



## Exploring Marketing Mix for Building a Viable Agro Business

Ann Dodor<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Marketing, Takoradi Polytechnic, Business School. P.O.BOX 256. Takoradi, Ghana.

### Author's contribution

*The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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### ABSTRACT

The marketing mix is an important strategy and consists of the marketing tools to be used to sell products. A number of different approaches have been employed by firms to achieve competitive advantage. Very few studies, however, have focused on agribusiness and the marketing mix let alone studying the marketing mix for agribusiness. This paper is part of a larger study on the Dynamics of marketing farm produce in selected urban markets. It contributes in proposing a model by adding three other Ps (Policies, Physical climate, and Partners) to the existing traditional 4Ps; (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) for effective marketing of farm produce to address food security and unemployment. This study critically reviews strategies used by farmers and distributors to market farm produce, acknowledging that a marketing strategy defines objectives and describes the way to satisfy customers in a chosen market. Both theoretical and empirical literature is reviewed. Conclusions are drawn based on the findings.

*Keywords: Exploring; marketing mix; marketing strategy; agribusiness.*

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: [anndodor@yahoo.com](mailto:anndodor@yahoo.com);

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Marketing has been defined and conceptualized in various ways, depending on the author's background, interest, and education. [1] For example, marketing can be seen as a matrix of business activities organized to plan, produce, price, promote, distribute, and market goods, service, and ideas for the satisfaction of relevant customers and clients. Marketers expect that by understanding what causes consumers to buy particular goods and services they will be able to determine which products are needed in the market place, which are obsolete, and how best to present the goods to the consumers.

Consumer behavior has been defined by Bray [2] as the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires. As a theory under which this study is underpinned, consumer behavior plays a major role in the marketing of produce. The marketers of farm produce need to be innovative and dynamic in order to compete with the changing purchase behavior of consumers of farm produce in Ghana.

Agribusiness is becoming essentially more industrialized, more competitive and even more technological and managerial intensive [3]. A report from FAO [4] indicates that agriculture has become a dynamic and integral part of the market economy. For instance in Ghana the Agriculture sector's contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has fallen from 31.8 per cent in 2009 to 22 per cent in 2013 [5]. This fallen trend is a bit worrying according to the agriculture ministry due to especially the youth who are no longer showing interest in farming but white collar jobs. According to Loveridge, Weber, & Mpyisi, [6], there are two underlying factors for the low commercialization or marketing of agricultural products: the inadequacy of business skills, entrepreneurial ethics and quality of products for farmers and farmers' organizations. Agribusiness has been defined to include "all participants in a commodity vertical structure, from farm suppliers, farmers, assemblers, processors, and distributors to ultimate domestic and international consumers [7].

Despite its dwindling rate of contribution toward Ghana's GDP, agriculture still holds the frame of the economy's skeleton together. Peasant agriculture is undoubtedly critical to the

development of the country [5]. With all the above developments, agribusiness needs a planned strategy that will satisfy the final consumer, and give the farmer and the middleman high profits. McCarthy [8] offered the 'marketing mix', often referred to as the '4 Ps', as a means of translating marketing planning into practice. The marketing mix has been extremely influential in informing the development of both marketing theory and practice [9]. Singh [10] have acknowledged that marketing mix is the greatest strategy for attaining competitive advantage for any firm. She emphasized that, the customer is king thus it is mandatory to employ excellent marketing mix by marketing managers which is essential and key elements to satisfy the customer needs and demands. It is highly necessary to plan and implement appropriate marketing mix or competitive advantage [10].

However, Silverman, [11] posited that there are two issues not considered by McCarthy's 4Ps. The first limitation, he indicated is that the 4Ps says nothing about managerial processes necessary for creating the mix. Secondly, the application of the 4Ps to stakeholder groups beyond end users and the environment (internal customers, distributors, government, suppliers etc). Over the years, there has been emphasis on the traditional 4Ps but "other Ps" could also emerge [12,13]. The physical climate which is usually the weather has been volatile resulting in low productivity improvement rate [6]. Policies well thought out can have a positive development impact on domestic agricultural supply [14]. Government policies are important instruments that can be used for the agricultural sector. Middlemen or distributors usually partner with farmers (producers) for farm products to get to the final consumer. Blume et al. [15], have concluded that middlemen have all the bargaining power and they simultaneously suggest prices to the producers and consumers for trade to occur.

The study seeks to propose a model for an additional 3Ps which are; Policies, Physical climate and Partners.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Consumer Behavior Theory**

Consumer behavior has been always of great interest to marketers. The knowledge of consumer behavior helps the marketer to understand how consumers think, feel and select

from alternatives like products, brands etc and how the consumers are influenced by their environment, the family and salespersons and so on. A consumer's buying behavior is influenced by cultural, social, personal and psychological factors. Most of these factors are uncontrollable and beyond the hands of marketers but they have to be considered while trying to understand the complex behavior of the consumer. Solomon, [16] defined consumer behavior as the study "of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires" [16].

## **2.2 Consumer Personality Factors**

There are two factors mainly influencing the consumers for decision making: Risk aversion and innovativeness. Risk aversion is a measure of how much consumers need to be certain and sure of what they are purchasing [17]. The second variable, innovativeness, is a global measure which captures the degree to which consumers are willing to take chances and experiment with new ways of doing things [17].

## **2.3 Consumer Decision Making Models**

There are three major models for consumer decision making which were proposed by Nicosia [18]; Engel et al. [19]; and Howard & Sheth [20]. They attempted to trace the psychological state of individual consumers from the point at which they become aware of the possibility of satisfying a material need by purchasing and consuming a product to their final evaluation of the consequences of having done so. Engel and Blackwell, [19] suggests that high involvement with a product results in an extended problem solving process which starts with problem recognition, followed by an information search, alternative evaluation, purchase, and post purchase activities. This process he added is aided by an active information processing sequence involving exposure, attention, comprehension, yielding/acceptance, and retention. The choice determined by the outcome of the information process-aided decision sequence may have satisfying or dissonant outcomes. Festinger, [21] first introduced the theory of cognitive dissonance for the consumer, which influence future purchasing. Engel & Blackwell [19] also point out that environmental influences may affect the decision sequence acting on the consumer's motivation and intention and that unpredictable factors may

result in modification of the actual choice made by a consumer.

### **2.3.1 The marketing mix**

The concept of the marketing mix developed from a notion of the marketer as a "mixer of ingredients" [22], which was introduced by Neil Borden in the 1950s [23], that is the mix of twelve controllable marketing elements was later labeled the 4Ps of marketing (product, price, place, and promotion) by McCarthy [8]. Marketing mix can be called "a set of tools intervention in the market" [24].

Despite the background and status of the Mix as a major theoretical and practical parameter of contemporary marketing, several academics have at times expressed doubts and objections as to the value and the future of the mix, proposing alternatives that range from minor modifications to total rejection [25]. While empirical evidence on the exact role and contribution of the Mix to the success of commercial organizations is very limited, several studies confirm that the 4Ps mix is indeed the trusted conceptual platform of practitioners dealing with tactical marketing issues [26]. The wide acceptance of the Mix among field marketers is their being identified as the controllable parameters likely to influence the consumer buying process and decisions [27].

In agribusiness, many factors should be taken into account when determining a marketing strategy; Cash flow, storage capacity, risk of higher or lower prices and production risk are primary determiners of marketing strategy. Regardless of whether the marketer intends to offer his products at a low-price or high price, he must first understand the market and strategize according to its demand and income level. The marketing mix as a strategy will influence the above variables positively. Cash flow is the measure of money flowing in and out of your business at any given time. Examples of cash inflows can be payments for goods or services from customers. Example of cash outflows are any cash outgoings and can include purchase of raw materials, or equipments and advertisements. In agribusiness, cash is needed for storage facilities; farm inputs and carting the produce to the final consumer. The price of the product will affect the perceived value of the product. The reason perceived value is critical to consider in product pricing strategy is because

customers often associate low price with low quality.

### **2.3.2 Product strategy**

A product can be described as anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need [27]. The key benefit or purpose for which a consumer buys a product varies from consumer to consumer. Harrell and Frazier [28] provide an easy categorization of products. They indicated that there are three dimensions in relation to products. 1. Core product, which is the basic function and benefit of a product. 2. Branded product, which means the view of a products packaging, characteristics, quality, style and brand image. 3. Augmented product, including shipping service, warranty etc. Harrell & Frazier [28] concluded that, designing a product strategy should depend on whether the core benefit comes from the physical good or service performance, or from the augmented dimension of the product. On the other hand, Nelson [29] has developed other product classifications. These are experience goods and search goods. Experienced goods according to Nelson [29] means a product or service is difficult to be observed in advanced before purchase. The second classification is search goods which indicate a product or services with features and characteristics easily observable before purchase. Most farm produce are experience goods such as maize and vegetables.

### **2.3.3 Price strategy**

According to Kotler, Armstrong, Wong, & Saunders [30], price is the amount of money charged for a product or service, or the total values that consumers exchange for the benefits of having or using the product or service. Determining pricing strategy is a delicate task. It requires that you assess customer demand and analyze cost in order to choose a price that will create customer satisfaction and yield a satisfactory level of profit [31]. The objectives of pricing are for market survival, sales growth, profitability, competitive pricing, and quality & image enhancement [27].

Kotler et al. [30] argued that Cost-based pricing is the simplest pricing strategy which is set by adding some mark-up to the cost of the product. They added that, cost-based strategy works if firm's prices are not too high as compared to the competition. However, Nagle, Hogan, and Zale

[32] posited that cost-oriented pricing strategy which is also referred to as Break-even pricing is determined by the price at which firms can recover manufacturing and marketing cost, or make targeted profit. According to Kotler et al. [30] competition-based pricing is when a company sets prices in accordance with the competition. Prices, according to them are largely based on the prices of the competitors. However, in Customer-value based Pricing, Kotler et al. [30] postulated that products are priced on the basis of perceived value of the product. Company according to them shall find out what value customers assign to competitors' product and what value they perceive of company's product. Measuring perceived value is difficult if more prices are charged than the perceived value, sales then will suffer [27]. Agricultural prices depend upon various factors which depend upon the conditions of demand and supply. Supply depends upon the local production, the needs of producers for ready cash: The more they need cash at harvest-time, the more they will be inclined to accept low prices [33]. Demand originates from the end users or consumers and is supplied by dealers or intermediaries. End user demand is influenced by product quality and price. Consumers will buy more if the price is low, but they may be willing to pay a higher price (depending on their income) if product quality is good. Lastly, prices for farm produce also vary depending on the seasons. During harvest time, prices are low, while they rise as sowing time draws near [33]. The ability of producers to stockpile their produce can help to minimize these seasonal fluctuations by placing on the market only amounts of produce sufficient to maintain a given price.

### **2.3.4 Place (Channel) strategy**

Distribution is delivering the desired product and service to the customer on time and desired place. There is an overall strategy about distribution. This is to direct and help distributors provide their goods and services to consumers [34]. A distribution channel function is to move goods and service from producers to consumers.

Kotler et al. [30] have indicated that in general there are two main channel strategies; the 'pull' and the 'push' strategies. The pull strategy according to them is when the producer directs its marketing activities toward final consumers to induce them to buy the product. This approach they say, intends to encourage customers to "pull" products through the channel network.

Smith and Taylor [35] also added that 'a pull' strategy is more concerned with pulling the customers into the store/distributor and motivating them to "pull" the product off the shelves'. A push strategy, on the other hand, involves "pushing" the product through distribution channels to final consumers [27]. The producer directs its marketing activities toward channel members to induce them to carry the product and to promote it to final consumers. It means that the product is pushed down through the channel towards the end-users for consumption. In the marketing of agricultural products a wholesaler typically acts as an intermediary between producers (farmers) and retailers in a distribution system. This is particularly evident for small individual producers who do not have a direct access to retail chains. In doing so, the wholesaler provides an intermediary role, but at the same time this also increases considerably the price of agricultural products.

### **2.3.5 Promotion strategy**

Promotion is all the communication tools that can deliver the message to the intended audience. Roosta et al. [36] posited that promotion basically is a set of activities to inform, persuade and influence existing and potential customers [34]. On the other hand, Kotler and Armstrong [27] defines promotion as the activities a company performs in order to communicate to its existing and potential customers. Promotion can be divided into four groups that each group has different dimensions; advertising, sales promotion, public relations and personal selling. Kotler and Armstrong [27] indicated that advertising is a non-personal presentation of goods or services, such as T.V ads. Keller [37] considers advertisement as a powerful tool to create strong associations with brands. Personal Selling is the type of promotion in which a company representative meets customers personally to sell a product. It is useful to understand customer needs deeply [28]. Sales promotions/Trade promotions are about giving incentives to enhance sales, such as discounts or samples [37]. Kotler and Armstrong [27] have provided various reasons for sales promotions, he says that sales promotions to end-customers increase short term sales and help build long term relationships, while trade promotions aimed at distributors and retailers so they buy large volumes and advertise the product more [27]. Personal selling and direct marketing are the promotional tools mostly used for farm produce.

Food distributors travel to the farm to pick up the food and handle everything else: Cleaning, processing, and delivering the food to buyers.

## **2.4 Other Proposed 'Ps'**

The traditional 4Ps which are controllable have been discussed extensively above. The study has proposed 3Ps in addition to the traditional Ps for the marketing of farm produce. Below is extensive literature on the three other Ps (policies, physical climate and partners).

### **2.4.1 Policies from the government**

Government policies on agriculture are important instruments that can be used for the agricultural sector. Policies well thought out can have a positive development impact on domestic agricultural supply [14]. Agricultural intensification through inappropriate farming systems has led in many agricultural areas to environmental degradation, erosion of top soils, depletion of soil fertility, declining water availability and pollution [38]. Agricultural policies need to be structured so as to provide support to small-scale farmers through projects to improve, diversify and market agricultural products.

In Ghana, farmers have to deal with increasingly expensive inputs, such as fertilizer, Land, Labor, Insecticide, and agricultural equipments. They also have difficulties in transporting produce to market and competition from imported foods that are underpriced.

Agriculture was identified as the economic sector that could rescue Ghana from a financial ruin. The Rawlings government in 1984 initiated the first phase of the Economic Recovery Program (ERP) Policy. Accordingly, since that time, the government has invested significant funds in the rehabilitation of agriculture. The government had directed capital toward repairing and improving the transportation and distribution infrastructure serving export crops. The government, furthermore, established a new farmers' organization, the Ghana National Association of Farmers and Fishermen, in early 1991 to replace the Ghana Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives.

There is a strong correlation between policies from the government and the marketing mix. The product strategy is one of the four tools of the marketing mix and enables to make exchange more valuable. The role of the government by

streamlining agricultural policies will assist farmers in the marketing of farm products. The provision of feeder roads, fertilizers, and storage facilities will enable farmers quote better prices, and easily send and distribute farm products to the final consumer. As stated above in Ghana, farmers have to deal with bad roads, expensive farm inputs and poor storage facilities.

#### **2.4.2 Physical climate**

The term climate change is generally used to describe human influences on the climate. Climate Change affects all countries in the world. Weather extremities such as droughts, floods and cyclones will occur more frequently and forcefully, causing insecure living conditions, food shortage and forced migration. Droughts and floods are destroying especially the crops and harvest of farmers in developing countries, leaving them in a miserable situation [6].

Parry et al. [39] identified the main drivers of agricultural responses to climate change. These are biophysical effects and socio-economic factors. They further explained that, crop production is affected biophysically by meteorological variables, including rising temperatures, changing precipitation regimes, and increased atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. Parry et al. [39] added that biophysical effects of climate change on agricultural production will be positive in some agricultural systems and regions, and negative in others, and these effects will vary through time. Socio-economic factors influence responses to changes in crop productivity, with price changes and shifts in comparative advantage [39]. According to Passioura, [40] climate change and agriculture are interrelated processes, both of which take place on a global scale. A United Nations report on climate change in 2007, stipulated that Global warming is projected to have significant impacts on conditions affecting agriculture, including temperature, carbon dioxide, glacial run-off, precipitation and the interaction of these elements. These conditions the report added determine the carrying capacity of the biosphere to produce enough food for the human population and domesticated animals. The overall effect of climate change on agriculture will depend on the balance of these effects. The report concluded that assessment of the effects of global climate changes on agriculture might help to properly anticipate and adapt farming to maximize agricultural production.

Assessments of regional impacts of climate change widely agree that the most vulnerable countries and societies are in Africa, especially south of the Sahara. During the last century, a rise in temperature of approximately 1°C was measured on the African continent, higher than the global average. It is beyond a doubt that global warming is proceeding, and that the adverse effects are already being experienced (UN report on climate change).

Climate Change is one aspect or explanation of how the livelihood of farmers can be threatened. Ghana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) in 2012 conducted a survey on the impact of climate change on the livelihood of farmers. In Ghana, the climate has changed over the last years. Crops are getting destroyed due to periods of extreme heat and heavy rains.

Today, global climate change is one of humanity's greatest challenges. Within the next fifty years, according to GAWU report, global warming will increase to the detriment of the world's population. It is the pressing responsibility of the international community to work together and reverse global warming, as well as to provide assistance to those most vulnerable to global weather extremities.

There is a correlation between the physical climate and the marketing mix. Climate change will profoundly affect agriculture worldwide. Food security in Ghana is under threat from unpredictable changes in rainfall and more frequent extreme weather. Harsh climatic conditions will affect the quality and quantity of produce from farmers, which is the first tool of the marketing mix. Pricing which is the second element of the marketing mix is a key to companies' profitability and survival. The effect of climate change will affect prices of farm produce making the poor farmer poorer. The place element of the marketing mix, which is how best to distribute the product, is usually a challenge for Ghanaian farmers during rainy season, due to poor roads. Lastly, in order to create and sustain a demand for an offering, the potential benefit has to be communicated to the client or customer. Farm produce in Ghana are well promoted for effective marketing.

#### **2.4.3 Partners (middlemen)**

In most markets, trade does not involve just producers (farmers) and consumers but also one or more middlemen serving as intermediaries

[41]. Middlemen or distributors usually partner with farmers (producers) for farm products to get to the final consumer. Blume et al. [42], have concluded that middlemen have all the bargaining power and they simultaneously suggest prices to the producers and consumers for trade to occur. Trader's association in various markets assists in the distribution of farm produce to consumers. Traders are often much maligned as "middlemen" playing vital role in facilitating food marketing and distribution [43]. Boleat [43] have indicated that, Trade associations are established by a number of organizations, operating in the same market and often in competition with each other. He noted that, Trade associations can promote common interest and improvement in quality. Food and Agricultural Organization, [4] established that in Ghana there are two types of distribution channels: Long distance and peri-urban agriculture. Peri-urban farmers primarily produce perishable items, like dairy, staples, fruits and vegetables. These goods must reach the consumer within 24 hours due to lack of refrigeration and high perish ability nature. This and many other reasons have led to the importance of middlemen to transport and provide storage for farm produce [43].

The partners are the people who distribute the produce (not the channel). In Ghana most of the markets in the urban centers, have market queens who control the flow of produce into the market. This is one of the reasons why the farmer will have to partner with the queen in the market for their produce to be sold. The partners in Ghana dictate the type, quality and packaging of the product, quote the price, place the product at the appropriate market and do the promotion of the produce themselves.

### **3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Although this paper is part of a larger study and the proposed new three 'Ps' have not yet been tested, conclusions can be drawn based on literature reviewed. From the literature there are all indications that, conditions of competition are changing rapidly today and companies that strategize and react to these changes promptly and quickly are the most successful. Marketing mix is the combination of strategies and activities that companies use to sell their goods and services. By focusing on the people who buy, a company can pick the right features for the product, the right price and distribution outlets,

and the right words and approaches for promoting the product.

Literature reviewed also indicated that, due to technological developments, physical differences of products have decreased. Differentiation should be made on the meanings products bear instead of on their physical features. In particular the buying process of consumer behavior is of more importance to marketing practitioners than the consumption process. From a practitioner's perspective consumer research is pertinent so as to enable him to understand changing consumer needs, wants, and motivations and thereby devise the most appropriate mix for his market. Then, to the marketer the dynamic nature of consumer behavior implies rapid product development, changing communications, and distribution strategies in order to be more effective.

From the literature, there are all indications that, knowledge of your customer, your competition and knowledge of government regulations build a solid environment with which you apply the marketing mix. Not knowing the answers to one of the key questions can mean you may make the wrong decisions on product, price, place/distribution or promotion/ communication. As a marketer, understanding the market means understanding something about the supply and demand of farm produce. The farmer is the supplier of farm produce while the ultimate customer who eats or uses the produce creates the demand. In most agricultural marketing there are many other participants in this supply and demand chain such as brokers, middlemen, distributors, processors and packagers. Information about supply and demand is usually expressed in prices and quantities.

Given the global climate changes in literature, it can also be concluded that agricultural production around the globe will be affected. It may be reasonable to assume that this will alter the long run costs of production and this would cause changes in relative prices. Farmers are the users of agricultural mechanization technology. The ideal situation is for farmers to have sufficient training and knowledge, have access to appropriate equipment of good quality at an affordable price and to operate under a favorable production environment. This implies: Availability of information to farmers to be able to make informed decisions; provision of appropriate financing mechanisms for the acquisition of equipment based on the socio-



economic situation of the farmers; availability of equipment, spares and repair services nearby.

#### 4. RECOMMENDATION

The conclusions above indicated that climate change and agriculture are interrelated processes and affects production of farm produce. Climatic change can lead to low crop yields, heat waves and drought, risk of forest fire which can increase the risk of famine. It is against this background that the paper recommends that there should be optimization of fertilizer application rates and spreading; reduced use (or restoration) of organic soils, such as peat soils, which contain high levels of carbon; and better control of manure management systems to reduce methane emissions and development of renewable energies from agricultural biomass could contribute to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from energy and transport, while benefiting the agricultural sector. There should also be intensive education on the topic of climatic change and effective ways of saving the environment.

It is also recommended that, there be clarity and consistency in stated policies, regulation of products for the domestic market adequate regulation of input supply and adequate support of agricultural research institution. Acquiring agricultural land (both domestic and foreign investors) should be simple and finally there should be a boost of public and commercial financing to agricultural sector.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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