

# The Imperative of the S.A.V.E Model - A Critical Argument for Customer-Centric Marketing in Contemporary Business

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## ABSTRACT

The traditional 4Ps marketing mix, while foundational, inadequately addresses the complexities of today's dynamic, customer-empowered business environment. This paper argues for the immediate adoption of the S.A.V.E. marketing model (Solutions, Access, Value, Education) as a more relevant and effective framework for contemporary businesses. Shifting the focus from product-centricity to customer-centricity, S.A.V.E. enables organizations to build stronger customer relationships, differentiate themselves in the market, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. This paper articulates the nuances of each S.A.V.E. element, drawing on the insights from Ettenson (2013) and other marketing scholars, and demonstrates its superiority over the traditional 4Ps in the current business landscape.

**Keywords:** S.A.V.E. Model, Marketing Mix, Customer-Centricity, Service-Dominant Logic, Value Creation, Marketing Strategy

## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business landscape has undergone a profound transformation, driven by technological advancements, heightened customer empowerment, and the emergence of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The conventional product-centric marketing approach, characterized by the 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), has increasingly proven inadequate in navigating this intricate environment (Gummesson, 2007; Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). In this context, customers have transitioned from passive recipients of marketing messages to active participants in the value creation process, demanding personalized solutions, seamless access, demonstrable value, and relevant information (Grönroos, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). As Darvidou (2024) notes, brands must transcend traditional multichannel strategies to deliver interconnected experiences that resonate with the modern, digitally-savvy customer. This shift underscores the necessity for brands to become integral parts of the customer's narrative, focusing on how their offerings enhance the consumer's personal story (HEC Paris, 2022).

This paradigm shift necessitates the adoption of customer-centric marketing models that prioritize understanding and satisfying customer needs (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Sheth, Sisodia & Sharma, 2000). The S.A.V.E. model, developed by Richard Ettenson, Eduardo Conrado, and Jonathan Knowles, offers a robust alternative to the 4Ps, providing a framework for businesses to align their marketing strategies with the realities of the 21st-century marketplace (Ettenson et al., 2013). This paper posits that the immediate and comprehensive adoption of the S.A.V.E. model is crucial for businesses striving to excel in the contemporary business landscape.

## Deconstructing the S.A.V.E. Model: A Customer-Centric Approach

The S.A.V.E. model signifies a fundamental rethinking of the marketing mix, shifting the focus from the marketer's perspective to the customer's needs and desires (Wani, 2013). Each element of the model addresses a critical aspect of the customer experience.

For a start, the **Solutions** component emphasizes a comprehensive understanding of customer problems and the provision of tailored solutions, rather than merely promoting product features (Elliot, 2012; Gems, 2013). This

necessitates an in-depth exploration of customer needs, pain points, and aspirations (Slater & Narver, 1998). As Ettenson et al. (2013) suggest, businesses must transcend product-centric paradigms and consider how their offerings can be bundled, integrated, or customized to deliver holistic solutions. Co-creation and collaboration with customers are fundamental to ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of these solutions (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Moreover, the application of design thinking principles and innovation is imperative to develop creative solutions that resonate with customers and provide a superior user experience (Brown, 2008; Martin, 2009).

The Access element is pivotal in creating convenient and efficient channels for customers to access products or services (Leszinsky & Marne, 1997). In today's omnichannel environment, businesses must establish a robust presence across multiple channels—both physical and digital—to accommodate customers' diverse preferences and needs (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Ettenson et al. (2013) envision seamless integration across channels, supplemented by convenient delivery and distribution options, enhanced customer support, and a streamlined purchasing process. Leveraging technology and data analytics to optimize the customer journey is essential for providing a consistent and personalized experience across all touchpoints (Verhoef et al., 2015; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Radomska et al. (2025) emphasize that a holistic approach to addressing omnichannel challenges is vital for enhancing operational efficiency and channel effectiveness.

The Value perspective is central to delivering superior customer value, encompassing not only price but also factors such as time, effort, and emotional investment (Zeithaml, 1988; Bolton & Drew, 1991). Ettenson et al. (2013) argue that businesses must understand customer needs and preferences to tailor their offerings and establish unique value propositions. Differentiation through distinct benefits, customer-centric product development, and effective communication of value are critical for attracting and retaining customers (Slater, 1997; Woodruff, 1997). Continuous value delivery and customer satisfaction are paramount for fostering long-term relationships and brand loyalty (Reichheld, 2016; Anderson, Fornell & Rust, 2024). Valls Giménez (2017) highlights that the empowered customer expects personally relevant offers, necessitating businesses to revamp their strategies to meet heightened expectations.

Lastly, the Education aspect involves equipping customers with the knowledge necessary to understand a product's benefits and maximize its utility (Leszinsky & Marne, 1997). Ettenson et al. (2013) advocate for empowering customers through knowledge, addressing their concerns, and building trust via relevant educational content. This requires identifying customer knowledge gaps, tailoring educational initiatives accordingly, and providing ongoing engagement (Rust, Zeithaml & Lemon, 2000; Bolton, Lemon & Verhoef, 2014). Furthermore, empowering employees with the requisite knowledge and training is crucial for effectively educating customers (Heskett et al., 2014; Zeithaml et al., 2016). Measuring the effectiveness of educational efforts and continuously refining strategies are essential for optimizing impact.

### **S.A.V.E. vs. 4Ps - A Comparative Analysis**

The S.A.V.E. model offers several advantages over the traditional 4Ps framework. Firstly, S.A.V.E. places the customer at the core of the marketing strategy, whereas the 4Ps tend to be product-centric (Popovic, 2016; Fakeideas, 2018). In addition, the S.A.V.E. is more pertinent to the complexities of the modern business environment, including the rise of digital channels, customer empowerment, and the experience economy (Fakeideas, 2018; Ajouz, Akrou, & Elbaz, 2023). further, it provides a more holistic and integrated approach to marketing, considering the entire customer journey and all touchpoints (Ettenson et al., 2013, 2019). In addition, the S.A.V.E. concept emphasizes value creation for the customer, whereas the 4Ps primarily focus on the exchange of goods or services for monetary compensation (Gummesson, 2017; Grönroos, 2018).

And eventually, the model encourages businesses to cultivate long-term relationships with their customers, while the 4Ps often emphasize short-term transactions (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996; Phillips, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Ajouz, Akrou, & Elbaz, 2023). As highlighted by Taichung (2024), the S.A.V.E concept is particularly suited for B2B marketing, where providing solutions and demonstrating value are paramount. This shift from product-focused to customer-focused strategies is essential for navigating the dynamics of marketing management and achieving a competitive advantage.

Table 1: S.A.V.E. vs. 4Ps

Feature	S.A.V.E.	4Ps
Focus	Customer Needs & Solutions	Product Features
Orientation	External (Customer)	Internal (Company)
Primary Goal	Value Creation & Relationship Building	Sales & Market Share
Key Elements	Solutions, Access, Value, Education	Product, Price, Place, Promotion
Time Horizon	Long-Term	Short-Term
Communication	Two-Way, Interactive	One-Way, Informative
Value Proposition	Benefits & Outcomes	Features & Attributes

### The Alignment with Service-Dominant Logic

The S.A.V.E. model aligns strongly with the principles of service-dominant logic (S-D logic), which posits that service is the foundational basis of exchange and that value is co-created by the customer and the provider (Vargo & Lusch, 2014; Lusch & Vargo, 2016). S-D logic underscores the importance of comprehending customer processes, facilitating value creation, and nurturing relationships through interaction and engagement (Grönroos, 2018; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). As Vargo and Lusch (2017) suggest, S-D logic continues to evolve, emphasizing the necessity for a general theory of value co-creation. The S.A.V.E. model operationalizes S-D logic by focusing on solutions, access, value, and education, all of which facilitate customer value creation and foster robust customer relationships (Ettenson et al., 2013). By adopting the S.A.V.E. model, businesses can embrace the principles of S-D logic and create a more customer-centric and value-driven marketing strategy.

### Implications for Contemporary Business

The immediate adoption of the S.A.V.E. model has significant implications for contemporary businesses. By focusing on solutions, access, value, and education, organizations can cultivate stronger and more meaningful relationships with their customers (Fournier, Dobscha & Mick, 1998; De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder & Iacobucci, 2001). Understanding and addressing customer needs can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty (Anderson et al., 1994; Reichheld, 1996). Furthermore, differentiating themselves through unique value propositions and superior customer experiences enables businesses to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Porter, 1985; Barney, 1991; Payne & Frow, 2015; Ballantyne & Varey, 2016). In prioritizing long-term customer relationships and value creation, organizations can achieve sustainable growth and profitability (Rust et al., 2000; Bolton et al., 2004). Lastly, aligning marketing strategies with customer needs and preferences can significantly improve the return on marketing investments.

## CONCLUSION

The traditional 4Ps marketing mix, while historically significant, is no longer sufficient for navigating the complexities of the contemporary business landscape. The S.A.V.E. model presents a more relevant and effective framework for businesses striving to thrive in the 21st century. As they divert focus from product-centricity to customer-centricity, S.A.V.E. empowers organizations to build stronger customer relationships, differentiate themselves in the marketplace, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. This paper advocates for the immediate and comprehensive adoption of the S.A.V.E. model as a pivotal step towards creating a more customer-centric and value-driven marketing strategy. Empirical studies and extant literature as shared in the foregoing contentions assert that businesses that embrace the principles of S.A.V.E. will be better positioned to meet the evolving needs of their customers, foster enduring relationships, and attain sustainable success in the years to come. The time for rethinking marketing is now; the time for S.A.V.E. is here.

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