Context of International Consumers

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### Abstract

Most marketing practitioners recognise the marketing mix as an important tool in marketing planning, implementation and strategy development. The marketing mix elements (4Ps) proposed by McCarthy in 1964 have changed over the years under the influence of various variables, and marketing researchers have proposed new mix elements in this context. The aim of this study is to examine the marketing mix in the context of consumer behaviour in global markets in the light of globalisation, pandemics, financial crises and technological developments, and to present new elements through academic articles and research in the year 2000 and beyond. In addition, this study shows that the elements of the marketing mix are intertwined and cannot be separated, and aims to reflect this situation with the recommendations given under each P heading. The findings of the study emphasise the need to consider the 3Ps of problem (crisis), people and digital marketing in addition to the traditional 4Ps when taking into account the existing literature and changes.

### Keywords

Globalisation, Global Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Marketing Mix

### INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, three key global driving forces, including technological advancements, socioeconomic and geopolitical changes, and environmental shifts, have led to ongoing and intensified major developments in the market, among market stakeholders, and consequently in the marketing mix (Wichmann et al., 2022).

Technological advancements, such as the Internet, Internet of Things (IoT), and various portable smart devices, have been observed to lead to increased interconnectedness and data collection (e.g., user-generated content, data provided through sensors) and the analysis/use of this data (e.g., through machine learning and artificial intelligence) (Wichmann et al., 2022). This situation facilitates reaching customers in different geographies and adds versatile momentum to international marketing. It is possible to say that international marketing has become livelier with platforms and technologies such as blockchain, cryptocurrency, smart contracts, and social media that have been occupying the agenda in recent years (Donthu et al., 2021).

Geopolitical changes, especially representing economic growth in developing markets and phenomena like globalization, facilitation of free trade, and the rise of protectionist approaches in different regions worldwide, denote significant shifts (Wichmann et al., 2022). With the recent U.S.-China trade conflict, the concept of "country of origin" (COO) has regained notable attention. This not only affects the respective countries but also impacts the international marketing of products and services connected to these countries (Donthu et al., 2021).

Conversely, environmental concerns, while bringing clear consequences for manufacturers and retailers, are becoming increasingly important for many consumers and policymakers. Additionally, the global COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect both demand and supply worldwide (Wichmann et al., 2022). Developing markets, which serve as international marketing hubs for many multinational corporations (MNCs), have been disrupted due to the pandemic (Donthu et al., 2021), and companies are putting significant effort into returning to pre-pandemic performance levels.

In light of all these developments, it has been proven that the marketing mix tools are a useful framework even for more traditional products. However, with evolving technology, consumer experience is becoming increasingly connected to digital and social realms, highlighting the challenge that traditional tools may not encompass all the essential tools a company needs (can use) to execute a marketing plan. Addressing criticisms in the field regarding the marketing mix lacking consumer interaction and strategic elements, this study, taking into account the proposal to reconsider or expand the marketing mix toolset (Wichmann et al., 2022), aims to present a new marketing mix in the context of consumer behavior in international marketing. When creating the new marketing mix, scientific articles and research results published after 2000 are taken into consideration.

### International Marketing and Consumer Behavior

It is believed that the biggest new research areas in consumer behavior will be user experiences. This is largely due to the extraordinary growth of social media platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter, which are global brands, as well as Chinese platforms like Weibo and WeChat. Additionally, the surpassing of \$6 billion in influencer marketing spending and the emergence of China, Japan, and South Korea as the biggest consumers of social media (Sheth, 2021) also highlight the importance of user experience as developments.

The situations that can be integrated into global marketing and consumer behavior according to Sheth's (2021) predictions are as follows:

**Focus on User Experiences:** The biggest shift in marketing and especially consumer behavior is the transition from buyer to user. That is, the focus is on consumer experience and engagement, which includes post-purchase reviews and feedback. This transforms predominantly localized word-of-mouth communication into a global phenomenon. Nowadays, online word-of-mouth is not limited to friends and family but recognizes that anyone with experience worldwide can be a source of information and influence.

**Conscious Consumption:** As mentioned earlier, both public and commercial entities agree that sustainability is a significant strategic issue of the 21st century. With the rise of the middle class with brand awareness in developing large markets like China, India, and now Africa, there is a strong consensus that the planet cannot sustain and reproduce modern consumption patterns quickly enough.

**Inter-Cultural Differences:** It is necessary to consider inter-cultural differences in the consumption of basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. The increasing interest in inter-cultural consumption can be attributed to two reasons (Sheth, 2021):

*Firstly*, since the liberalization of trade and the formation of economic regional trade blocs like NAFTA and regional integration such as the European Union, there has been increased movement of products and people internationally. While differences in consumption (spending) among countries globally can be explained by differences in income, in economically more homogeneous regions like Europe, most consumption differences can only be explained by culture (Zheng et al., 2007).

*Secondly*, social media and e-commerce provide access to foreign products and services within each nation, resulting in increased consumption variety, such as music, concerts, food, clothing, and movies.

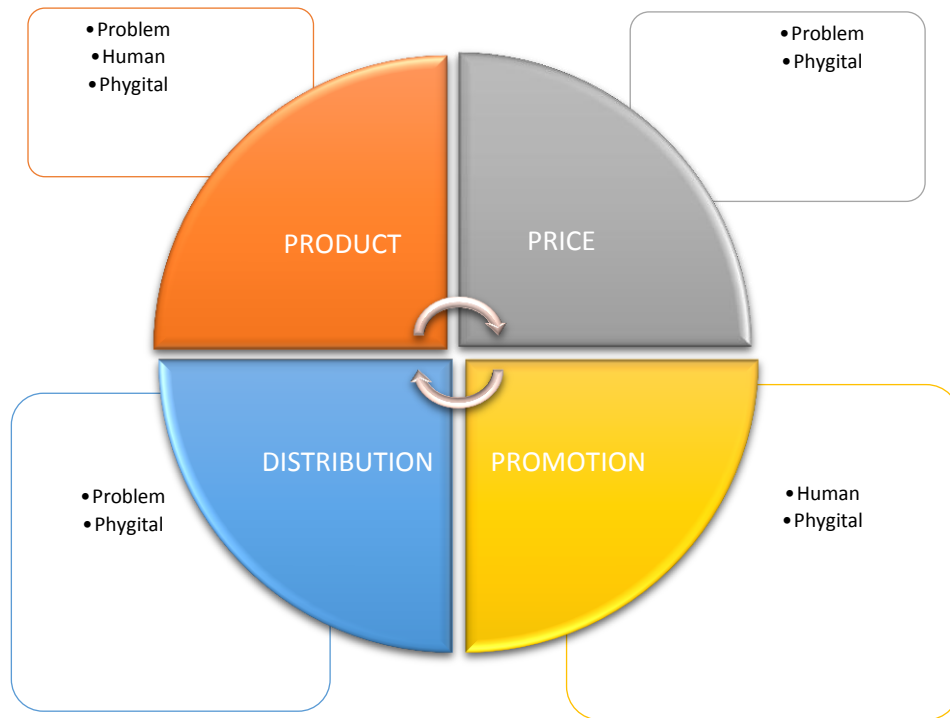
**Going Digital First:** The biggest new research area in consumer behavior will be the permanent shift from physical to digital. Consumers primarily use their mobile phones and computers to access information, recommendations, and learn about new uses for existing products and services, resulting in increased consumption of new products and services.

### IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS: MARKETING MIX ELEMENTS

Taking into account the call to address the constraints of the marketing mix and propose a new mix in line with recent developments, this study aims to examine the existing marketing mix elements and suggest new mix elements, considering the discussions in the literature. Initially, the marketing mix elements will be examined, followed by a discussion on the new elements proposed to be added to the existing mix. The model of the study (Figure 4) is as follows, and suggestions for each marketing mix element are provided at the end of the respective section.



Fig. 1 Marketing Mix Model (Marketing Mix (4Ps))



**Fig. 2** Model planned for the study

### Product-Experience (Product)

In international markets, product strategies diversify depending on specific goods and customers (Yürük-Kayapınar, 2017). The term 'global product' or 'product standardization' is commonly used to discuss the product component of the marketing mix in addition to other marketing mix elements. Meeting customer needs with a wide range of products and special product offerings requires careful evaluation of local market differences such as physical environment, economic development stage, cultural characteristics, product life cycle stage, competition, distribution systems, advertising, legal constraints, and local autonomy versus central coordination (Powers and Loyka, 2010). While some products can be successfully produced and sold in foreign countries using the same strategies (Yürük-Kayapınar, 2017), often a company cannot sell the same product in all international markets due to the need to adapt to the standards, regulations, and specific tastes and preferences of consumers in a particular country (Powers and Loyka, 2010). In a competitive environment, it is also important for global brands to consider local elements to sustain their operations. Businesses should focus on one of the two important decisions related to the product: presenting their products uniformly to all markets without modification or making adaptations according to the conditions of the country to which the presentation will be made (Şahin and Kalyoncuoğlu, 2014).

According to Şahin and Kalyoncuoğlu (2014), summarizing the views on how product strategies can be implemented in international marketing from Baalbaki and Malhotra (1993), the opinions are as follows:

- Standardization is more necessary for industrial products compared to consumer products.
- However, adaptation strategy comes to the forefront in perishable consumer products, culture-dependent products, substitute products, foreign product or country of origin differences according to consumer perception and attitude, and finally in cases of negative connotations due to language differences and product names. It should be noted here that consumer behavior and environmental conditions play a decisive role in product strategy.

Finally, according to Şahin and Kalyoncuoğlu (2014), as conveyed from Foglio and Stanevicius (2007), adaptation in areas such as climate, religion, income level, language, laws, packaging, labeling, taste preferences, product content, service quality, and logistics ensures the success of global products in local marketing. These findings in the literature suggest the inference of offering products to consumers on different platforms while preserving physical and digital environments together; addressing problems arising from consumers living in geographies with different political, economic infrastructure; and presenting products to consumers in different ways due to cultural differences among consumers in different countries and the consequences of these cultural differences. Therefore, based on these insights:

**Proposition 1:** The suggestion is put forward that 'traditional product strategies become a function of crisis, people, and figital marketing strategies'.

### Pricing

In international markets, price strategies for goods and services are influenced by existing production factors in the markets. These factors can be briefly listed as market diversity, exchange rate fluctuations, and pricing power (Yürük-Kayapınar, 2017).

When the same product under the same brand is sold in different countries, it can be difficult or even impossible to sell at different prices. Success and revenue maximization in international markets can be achieved through pricing adjustments, including premium pricing when market conditions are favorable (i.e., strong demand and weak competition) or competitive pricing when market conditions are unfavorable (i.e., weak demand and intense competition) (Powers and Loyka, 2010).

In traditional market conditions, consumers have little or no say in determining the final price of a product. However, with technological advancements, differences are also observed in this regard. For example, the ease of communication between sellers and buyers through the internet and the rise of secondary markets (e.g., platforms like eBay) have made online auctions commonplace for a wide range of product categories for the average consumer. Additionally, there is an increase in the adoption of new participatory pricing mechanisms where consumers play a central role in determining prices. Finally, as consumers transition into producers in the sharing economy, they generally have a significant role in determining prices either by explicitly defining a price (e.g., Etsy) or indirectly by providing supply to demand-driven systems (e.g., Uber) (Wichmann et al., 2022). These findings in the literature suggest the inference that the problems (demand-competition) experienced in different market conditions and the increasing influence of consumers on prices due to the reflection of their physical presence's strength in digital platforms with further technological advancement lead to the transformation of traditional price strategies into a function of crisis and digital marketing strategies.

Therefore, based on these insights:

**Proposition 2:** The suggestion is put forward that 'traditional price strategies become a function of crisis and digital marketing strategies'.

### **Distribution**

The concept of distribution refers to the flow of goods and services between producers and end consumers. This flow mentioned often varies from country to country, leading to differences in the time spent, distributors to be used, channel selection, and how employment will be segmented for multinational businesses (Yürük-Kayapınar, 2017). In distribution strategies, it is necessary to make some adaptations regarding inventory and transportation depending on the countries (Powers and Loyka, 2010). Additionally, distribution has become part of the product experience as well (Wichmann et al., 2022). The main goal of distribution strategy is to ensure that goods and services reach consumers at the right time, in the right amount, at the right place accessible to consumers, and at the right price. Furthermore, the impact of distribution channels on the price consumers are willing to pay highlights the importance of distribution strategies from a consumer perspective (Kazimov, 2004). Distribution channels vary from country to country based on consumer expectations and habits. For example, while large-scale retail stores dominate in America, in most other countries, retail activities consist of small and independent retail stores, and this situation can be exemplified by the large number of small retail stores and sales made in open markets in countries like India and Indonesia. When looking at the ways of distribution due to different consumer expectations from country to country, it is seen that in Western countries like the US, consumer brands rely on self-service in retail stores such as Walmart and Carrefour, while in China, similar retail stores include "push girl" status employees who distribute samples or promote brands' products inside stores (Kotler, 2018).

Taking technological advancements into account, consumers now experience this process by using branded applications and platforms to create, customize, and share products and user-generated content online (Wichmann et al., 2022). For example, looking at the revolutionary distribution channel development of Netflix, it started its sales journey initially as DVD rental retail stores, differentiated from rival DVD rental retail stores by continuing to offer DVD services via mail in the early 2000s, and today, it has reached a point with 260.28 million subscribers (NTV, 2024) positioning itself as the world's largest online DVD library in customers' minds (Kotler, 2018). From these findings in the literature, it can be inferred that distribution channels have a determining role in both physical and digital platforms today, encompassing issues such as infrastructure in countries where distribution will take place, consumer expectations and habits, geographical differences posing certain obligations, time, and employment.

Based on these insights:

**Proposition 3:** The suggestion is put forward that 'traditional distribution strategies become a function of crisis and digital marketing strategies'.

### **Promotion**

Promotion is one of the most effective elements in the marketing mix of businesses operating in international markets. It encompasses all kinds of information transfer related to the product and persuasion processes, playing a role in establishing a positive image for businesses on an international scale. Companies engaged in international marketing activities must create a positive image to be recognized in new foreign markets and maintain their presence there (Yürük-Kayapınar, 2017).

One of the most noticeable elements within promotion activities is advertising, which needs to be appealing. It should be noted that consumers in different cultures respond to different types of advertisements. Culturally appropriate advertising appeals should have a greater impact on buyer behavior in a specific culture (Zheng et al., 2007).

Another crucial aspect to consider in promotion activities is the strong connection between the contextual level of a culture and the characteristics of communication within that culture. In high-context cultures encompassing regions like



Asia, Africa, and South America, the message tends to be less important than the context in which communication takes place. To interpret the message effectively, the receiver needs to perceive all nuances and grasp the subtle, unspoken, and implicit contextual factors of communication. In contrast, in low-context cultures like the U.S. and Canada, the message is often conveyed very explicitly and directly. Information is clearly encoded, and the context plays a limited role in interpreting the message (Zheng et al., 2007).

Another important aspect for promotion activities is that adaptation is necessary not only for products but also for marketing and communication programs. Promotion adaptation, including product positioning, brand names, packaging messages, and sales promotions, can be encouraged by competitive pressures in export markets. Communication methods, audiences, product groups, company objectives, legal constraints, and infrastructure availability are often cited as driving forces for local adaptation in advertising messages, formats, and promotional approaches. The aspects of advertising and promotion, including the nature of the consumption process, language, and market segments of customers, also play a role in determining the extent of adaptation required (Powers and Loyka, 2010).

With these findings in the literature, it is inferred that promotion activities targeting consumers need to differentiate their messages due to cultural, linguistic, perceptual, and behavioral effects on consumers, emphasizing the necessity of using both traditional and digital media elements together.

Therefore, based on these insights:

**Proposition 4:** The suggestion is put forward that 'traditional promotion strategies become a function of human and digital marketing strategies'.

### Problems – Pandemic

People are generally prone to irrational emotions such as anxiety and depression (Clauw et al., 2003; Klitzman & Freudenberg, 2003). Additionally, consumers' perception of uncertainty, scarcity, severity, and other psychological factors increasingly leads to behaviors described as 'panic buying' (Omar et al., 2021). Panic buying behavior is defined as 'a sudden increase in consumption and quantity of one or more essential goods resulting from an imbalance between supply and demand caused by a negative situation' (Cooper & Gordon, 2021).

When examining human psychology during crisis situations, it is observed that people exhibit distinct purchasing behaviors such as panic buying, impulse buying, compulsive buying, and online shopping behaviors due to different psychological changes arising from various emergency periods (Tao et al., 2022). Another psychological reaction encountered during crisis periods is the fight or flight response, an individual mechanism responding to perceived threats or fears, facilitating reaching safety and reflecting avoidance, thus enabling individuals to cope with their fears, stresses, and anxieties (Gray & McNaughton, 2003 cited in Güngördü Belbağ, 2021).

Over the past 100 years, consumers have faced different crisis periods. For instance, the Great Depression in 1929 resulted in reduced spending, increased purchases of cheaper brands, concerns about societal shallowness, and perceived intellectual laziness, leading to behavioral and attitudinal changes (Etzioni, 2011).

Recently, COVID-19 has significantly impacted global economies. According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), economic consequences are severe, with global trade predicted to drop by more than one-third compared to 2020 (Lang et al., 2021). In addition to increased rates of home delivery, alcohol consumption, and even firearm purchases (Hill, 2020), it is anticipated that online shopping, savings, furniture, and home decor purchases will further increase (Belk, 2020).

In summary, it is possible to say that COVID-19 has had much larger effects compared to events like 9/11 or the 2008 financial crisis, reshaping society in permanent ways from our travel and home-buying patterns to the level of security and surveillance we are accustomed to (Politico, 2020).

COVID-19 has disrupted the global political and economic order, significantly impacting consumer service sectors such as retail, hospitality, and tourism. Many service providers are experimenting with new technologies and platforms to meet changing consumer demands, leading to new consumption patterns. To cope with restrictions, some consumer service companies have developed alternative business models such as 'contactless delivery' and 'social cinema' (Tao et al., 2022).

COVID-19 has influenced consumer behavior through five key avenues that may have a lasting impact, according to research conducted by McKinsey during the pandemic period. Globally, many consumers are reducing their spending, shifting it towards basic necessities like groceries and home essentials, planning to cut optional categories. During the pandemic, many categories saw over 10% growth in their online customer base, and many consumers plan to continue online shopping even after physical stores reopen. In markets like the UK and the US with high online conversion rates before the pandemic, e-commerce continues to grow across all categories. COVID-19 caused disruptions in the supply chain for specific products and brands, leading to changes in shopping behaviors as consumers unable to find their preferred product or retailer experimented with different brands and stores. While more than 70% of consumers in most countries are still not comfortable resuming their 'normal' activities outside the home, many plan to socialize with friends and go shopping for groceries, avoiding travel and crowded areas (Arora et al., 2020).

The concept of 'stockpiling,' which emerged during wartime but had long been forgotten, resurfaced during the pandemic, highlighting changes in consumer priorities and purchasing behaviors (Erkan, 2020).

Zwanka & Buff (2021) summarize the changing conditions during the pandemic as follows:

- Stock mindset and online ordering,
- Return to experience and hedonism with a warning,
- Working from home,
- Online transactions not previously available,
- Virtual reality replacing travel,
- Transition from dining out to cooking at home,
- Psychographic long-term changes in beliefs.

Social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and disruptions and bans on daily life routines due to the pandemic have brought many sectors, from the food industry to manufacturing, transportation to textiles, education to tourism, to a standstill, especially severely impacting the tourism and retail industries (Terry et al., 2020). While the pandemic may end, its economic, social, political, and cultural effects will continue for some time (He & Harris, 2020) (Temizkan et al., 2021). Previous research suggests that while adapting to the new normal, quality, performance, local companies, convenience, accessibility, availability, value (e.g., price sensitivities), online shopping, contactless services and delivery, and technology are essential for global consumers (Güngördü Belbağ, 2021).

Based on these findings in the literature:

**Proposition 5:** The suggestion is put forward that 'newly created problem strategies encompass the functions of traditional product, price, and distribution strategies'.

### People – Prosumer

Alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in demand for ethical behavior from brands, sustainable consumption practices, and sustainable product features. Secondly, an expanding affluent upper-middle class is starting to gain attention in emerging markets. Additionally, as consumers adapt to the global market, there is a cultural shift towards a more intense local focus, being content with national and local brands (Wichmann et al., 2022).

The influence of culture and cultural values on attitudes and behaviors has become an important topic in consumer research. Values based on cultural orientation not only serve as a powerful force in shaping an individual's attitudes and behaviors but also function as guiding principles in one's life. Values play a significant role in the perception and utilization of intercultural communication and in the development of intercultural advertising messages. Values can directly or indirectly influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors, shopping patterns, and exposure to specific media types (Gregory, Munch, & Peterson, 2002).

The stability of cultural values contradicts what economists would expect: as incomes converge, cultural values and habits also converge. When people have more or less everything, there is a situation where they will spend their increased incomes on what best fits their own value models (De Mooij, 2000).

Marketing researchers have previously used cultural dimensions such as individualism-collectivism to measure the impact of cultural values on consumer behavior research (Luna & Gupta, 2001). Prior studies include cultural differences in consumer complaint behavior (Liu & McClure, 2001), consumer innovativeness (Steenkamp, 2001), consumer retailing (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002), and impulse buying (Kacen & Lee, 2002). Therefore, using individualism-collectivism to measure cultural values is a key concept successfully utilized in cross-cultural marketing research (Bond et al., 2004).

Consumer ethnocentrism (CET) has been widely examined in the field of international marketing (Han & Guo, 2018). CET represents consumers' beliefs and values regarding the appropriateness and ethics of purchasing foreign products (Feurer, Baumbach, & Woodside, 2016; Lee, Lee, & Li, 2017; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Ethnocentric consumers are generally more inclined to embrace the positive aspects of domestic products and overlook the merits of foreign-made products (Verlegh, 2007; Josiassen, Assaf, & Karpen, 2011; Han & Won, 2018).

Technological advancements and efforts by consumers to adapt to the situation have led to the emergence of concepts like 'prosumer.' The origin of this concept lies in the term 'prosumption,' capturing the visionary idea that consumers playing an active role in the production process will blur the line between production and consumption (Chan, Zheng, & Yang, 2022). Consumers are also influencing value creation for other consumers in many situations, such as contributing to the development of new products and services or through user-generated content. The gradual transformation of consumers into value creators has resulted in the widespread adoption of the sharing economy with platforms like Uber and Airbnb. Therefore, consumers are evolving from being co-creators to actual producers and service providers, and companies are returning to being coordinators between supply and demand (Wichmann et al., 2022). Based on these findings in the literature:

**Proposition 6:** The suggestion is put forward that 'newly created human strategies encompass the functions of traditional product and promotion strategies'.

### Phygital – Platforms

In the post-pandemic world where people weave between digital and physical channels, linear customer journeys have almost become remnants of the past. Customers now expect more personalized and customized experiences while also being more cautious about how their data is obtained and used (Veenstra et al., 2021).

On one hand, new media, multiple touchpoints, and fragmented channels increase the digital complexity of customer journeys, while on the other hand, understanding the relationship between digital and physical shopping requires a deeper understanding of how it impacts customer experiences. The resulting concept of "phygital" is proposed in business research to denote the intertwining of physical and virtual spaces (Mele et al., 2021).

The use of phygital marketing methods refers to coordinating physical and digital channels in multi-channel marketing and creating marketing strategies accordingly. For example, a brand operating in phygital retail integrates the use of physical and digital channels by offering combined physical and digital experiences through applications like virtual shelves, QR codes, mobile payments, touchscreen displays, and more. This allows consumers to experience real and digital environments simultaneously and engage with the brand, product, and store (Çelik, 2021).

In addition to phygital strategies, another growing yet often overlooked area is the consumption of "free" goods. Free goods refer to situations where users do not pay for a product or service when buying or using it. The most obvious examples are social media and search engines. Facebook, Weibo, WeChat, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Google are the most notable examples. However, there are millions of free applications available on topics ranging from dating sites to entertainment and news. In all these cases, users do not make payments, and marketers, such as advertisers and investors, need to determine who will pay (Sheth, 2021). In this context, considering the significant role of platforms in consumer purchasing behavior, both brands and consumers should be carefully examined.

Based on these findings in the literature:

**Proposition 7:** The suggestion is put forward that 'newly created phygital marketing strategies encompass the functions of traditional product, price, distribution, and promotion strategies'.

## CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The marketing mix elements have been seen as an important tool for both researchers and practitioners since McCarthy's proposal in 1964. However, over the years, the existing understanding has been criticized for its inability to capture current developments and assumptions due to changing conditions. Taking into consideration the criticisms that the marketing mix lacks consumer interaction and strategic elements, this conceptual study suggests a new marketing mix proposal in the context of consumer behavior in international marketing (Table 1).

**Table 1** A New Perspective on Marketing Mix Elements

| Marketing Mix Elements                 | Marketing Mix Elements in the Context of Consumer Behavior in International Marketing |
|--|---|
| Product<br>Price<br>Place<br>Promotion | Product   |
|  | Price   |
|  | Place   |
|  | Promotion   |
|  | Problem (Crisis)  |
|  | People (Human-producer-consumer)  |
|  | Phygital  |

It should be noted that in addition to the current marketing mix elements, this new mix consisting of 7P with concepts such as Problems (problem-crisis), People-Prosumer, and Phygital (Fijital marketing) is open to further development. Moreover, the current debate suggests that the marketing mix elements are interconnected and cannot be separated from each other (for example, discussions related to product strategies should be expanded to include problems, digital marketing, and human elements), and each recommendation given under each P heading proves this situation. For example, discussions related to product strategies should be expanded to include problems, digital marketing, and human elements.

This study, which provides a perspective on consumer behavior in global marketing within the marketing mix, offers a general recommendation. Studies conducted specifically for a certain sector will contribute to the emergence of different mix elements. It should be noted that the effects of the current period's pandemic should continue to be reflected in the study. Additionally, it should not be forgotten that health or financial crises leave effects that may change strategies during certain periods. Finally, it is believed that empirical studies supporting the conceptual conclusions of the study would be beneficial.

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