Combining mix and relationship marketing

Uolevi Lehtinen, University of Tampere, Finland*

This study would provide a motivational start for theoretical and empirical development that in the longer run will hopefully result in the more systematic combination and combined use of today’s most noteworthy theories of marketing. The main objective is to outline theoretically new tentative frameworks and examine them empirically in order to combine the mix marketing and relationship marketing approaches. All empirical studies of this paper show that there are gaps between current marketing theories and marketing practice. All studies also tentatively support the points of departure and the use of combining. At the same this paper outlines a potential basis for a new, comprehensive paradigm for marketing.

Keywords Marketing theory, marketing practice, mix marketing, relationship marketing, paradigm for marketing.

Background and objectives

Many marketing scholars have seriously debated the status of marketing as a discipline and in the corporate practice (see for example the special issue of Journal of Marketing, October 2005). Have marketing scholars specialised excessively on narrow perspectives and thus failed to look at the bigger picture in theory and practice? Consequently, it is no wonder that this main theme of the EMAC 2008 Conference raised the following basic questions: Have we gone too far? Do we need a single universal paradigm or multiple paradigms? How can we reconnect with the corporate world? How does marketing respond to its critics? These important questions form the backdrop for this article.

The managerial school of marketing and its central tenet, the marketing mix approach (often more or less identified with parameter or transaction marketing) has been the main focus of marketing theory and practice since the 1960s. The marketing mix approach has been widely criticised by researchers who have attempted to develop the field of relationship marketing (Constantinides, 2006; Ennew, 1995; Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 1995; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Van den Bulte, 1991).

However, both the parameter based (parameters are usually identified with marketing parameters, competitive parameters, competitive means,
ingredients, elements, or controllable and tactical marketing tools) and the relationship based marketing approaches have remained at the very center of scientific and practical marketing rhetoric, although they are not the only approaches (cf. Sheth, Gardner & Garett, 1988; and Möller, 2007). Although arguments about the superiority of one particular approach over another continue, they are declining in amount and importance.

Although early relationship marketing proponents were initially unaware of or reluctant to see this, the mix and relationship approaches can be combined extensively. However, a number of studies have touched lightly the possibility of combining the two approaches.

Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne (1991) spoke about “the parameters of the relationship marketing”, but in a way they settled the argument by adding three new parameters (people, process and customer service) to the 4Ps list. They evidently considered that the total list was part of relationship marketing. They left the general combining of approaches outside the scope of their analysis.

In 1992 Kotler introduced a new view where the marketing mix is not replaced. Instead,

*they (companies) must engineer stronger bonds with their stakeholders, including customers, distributors, suppliers, employees, unions, governments and other critical players in the environment…Companies must move from a short-term transaction–oriented goal to a long-term relationship–building goal.*

Although Kotler’s opinion could be interpreted as congenial to the spirit of this article he was not referring to an actual combination of approaches.

Gummesson (1995) described moving from marketing mix centrality towards relationship centrality. He wanted to forget the mix model and speak instead about single parameters that the company can control. These parameters should have only a supporting position, not a dominating one.

Brodie, Coviello, Brookes and Little (1997) studied marketing practices empirically. Although their empirical research results can seem to suggest the combinatorial possibilities of marketing approaches they did not examine these prospects systematically.

Pels, Coviello and Brodie (2000) have accepted four marketing approaches (Transaction, Database, Interaction and Network), all of which may co-exist in the exchange situation in their model. Coviello, Brodie, Danaher and Johnston (2002) discovered that marketing practices are pluralistic and managerial practice has not shifted from transactional to relational approaches per se.

These three studies of the CMP group place the different approaches more or less in the position of parallel use but do not examine how close they are to each other or how they could be combined. In any case, the empirical results of the CMP group can and will be used when evaluating the results of this study.

When developing marketing theory mix marketing and relationship marketing should not be considered rivals but rather complementary approaches that could even be combined. Consequently, this study focuses on the following:
1. Bringing forward the underlying idea and rationale for combining the parameter marketing and relationship marketing approaches as well as the arguments explaining why they should be combined. The concepts of “mix marketing” and “relationship marketing” are used broadly, as representatives of groups of different but related approaches. Hence, relationship marketing includes here CRM (cf. Payne, 2006) though there is some disagreement about this.

2. Outlining new frameworks in order to combine the essential and compatible elements of approaches (at the end consciously, systematically and equally). Actually, an attempt is made to bridge the gaps between current marketing theories and marketing practice by combining current theoretical approaches.

3. Studying in an empirical and exploratory fashion how well the opinions and actions of marketing directors mesh with the combinatorial needs and frameworks.

4. Summarising the main results and other concluding comments including central suggestions for future research.

Because this study above all aims at providing a motivational start to a new scientific development process the reader should not expect precise procedures or results. This article is not a concept or literature review. There are many good reviews in marketing (for example Constantinides, 2006; Egan, 2008; Grönroos, 1990; Gummesson, 1995 and Payne, 2006). Hence, only selected publications that are important from the perspective of this study are cited later.

**Points of departure for combining**

*The idea and rationale behind combining*

There can be significant gaps between the separate major theories and their practical use. On the basis of introspective practical experience it was assumed that the parallel use of the mix and relationship approaches is an accepted custom in companies and that the combined use of approaches is the reality in some companies and the intention of a great many others.

As early as 1983, Lehtinen predicted that the importance of the marketing mix not would decrease or disappear but would instead be supplemented and improved through an interactive approach. Probably this was the first time that the idea of combining approaches was explicitly presented. It can be considered noteworthy because relationship marketing was “born” later in the same year (Berry, 1983).

Lehtinen reverted to the subject in 1995 by presenting – particularly because of the prospects for combining - the following definition of marketing:

*Marketing is a mutually beneficial exchange process achieved by the establishment, maintenance, enhancement and termination of mainly long-term relationships with customers and other stakeholders, and facilitated by the application of marketing mix* (Lehtinen, 1995).
An almost identical definition is included in Glynn and Lehtinen (1995).

In any case, the natural and promising idea of combining the mix and relationship approaches has received very little direct attention in marketing research (however, see Lehtinen, 2007, Lehtinen, 2008a and b and Lehtinen, 2009). There are many reasons to explore the combining of the approaches:

- There is a need to create a comprehensive approach to marketing. Business – and also marketing – environment has become more comprehensive and complicated and, consequently, more comprehensive and complicated models are needed by researchers and managers.
- Both of the major approaches have their own distinct strengths and, therefore, they complement one another.
- Although both approaches also have their own distinct weaknesses, the weaknesses of one approach can at least partly offset the strengths of the other.
- These approaches are not mutually exclusive.
- Especially in marketing practice but also in theory, these approaches have never been fully separated for example because the subparameters of communication, particularly PR and selling, are strongly related to relationship marketing. Therefore, a company using one approach inevitably integrates elements from the other approach to one extent or another.
- Combining the basic approaches can be a useful way to fill gaps within the separate theories and between theory and practice.
- Both approaches are well-known which makes the adoption easier at least in companies.
- It is frustrating and partly mistaken to argue about the superiority of different marketing approaches, as has been done to date.

For these reasons, the new approach, which consciously, systematically and equally combines the essential and compatible elements of both approaches, is probably more reliable, fruitful and profitable than any of the previous (and separate) approaches. Perhaps the main rationale for combining is the possibility of offsetting strengths and weaknesses.

Compensating for the weaknesses of one approach with the strengths of the other

All products must be planned, priced, distributed, sold and advertised, personnel must be chosen, trained and rewarded, the physical surroundings must be looked after and the processes planned and implemented (7Ps of Booms & Bittner 1981) though for example the type of personnel, surroundings and processes are not on the same level with 4Ps (see Ennew, Watkings & Wright, 1995). These parameter based tasks cannot be avoided in marketing practice. Consequently, they should not be avoided in any marketing theory.

We should also remember that Kotler (2004) added altogether 23 subparameters to the 4Ps. Lehtinen and Järvelin (1994) introduced 13
additional parameters on the same level with the 7Ps.

Even if we cast aside the fallacies of the criticism of the mix approach (Möller, 2007a and Lehtinen, 2008a and b), it still has its undeniable deficiencies. The worst of them seems to be that this approach does not take into account the interactions or relationships between seller and stakeholder groups, especially customers. It is also virtually silent on strategic issues, the organisation of marketing activities and personalisation. In the broad analysis of Constantinides (2006) two limitations seem to be common: the internal orientation that speaks to neglecting relationships and the lack of personalisation that speaks to neglecting individual characteristics. These main weaknesses of mix marketing can be eliminated through relationship marketing when combining approaches (Lehtinen, 2007 and 2008a and b). If the approaches are combined, relationships and personalisation are in a strong position because they are at the core of relationship marketing.

Relationship marketing, network marketing and networking play significant roles especially in services marketing and b-to-b marketing (Grönroos, 1990; Tikkanen, 1996; Gummesson, Lehtinen & Grönroos, 1997). In fact, the relationship marketing approach could be applied in any company’s marketing, and it can cover everything from the high strategic to the low operational level.

The major problem seems to be that the relationship marketing (or management) is understood differently by different scholars and practitioners (for example Winer, 2001; Möller & Halinen, 2000). This has made it more difficult to create a consistent theory and to reach the level of paradigm (cf. Lehtinen 1995, 1996). As a strategic framework, relationship marketing is loose, and as an information technological CRM customer analysis it concentrates on a very different and low level of marketing. An excellent analysis of the pitfalls and unknowns in CRM implications is presented in Boulding, Staeling, Ehret and Johnston (2005).

Combining approaches permits operationalisation of the tactical level of relationship marketing through mix marketing (Lehtinen, 2007). At the same time, combining can broaden CRM-type use of IT-analyses of customer data, which as such is important as a basis for the utilisation of any approach.

The mix approach can contribute to relationship marketing especially in the explication and formulation at the tactical level. The relationship approach is useful in combining because its strengths can compensate for the main weaknesses inherent in the mix approach. Consequently, the combination approach should probably be more efficient and effective than either of the original approaches on its own.

Combining approaches

The first principal phase of combining

It may be reasonable to state some general points at the outset. Theoretically, the continuum of combining extends from zero combination to perfect combination (cf. Grönroos, 1992 and Coviello et al., 2002). Actually, both ends of this continuum are empty. Zero combination is impossible because there are always links between approaches. On the other hand, combining never achieves perfection. At least, it is always possible to add
new components to both of the approaches combined.

In this paper the continuum of combining in divided into two parts: the first and second principal phases of combining. This division is not necessary but it can be helpful, for example when determining the line of demarcation between the natural links of the approaches and the developed and conscious forms of ordinary combining.

If combining is unconscious (based on the links between approaches without any human effort) or partly unconscious, it cannot be very systematic. Unconscious and unsystematic combining may be the normal way companies behave before starting their ordinary combining work.

In fact, even new companies are unconsciously in the first principal phase of combining if they use both approaches. The approaches are never fully separated because of their links especially in communication. These links are very strong between the PR subparameter as well as selling and relationship marketing. But naturally the consciousness, systematic nature and equality of combining can be at least near their minimum.

The approaches can be used side by side without any purposeful combining. Actually, this kind of parallel coexistence of both approaches is a common and important phase toward more advanced forms of combining, which gradually develop through parallel use of the approaches. But even in parallel use, the approaches are to some extent dependent because of the links between them described above.

All in all, fairly unconscious and unsystematic combining often as the parallel and independent use of the approaches can be considered the first principal phase (preliminary phase) in combining approaches.

The second principal phase of combining

When combining after the initial period, managers usually consider more consciously, carefully and creatively, how the customer orientation and other important features of the relationship approach as well as the parameters of the mix can best be taken into account at the same time.

For example, if the product parameter is considered, the linking of the relationship approach to product planning to a great extent increases the gravity of market-oriented research and probing and test marketing that should be used through the whole product planning process. Customising individual products, mass customisation, and the overall usage of the customer-oriented high touch product parameter are important. Depending on the product, customer-oriented and flexible acts can also be targeted on assortment, design, characteristics, services, packaging and brand name. All this aims at creating as much value as possible for both the customer and the company. We should possibly speak about relational product parameter, relational price parameter etc (see Lehtinen and Järvelin, 1995). Combining other parameters and relational aspects is described in Lehtinen (2007).

On the basis of the former examination, parameters seem to be more or less the field, where suitable parts of relational processes were planted (cf. Pels, 1999). Naturally, combining can be performed contrarily or in some balanced way.

To achieve sustainable competitive advantages companies should benefit from all the essential elements of both approaches. This can best be done by
combining the two approaches systematically, consciously and equally into a single, comprehensive framework. Actually, this could be called the second principal phase of combining. In principle, this is illustrated simply by Figure 1.

This kind of generic scheme based on conscious, systematic and equal combining is one of the correct ways of thinking creatively about the combination. It does, however, bring up two major questions:

- What are the essential elements of the approaches?
- How could or should the essential elements be combined?

Our choice of elements is generally influenced by whether we concentrate on developing a marketing strategy or on formulating a marketing plan. Here the focus is on the preparation of an operational marketing plan.

As far as the mix approach is concerned, choosing the elements is fairly straightforward. The parameters themselves form the core of the approach. Their number and content may, however, vary from organisation to organisation though the 4Ps (McCarthy, 1960) are a natural point of departure. Many researchers and especially companies have to start off with relatively limited and controllable studies and practical applications.

The choice of essential elements is less easy when considering the relational approach. This is understandable because the relational approach is actually a large and inhomogenous family of approaches (Payne, 2006).

Figure 1 Basic framework for combining the mix (parameter) approach and the relationship approach
There are also a number of researchers who have created different lists of relationships (see Håkansson, 1982; Katsikeas, 1989; Gummesson, 1995 and LaBahn & Harich, 1997). It might be natural to utilise the definition of relationship marketing and choose the basic elements i.e. the establishing, maintaining, enhancing and terminating of long-term customer relationships (cf. Grönroos, 1990).

At the moment, the promising and developed elements for combination are found in the basic processes of the CRM approach, since these processes have been specified by Payne and Frow (2005) and Payne (2006), among others. They argue that the basic CRM processes applicable to most organisations are the following: strategy development, value creation, multi-channel integration, information management and performance assessment.

Since we will here concentrate on the combination that represents the tactical or marketing plan level, the strategy development process is left out. It is possible to assume that the four processes that are not left out form a sufficient relationship marketing base for the tactical combination. Naturally, the strategy development process could also be included here and it could be of the utmost importance in some other study or plan.

We can examine, how could or should the essential elements of the approaches be combined (the second major question). Combining can take place as described in the beginning of this paragraph taking into account the influence of the main features of relationship marketing in mix parameters or vice versa. On the other hand, the combination can proceed from combining the first element of an approach to the first element of another approach, to combining the first element to an approach to the second element of another approach etc. until all combinations are complete. This issue will demand a lot of research in future. It will be dealt with in the paragraph 5.2.

The nature and content of parameters and processes may vary between companies, products, lines of business and situations. Other operation(s) may sometimes become so vital that the company wishes to develop it (them) alongside the basic processes. Consequently, they can be included in combining framework of that company.

In any case, we can develop conceptual frameworks that describe the combination of the essential elements of both approaches. A fairly advanced combination framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

The framework is really a matrix with the essential elements of mix marketing on the x-axis and the essential elements of relationship marketing on the y-axis. The combining (coalescence) of elements happens at the intersections of parameters and processes (marked with vertical and horizontal lines). Some intersections (or elements) can be left outside the practical combination work and thus remain the “zero level”. In principle, the number of intersections is the number of parameters multiplied by the number of processes.

We can regard the parameter and process areas outside these intersections (marked with vertical or horizontal lines) as the areas where the elements can be developed independently. The markings “process 5” and “etc.” in the graph illustrate the possible advancement of the new processes onto the basic process level. The corresponding practice concerns parameters of mix. In these respects, this framework is related to the work of Vargo and Lusch (2004 and 2006).
Figure 2 RELMIX framework for combining marketing parameters and relational processes.
At least in the beginning, combining work can be much the same as described in the beginning of this section. Everything in the framework eventually leads to the customers, which means that all work based on the framework happens on the terms of customers (or/and alternatively of other stakeholder group(s)). There is also a feedback process from present customers to the customer database. In this respect the framework is dynamic.

The framework forms a fairly clear and grounded basis for combining. This type of framework and its applications can be included in the advanced part of the second principal phase of combining. This framework can be called the “RELMIX framework” (RELationship-MIX framework).

The start should be careful and the suitable balance between the number of elements (coverage) and the accuracy of combining work must be found. When experience enhances competence in combining work, the number of elements can be gradually increased. Basically, this is a matter of tradeoff/payoff analysis.

**Empirical results and interpretations**

**Data**

Because all the data and results here are exploratory, we are content with the basic facts (see also the evaluation in the section “Theory, empirical results and implications” in subsequent text). The questions asked are revealed in the following analysis.

All 20 participants of the Work Seminar for Financial Sector Marketing Management in August 2007 filled in a self-administered questionnaire, which consisted of questions concerning the combination of different marketing approaches and their usage. The respondents - i.e. marketing managers, loan officers and CEOs - represented all the central operators of the Finnish financial market and, in this respect, the data represent the entire population of financial companies in Finland.

In November 2007, the same self-administered questionnaire was also presented to the six marketing people of the Finnish company Imageneering Oy that offers brand marketing services.

In June 2009, a completed self-administrative questionnaire was presented to the participants of a marketing seminar. The twenty three participants seemed to represent the Finnish business community quite generally, although a precise evaluation of this sample is difficult. Additional questions were posed in the questionnaire to deepen the examination toward the combination phenomena.

The empirical results of Brodie et al. (1997), Pels et al. (2000) and Coviello et al. (2002) were utilised as secondary information when evaluating the results.

The researcher also conducted a marketing case study of a research and consultant company, Life Works Consulting. The case study was a follow-up study with the results reported twice during a three-year period, in October 2004 and August 2007. All three owner-entrepreneurs together with the researcher as participating observers took part in the studies. Judging by this and the time period of this study, it seems likely that the results present an accurate picture of this company’s marketing.
Surveys concerning the marketing approaches of the financial sector, a brand marketing company and the business community

The first questionnaire included three questions related to the current usage of main marketing approaches. The first of these concerned the level of usage (Table 1).

Judging from the table, both approaches were simultaneously used in almost all companies. Frequent use is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the advanced combination of approaches. It is possible to trust the data because as a matter of fact the data represent the entire population of financial companies in Finland.

The relationship marketing approach appears to be used slightly more often than the mix approach. The answers to the questions concerning the utilisation rate (expressed as a percentage of total use) suggested the same.

When asked about the changes in the usage of approaches in marketing plans during the last five years, 12 respondents estimated that use of the relationship marketing approach had increased.

Next, the respondents were asked whether they thought the mix approach and relationship marketing approach should be brought closer together. Twelve of the respondents thought that cooperation should be increased from the current level and seven respondents thought that cooperation between the approaches was sufficient. These results indicate that a distinct majority of companies support further integration or combining of these approaches.

Some respondents were able to recognise that the companies they represented had been working in the manner of Payne et al. (2005) process description. However, according to the respondents only two companies had used all five of the processes described before.

In October 2007, the same questionnaire was also presented to six marketing professionals of the company Imageneering, which offers brand marketing services. The main results were rather similar to those of the marketing leaders of the financial sector.

From the viewpoint of this study the most significant, although fairly small, difference might be that all respondents from Imageneering considered in their answers and especially in discussions held afterwards that the mix and relationship approaches should be brought closer together and even combined. These results further strengthen the finding that company representatives generally consider further combining of the approaches rather important.

In June 2009, the completed self-administered questionnaire was presented to all twenty three participants of a high-level marketing seminar.

Table 1 Usage of approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of usage</th>
<th>Mix</th>
<th>Relationship Marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
who represented the Finnish business community. The answers to the questions presented in two earlier surveys were very similar to the answers of earlier surveys. For example, all companies had used the approaches in parallel and a clear majority (fifteen respondents) supported bringing the approaches closer to each other.

Then the respondents were asked, why and how combining was performed. As reasons for combining (the “why”-question), the respondents emphasised the importance of both approaches, total utilisation of the major approaches, the importance of customer relationships, success in the keen competition, increased profitability and achieving a good image for the company.

As to the performance in combining (the “how”-question), the respondents emphasised command of balanced totality, consideration of customer needs, targeting of marketing and services to customers, and so-called customer-owners, chain marketing and internal marketing.

However, all results of this latest survey clearly support the parallel use of the approaches, the need for the further closing of the approaches and the existence of combining work with different underlying rationale and performances.

After completing self-administered questionnaires open discussions for all respondents were always arranged. All 49 respondents had an opportunity to comment on marketing issues freely without any leading remarks. Generally attitudes towards marketing and the questionnaire were positive in nature. But in all discussions several marketing managers expressed their surprise that researchers could still debate the superiority of one approach over the other. According to the managers, the researchers should concentrate on the analyses of combining the most used approaches, which they considered to be mix and relationship marketing. Most companies already applied both approaches at least in parallel. Some managers stated that their companies had used some kind of combination and most managers hoped for the development of proper methods or models to combine approaches. These comments are very encouraging for further studies of combining.

In any case, the managers emphasised that combining would match current practice or at least combining the aims of companies. Therefore, it can fill the gaps between the present theoretical approaches and practice. They also thought that the developed combining models would allow greater marketing efficiency and better results. In addition to these comments, the same general vision was backed up by the fact that none of the respondents wanted the approaches used by their companies to be separated more than at present. The managers’ challenge to researchers was thus clear and grounded from many angles.

Secondary analysis

The empirical results of the studies by CMP groups (see the chapter 1) are important when evaluating the empirical part of this study.

For example, the results of the Brodie et al. (1997) study were based on a quite large and representative sample of 134 firms. Hence, the results acquired from this kind of fairly balanced data can also supplement the results acquired from the data of this study. Brodie et al. concluded as follows:
“Based on the results of this investigation, it is concluded that both the Transactional and Relational Marketing approaches can and do coexist”. The researchers also stated the following: “On the aggregate basis, “relational development” is dominant”. In addition, they emphasised that “the study provides evidence to support the perspective that marketing needs to be practiced as an integrative activity involving personnel from across the organization”. The results of Pels et al. (2000) and Coviello et al. (2002) are broadly comparable with the results of Brodie et al. (1997).

Consequently, the main results and conclusions concerning the coexistence of different approaches in these three large studies are rather compatible with the results of studies described before. However, for practical reasons the data of this study mainly concern services whereas the secondary data concern all the main groups of products. Together the results of all six survey studies support the theoretical results of this study.

Case study concerning the marketing approaches of Life Works Consulting Ltd

This study concentrates on the above mentioned reporting period, which ended in August 2007. Then the staff included, in addition to three owner-entrepreneurs (three doctors of management), three employees and two people working on a programming project. The corporation had also formed networks with experts from different fields of management.

In marketing Life Works had simply applied the 7Ps on the mix side. This was quite natural because Life Works produces high-level expert services for business and public organisations. The supply of services focuses on the development of earning logics, strategies, innovations and leadership. On the relational side, Life Works had not been very systematic and had instead been guided by practical relational tasks in connection with the mix.

The principles and practices of Life Works’ marketing had developed as a learning process. In practice, the owner-entrepreneurs had carefully considered how the customer orientation and other features of the relationship marketing are linked to the 7Ps. The customer’s needs and wishes were defined during discussions with executives and training organisers i.e. those commissioning the research. As a rule the services were tailored according to customer wishes, so that the quality of the service was defined and carried out through genuine dialogue with the customer.

The company had conceptualised research results into operational tools when solving a customer’s problem. Examples of this conceptualising comprised for example storyteller strategy and productivity tool for teams, which are new management tools of Life Works. The customised models of Life Works are based on self-made high quality research.

The company’s operations had been developed towards an emphasis on relationship and even network orientation. Life Works’ background as a university spin-off can be seen in the owner-entrepreneurs’ methods: they have vast experience of how interaction within the scientific community can produce innovative results in practice.

Though the tactical action of Life Works was based on marketing mix, relationship marketing was nearly always and everywhere emphasised in Life Works’ operations, even in the use of parameters. Life Works’ daily
operations involved building and maintaining cooperation networks. In practice this means that communication with colleagues, local know-how center experts and Life Works’ service suppliers is a prime necessity for the company’s existence. It can undoubtedly be said that Life Works has managed to combine the parameter and relationship approaches to a great extent, both in planning and operation. This has happened quite consciously but not very systematically. It could be said that the company’s marketing was at the last part of the first primary phase of combining in 2007.

Life Works wanted and was able to proceed flexibly into a more systematic, conscious and equal combining of approaches, that is into the second principal phase. The owner-entrepreneurs considered the RELMIX framework to be an excellent basis for such combining work. Life Works realised that such work guided by a framework will take time, and might even become a lifelong learning process for the company.

The results of this case study clearly support the theoretical vision of the study. Taken together all seven studies therefore show that some kind of combination is sought and also used. The combinations varied from parallel coexistence to advanced combinations, reminiscent of the RELMIX framework.

Conclusions

Theory, empirical results and implications

This study above all aims at providing a motivational start for theoretical and empirical development that in the longer run will hopefully result in the more systematic combination and combinatorial use of today’s most noteworthy theories in marketing field. Consequently, it challenges some parts of present day marketing thinking. In any event, the tentative combination frameworks of this study and the theories behind them leave room for different interpretations, requiring more specification and formulation.

In this study, the explication of the idea and rationale for combining, the combination frameworks and the empirical analysis concerning the new idea and frameworks are novel scientific contributions. Some visions to correct the weaknesses of the approaches and two phases of combination can be considered minor contributions.

The combined approaches serve as an opportunity to use both approaches. The weaknesses of one approach can be compensated by the strengths of the other and the combined approaches naturally are a more comprehensive view of marketing than when considered separately. On the other hand, they require marketing and combining knowledge and their use takes time and money.

The quality of the empirical studies was maintained throughout the research process. In all three surveys the same main questions formed the basis of the questionnaire used. The questions were pretested before the surveys were administered. Answering the main questions was easy and as business experts the respondents could understand the terminology used. The completed questionnaires and additional discussions were dealt with immediately and carefully by two persons to increase reliability. The differences between the interpretations of these two persons were small,
which indicates that the interpretations were likely to have been performed correctly. Because the main results were almost identical in all surveys and in the secondary data as well as in the case study, the results seemed to be quite valid and trustworthy.

The empirical data acquired for this study and the data of secondary studies were collected from different types of companies in different countries and with varying methods. This empirical evidence seems to be compatible and taken together rather clear for the purposes of this kind of preliminary empiricism. However, the amount of data is fairly limited.

The empirical results based on all four own studies and three secondary studies seemed to prove that there are evident gaps between the marketing practice (manifested by empirical results) and current theories (manifested by separate theories of mix marketing and relationship marketing). At the same time the results of these exploratory studies also confirm the view of this article that there is a very significant parallel use of both approaches and a need to explore how to combine major marketing approaches.

All findings of this study can be used in marketing management practice at least in modified form. The applications naturally require the time and attention of any company that wants to consider utilising these new opportunities. First, the company should determine its attitude in regard to combining. If it considers that combining is of practical importance a plan of operations specifying objectives and a time-table should be made. Then they should start their systematic combining work.

The objective of combining work can vary from parallel use of the approaches to fairly sophisticated combinations. The nature of the work can change from the independent use of both approaches through conscious but unsystematic combining to the conscious, systematic and equal use of combining mechanisms based on models like RELMIX.

Generally, no company can totally avoid the use of both marketing approaches, though implementation will differ by company based on background factors like the financial and competitive situation, the industry and the competence of marketing people involved. For example, if a company is financially strong, it operates in a demanding competitive situation in a rapidly changing industry and it has very competent marketing personnel, it can of course move quickly to make use of a RELMIX-type, fairly advanced framework.

There is a good reason to return to some basic questions presented in the beginning of this paper. All questions (in the themes of EMAC 2008) are connected with one fundamental question: Have scholars specialised marketing excessively and narrowed its perspectives resulting in a failure to look at the bigger picture in theory and practice? The results of this study hint at an affirmative answer to this question. Nevertheless, this study does not try to narrow marketing perspectives but on the contrary to broaden them.

Certainly the thinking and approaches to combining presented in this paper will meet resistance from many academic researchers and managers. Many academics have more or less bound themselves to one approach and/or do not like major changes in thinking on marketing. Due to their education and experience, one major approach is deeply rooted in the minds of some managers.
Future research

Even in the future research and practice the frameworks for combining will bring forth the following basic questions:

1. **What are the most essential elements in these approaches?**

   At least the parameters adopted from the marketing mix tradition are essential elements on the level of marketing planning even in the future. But are the four CRM processes the best choice for the relational level? These processes are probably not a bad option. But if they are not the best option, which elements of the relationship approach would be better? This question may lead to a whole set of new questions and needs for development in relationship thinking.

   In any case, we should carefully consider whether there are applicable elements and visions in other marketing approaches (cf. Hunt; 1983; Möller, 2007a and Sheth et al., 1988) that might be beneficial to the combination frameworks. This demands also careful metatheoretical analyses. Metatheoretical analyses can indicate “that each tradition (approach) provides a particular and partial view of its focal phenomena, dependent on its ontological and epistemological assumptions” (Möller, 2007b). These analyses may not be easy but some useful possibilities for combination may be found (cf. Vargo et al., 2004).

2. **How could or should the essential elements be combined?**

   Combining the different elements requires creative efforts by researchers and managers. If we utilise a RELMIX-type framework a logical way to start combining is proceeding from one chosen element of an approach to one chosen element of another approach in order to see how the elements can positively support each other’s effect on customers (see section “Compensating for the weaknesses of one approach with the strengths of the other”). If extensive work is conducted in this way in all interactions of the RELMIX or some comparable framework, both in research and implementation, little by little better and more sophisticated combination mechanisms and better frameworks for combining will emerge. New insights may appear, and these can be used to develop any single part of the puzzle: for example combination processes, elements of relationship marketing, elements of mix approach, etc.

   Seeking answers to the important questions demands a lot of work going forward. For example, careful examination of the contents of interactions of the RELMIX framework was purposefully left out of this preliminary discussion. Such interaction actually represents the combination of two elements of RELMIX or a corresponding framework. Hence, one very important issue in the future research will be how combining work is actually done (positive witnesses) and how it should be done (normative advices). More generally, future combining research and practice can also stimulate marketing and marketing research to a great deal, even outside the issue of combining discussed here.

   Customers are included in the RELMIX framework. Although the customers are not dealt with in this article at length the customer orientation is the point of departure in all kinds of combining work and models. Therefore,
customer issues in connection with combining should be the focus of more study in the future.

Some elements are more important in combining than others. Combining should be also tested with different weights for different elements.

Many other important issues should be researched sooner or later. These issues concern for example the developments in the parameters and processes outside interactions and the influence of changing business environment and company-based factors on combining.

A need for additional large-scale empirical evidence remains. This challenge is clear and it emphasises the amount and representativeness of data. Also questions should be deepened more directly towards an empirical examination of the real implementation of combination work as well as of the frameworks and which of their components are used. Though findings of this study are in some respects preliminary they clearly favor the continuation of scientific discussion and work on combining the approaches. Especially the comments of the managers in discussions conducted after they had answered the questionnaire were both challenging and encouraging in this respect.

There is not always a direct relationship between academic knowledge and managerial practice (see Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996). However, marketing is more or less an applied science that should be based on the acts and needs of companies and other marketing organisations. Therefore, the significant gaps between practice and current theories are troublesome. In any case, the issue is of the utmost importance and these gaps should be reduced by means of research.

It could also be argued that this study introduces a new promising way in the long run to develop a new comprehensive paradigm for marketing. The anomalies of older approaches cannot be assimilated very long but in any case a new paradigm in marketing could emerge (cf. Kuhn, 1970). Some leading researchers have argued that a paradigm shift is occurring from mix marketing to relationship marketing (for example Grönroos, 1994 and Gummesson, 1995). The results of this study suggested that a paradigm shift from these major approaches to their combined approaches might eventually occur.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Professors Christian Grönroos, Evert Gummesson, Maria Holmlund, Peter Kelby, Kristian Möller and Henrikki Tikkanen and managing directors Pekka Lehtonen and Pasi Mäkinen as well as many others who helped and encouraged him to write this paper.

References


About the Author and Correspondence

**Uolevi Lehtinen**, Ph.D., has been a professor of marketing in several universities during 30 years. Lehtinen was dean of economic-administrative faculty, chairman of the council and board, and rector of the University of Tampere, Finland. He has been and still is a member of board or council in several firms and other organizations. His fields of expertise are services marketing, relationship marketing, international marketing, consumers’ and managers’ decision making, and marketing theory. He has published some 180 scientific publications, more than third of them in refereed international journals or proceedings in seven languages. He has also been on the editorial board of four international and two Finnish journals. He is an honorary doctor of the Russian Academy of Economics and honorary chairman of the Society for Business Administration.

Professor Uolevi Lehtinen, University of Tampere, Finland.

E uolevi.lehtinen@uta.fi