



# The marketing mix paradigm and the Dixonian systems perspective of marketing

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to present an alternative view of marketing that Donald F. Dixon spent much of his distinguished career developing – a paradigm that we refer to as the Dixonian systems perspective of marketing. It is a paradigm that presents marketing as a phenomenon that reaches far beyond the micro/managerial marketing mix paradigm.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Analysis and interpretation of Donald F. Dixon's and colleagues' scholarly work to distill the essence of Dixon's view of marketing, which we refer to as the Dixonian systems perspective of marketing.

**Findings** – The Dixon's systems perspective of marketing offers a framework for the analysis of macromarketing issues that is not provided by the conventional marketing mix micro/managerial paradigm.

**Originality/value** – The paper provides a concise overview of the macro/systems ideas and concepts of marketing contained in Donald F. Dixon's and his colleagues' extensive writings that to date has not been available from any other source.

**Keywords** Marketing mix, Marketing theory

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Since the late 1950s, a period of over half a century, the marketing discipline has been dominated by a paradigm that can be summed up in two words: micro and managerial. Most of the scholarly literature, the professionally oriented journals as well as textbooks approach marketing from the standpoint of a particular firm, organization, or market segment. Indeed, of the roughly 200 journals dealing with marketing issues (American Marketing Association, 2010), only one uses the term “macro” in its title and only a few others address marketing from a societal or public policy perspective (see, for example, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *Journal of Macromarketing*). As for textbooks, it has been several decades since anything with a macro view has been published (Narver and Savitt, 1971; Gist, 1974). Instead, just about everything published in the literature, explicitly or implicitly, conforms to what has now become the “classic” managerial marketing paradigm. Essentially, the entire field of marketing is viewed as a set of strategies on the supply side and a set of customers on the demand side. And, based on the underlying philosophy of “customer orientation,” “customer focus” or “customer centricity,” the roots of which emerged from the so-called “marketing concept” of the late 1950s (McKitterick, 1957), the strategies for any given firm on the supply side are supposed to conform to the desires of customers on the demand side. This micro/managerial vision of marketing was even given a nice tidy name – “the marketing mix” (Borden, 1964). This term explicitly defines the set of marketing strategies comprising the marketing mix.



Apparently adhering to the principle of parsimony, the core marketing strategies were limited to four strategies: product, pricing, promotion, and distribution. One astute textbook author noticing that the fourth marketing strategy started with a “d” instead of a “p” chose to change the term “distribution” to the term “place,” and hence the famous “four Ps” of the marketing mix was born (McCarthy, 1960). Now, the model was almost complete. Marketing is all about adjusting, blending, or better yet, “mixing” the four Ps into an optimum blend that would satisfy the needs and desires of customers. Further, this marketing mix model was not a static one. Rather, it was dynamic because over time, those responsible for mixing the marketing mix usually referred to as “marketing managers” would monitor their customers or “target market” through marketing research to ascertain their changing needs and desires. Then, these marketing managers would have the information needed to remix the marketing mix to reflect the changes desired by their target markets (McCarthy, 1960; Kotler, 1967; Borden, 1964). What could be more simple, or, as proponents of this paradigm would argue, more elegant? Marketing is what firms do to find out what people want and then in turn how firms can develop the right mix of the products customers want, the prices they are willing to pay, the promotional messages they can understand, and the distribution channels that need to be used to make the products available at the places customers are willing to patronize. But how about other factors besides the four Ps and the target market? You know the things that economists refer to as exogenous factors such as economic conditions, socio-cultural forces, competition, technology, and government regulations? Not to worry, the marketing mix paradigm found a way to handle this as well. All these messy exogenous forces would be referred to as the “external environment” and the marketing mix paradigm would even go so far as to allow that this external environment could have an effect on the marketing mix (Kotler, 1967). How? Well, changes in the external environment such as an economic recession, competitive structure change (the emergence of Wal-Mart), or technological innovation (internet-based online sales) could affect customer behavior which in turn would have implications for how marketing managers would mix their marketing mixes. Yes, this messy, even nasty external environment could make the marketing manager’s life more difficult, but armed with the four Ps of the marketing mix, and sophisticated marketing research methods, nothing fundamental would change. It is just a matter of getting the right data and information about how the changing environment is affecting customer behavior and then using it to reformulate the marketing mix to account for these changes. Given the vast menu of academic and professional research available on customer behavior and the four strategic areas of the marketing mix, the potential for marketing managers to optimize their marketing mixes, even in the face of rapid environmental change, would become increasingly possible as the marketing discipline “matures.” After five decades, “modern” marketing has incorporated a great deal of new technologies, methods, and terminologies, but the classic managerial/marketing mix paradigm still overwhelmingly prevails.

The purpose of this paper is to present an alternative view of marketing that Donald F. Dixon spent much of his distinguished career developing – a paradigm that we refer to as the Dixonian systems perspective of marketing. It is a paradigm that presents marketing as a phenomenon that reaches far beyond the micro/managerial marketing mix paradigm. Instead, marketing is viewed from a macro perspective as a core element that exists in all societies. Marketing is part of the set of systems in society that is not only shaped by those systems but also helps to shape societal systems.

Our purpose in presenting our interpretation of the Dixonian systems perspective is not to argue that it is “better” than the managerial marketing mix model or that a macro perspective must be considered instead of or in addition to a micro perspective in order to obtain a well-rounded view of marketing. For many academics and practitioners, a micro view of marketing may be perfectly satisfactory in terms of their research interests or business goals. Rather, we present the Dixonian framework in the spirit of: “here’s another way of looking at marketing that we think is not only interesting, but offers an entirely different perspective on the phenomenon we call marketing.”

### **Dixonian systems perspective of marketing**

According to Dixon, there appears to be six core components of the marketing system which exists in every society:

- (1) the rational consumer;
- (2) the household;
- (3) the firm;
- (4) marketing;
- (5) transactions and transvections; and
- (6) the market.

The output of the marketing system is termed “material satisfaction.” Following is a discussion of each of these concepts based on our interpretation of Dixon’s work.

#### *The rational consumer and the household*

Some of Dixon’s students believe that over the years he had shifted to the notion of the “boundedly rational” consumer who lacks all information necessary to make rational decisions and, hence, seeks a satisficing rather than an optimal solution to his consumption needs (Simon, 1982). However, Dixon’s (2002) most recent work suggests that he viewed the rational consumer whose core objective is to maximize satisfaction as the starting point of the marketing system. The value of a product or service determines a consumer’s level of satisfaction and consumers tend to rank the satisfaction they obtain from consuming different products (Dixon, 2002). Further, Dixon refers not simply to individual consumers, but to households (Dixon, 1984, 2002; Grashof and Dixon, 1980; Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989) and he argues that the behavior of individuals occurs within the context of the household (Dixon, 2002). Essentially, the household is “a social system consisting of a set of individuals organized into defined roles and responsibilities” (Grashof and Dixon, 1980, p. 486). The household is an active participant in the marketing system because it is a consumer of goods and services as well as a supplier of labor, financial resources, and technology, in the form of specialized skills, to the system (Dixon, 1984, 1995; Grashof and Dixon, 1980). Similar to individual consumers, households can freely select the products they buy from the market. The purpose of product purchases within the household is to improve the “state” of the household unit. In addition, goods and services are viewed as “combinations of assortments of characteristics” which provide consumption value for individuals (Grashof and Dixon, 1980; Alderson, 1965). Hence, households seek to “assemble,” or acquire, goods and services that enable them to achieve a certain level of satisfaction which can be derived from the characteristics of the products purchased or the services

utilized and the contribution of these characteristics to the household assortment. Dixon (2002) also notes that consumer and household demand for goods and services is not static because tastes and preferences change over time.

#### *The firm*

Dixon argues that the firm is the primary provider of goods and services that individuals and households seek to purchase. In other words, firms are the “supplying organizations in the market” (Dixon, 1984, p. 12). Further, they tend to become specialized in performing some part of the process of satisfying consumer demand for goods and services (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989). In contrast to the micro/managerial approach to marketing which views the firm as a key driver of the marketing system (McCarthy, 1960), Dixon treats the firm as just one level in the marketing system (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989). Thus, the firm supplies consumers with goods and services, but it is not the major driver of the marketing system. Dixon (1984) recognizes the value of the firm for the functioning of the marketing system by viewing the firm as “an organized group” that can perform a task required by the system at a lower cost and more effectively than can “a number of unorganized individuals”. Hence, firms contribute to overall system efficiency.

#### *Marketing*

Marketing refers to the acts of buying and selling in a market (Dixon, 2002; Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989; Shaw and Dixon, 1980). It is an exchange activity which brings together suppliers and users of goods and services (Dixon, 1984; Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989; Preston, 1970). Hence, the market transaction is the *locus* of marketing activity. In other words, marketing brings transactions into existence, thus making possible the operation of the market (Shaw and Dixon, 1980; Preston, 1970; Dixon, 1990, 1984). Relying on early economic thought, Dixon (1990) also conceives of marketing as providing “bundles of utilities” to consumers and argues that this helps ensure consumer satisfaction.

Further, Dixon differentiates between a marketing activity and a marketing function. Specifically, he argues that a marketing activity becomes a marketing function only when it can be demonstrated that a given marketing activity is relevant to the marketing system (Dixon, 1984). So, a marketing activity becomes a marketing function only when it directly contributes to the operation of the marketing system and, hence, to societal well-being. For example, the acts of buying and selling are essentially marketing functions because they make possible the exchange of goods and services and facilitate the functioning of the market, one of the core elements of the marketing system. In contrast, credit provision, or financing (Weld, 1917; Cherington, 1920), may not be a marketing function, especially in a barter economy where there is no actual monetary exchange between buyers and sellers. The same would apply for standardizing (Vanderblue, 1921; Carver, 1917) in economies where goods are separated into standardized weights and measures from the time they leave the factory to reach final consumers.

#### *Transactions and transvections*

Individual consumers, households, and firms meet to exchange goods and services by engaging in marketing activities. Numerous transactions thus emerge (Dixon, 1990; Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989). The focus, from a systems perspective, is on a system

of transactions rather than on individual exchanges (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989; Mittelstaedt *et al.*, 2006), referred to as a transvection (Alderson, 1965; Alderson and Martin, 1965). That is the series of transactions created as products move from a manufacturer to final consumers through the channel of distribution (Alderson, 1965; Alderson and Martin, 1965). In this sense, a transvection is the outcome of a series of transactions (Alderson and Martin, 1965; Alderson, 1965; Shaw and Dixon, 1980). Dixon identifies three systems of transactions, or transvections:

- (1) The system of transvections that links all the production stages involved in supplying a good or service, from the original source of supply to final demand; (2) the system of transvections that links all producers at a particular stage of production of a good or service to an adjacent production stage, and (3) the system of transvections involved in supplying the assortment of goods and services required by a producer or a household (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989, p. 373).

According to Dixon, the first system of transactions is concerned primarily with the exchange of information among suppliers of goods and services as well as between suppliers and consumers. The second system of transactions leads to the transformation of materials and services in form, time, and place. It is thus responsible for the physical distribution of goods or services from manufacturers to final users as well as for the physical movement of the parties involved in a given transaction. The third system of transactions is primarily concerned with the transfer of ownership of goods and services from supplying organizations to households (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989).

Transactions and transvections make possible the division of labor within the marketing system because the parties taking part are differentiated based on the functions they perform (Dixon, 1990, 2002; Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989). That is, each participant in a transaction is responsible for carrying out a particular task, for which it has developed proficiency and which is necessary for completing the transaction. For example, the seller is responsible for selling and the transporter for transporting goods from points of production to points of consumption. However, in some cases, the same party may perform several closely related functions, such as storage and transportation, in order to achieve economies of scope (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1986).

### *The market*

As buyers and sellers interact and engage in transactions, their behavior is influenced by the behavior of other market participants (Dixon, 2002). Consequently, an institution regulating the behavior of different parties in a transaction is needed in order to ensure the effective operation of the marketing system. This institution, called the market, “arises not from conscious deliberation, but from the unintended consequences of individual decisions” (Dixon, 1984, 2002, p. 743; Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989).

Essentially, the market is viewed as a social institution that has three primary functions. First, it makes possible the physical supply of goods from sellers to buyers (Dixon, 1995, 2002). Second, it allows for information gathering. That is, buyers are able to obtain information regarding various products available for purchase while sellers are able to learn about buyers’ needs and preferences (Dixon, 2002). Third, the market plays an important role in demand stimulation. Specifically, the demand stimulation function of the market leads to job creation, which in turn positively affects consumer income and, ultimately, consumer spending (Dixon, 2002).

### *The marketing system*

The marketing system represents the combination of consumers, households, firms, marketing, transactions and transvections, and markets in any given society (Dixon, 2002; Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989). In defining the marketing system, Dixon employs Boulding's general systems theory (GST), which not only assumes that the whole is more than the sum of its independent parts, but also considers systems of relationships among system elements (Boulding, 1956). In other words, all components of the marketing system are interrelated, which means that the marketing system is an integrated whole fulfilling an essential function in society (Dixon, 1984, 1967a; Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989; Shaw, 1995; Shaw and Jones, 2005).

Further, GST is concerned with understanding the dynamic processes taking place within the system and the outcomes of the interactions among the various constituents of the system. Therefore, institutions from the GST perspective undergo constant modifications "in response to feedback from social interaction" (Dixon, 1984, p. 8). This means that the marketing system grows, adapts, and evolves over time in order to accommodate the behavioral changes of system constituents (Dixon, 1984, 2002; Layton, 2009). Hence, the two-way interaction between marketing and society stays at the core of the systems approach to the study of marketing (Dixon, 1984; Dixon and Polyakov, 1997; Layton, 2007; Fisk, 1982).

### *Material satisfaction*

Material satisfaction is the output of the marketing system (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989). Hence, material satisfaction is necessary if the marketing system is to adequately fulfill its role within a given society (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989). Specifically, consumers and households rely on the marketing system for acquiring the right kinds of product assortments which leads to utility gains. Although consumers and households may not always be able to maximize their utility, they are able to approach it, thanks to the form, time, and place utilities the marketing system provides.

### **Dixonian perspective of the social system**

As mentioned, most of Dixon's work seeks to examine the interaction between the marketing system and the social system within which marketing takes place. Hence, we next discuss the three major components of the social system as depicted in numerous articles written by Dixon and his co-authors.

### *Social environment*

The social environment comprises "other" social systems such as the economic and political system (Dixon, 1984). Only through interaction with these other systems can the social system satisfy its "functional requisites," defined as adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance. Adaptation refers to the relationship between the social system and its physical environment. Specifically, the economic system, which represents one of many other social systems, provides the means and resources that help the social system adapt to its environment and, ultimately, meet system requirements (Dixon, 1984). Goal attainment refers to relationship continuance with other social systems. Specifically, it is argued that the political system plays an important role in preserving the social system from potential external threats and, so, contributes to goal attainment. Integration takes place within the social system itself. In particular, as various

members of the social system are responsible for carrying out specific tasks, communication and coordination within the system are necessary in order to avoid role expectation and role performance discrepancies (Dixon, 1984, 1967b; Shaw and Dixon, 1980). Finally, pattern maintenance is concerned with ensuring system conformity with cultural norms and values. So, mechanisms that motivate social system members to respect and comply with these norms and values as well as sanctions for those who fail to abide by widely accepted cultural prescriptions should be put in place (Dixon, 1984).

### *Cultural environment*

The cultural environment reflects a society's way of life, beliefs, and norms of behavior (Dixon, 1984). Dixon actually compares the relationship between the cultural environment and the social system to that between personality and an individual. In other words, just as an individual's actions and lifestyle are largely determined by her personality, so the attitudes and behavior of social system members are affected by their culture. The cultural environment also provides society with some guidelines as to what objects can be used, enjoyed, or disposed of (Dixon, 1984). It thus influences consumers' shopping behavior and product preferences (Dixon and McLaughlin, 1971). Moreover, institutions of private property and contract, which are essential for the successful completion of market transactions involving the transfer of title from sellers to buyers, are influenced by the cultural environment because culture serves as the foundation for the establishment of these institutions (Dixon, 1984). Hence, the cultural environment is one of the most fundamental components of the social system and should be given particular attention by scholars studying the marketing system.

### *Material environment*

The material environment, also referred to as the physical environment, is a major supplier of material resources to societal members. In fact, in order for materials to become a resource, they should be considered as relevant to the requirements of the social system (Dixon, 1984). Once acquired, material resources are utilized as inputs in the manufacturing process and are subsequently transformed into goods or services that have some form, time, and place utility for consumers.

### *Societal functions of marketing and corresponding marketing flows*

As the marketing system interacts with the social system, it fulfills three important societal functions (Dixon, 1984):

- (1) a social environment function;
- (2) a cultural environment function; and
- (3) a material environment function.

Essentially, these functions are carried out by a corresponding marketing subsystem (Dixon, 1984):

- the contactual subsystem;
- the contractual subsystem; and
- the corporeal, or material transformation, subsystem.

Each marketing subsystem in turn plays an important role in linking buyers and sellers in the market (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1989). Further, the output of the three subsystems involves “a movement of some kind” and, hence, it can be conceived as a “flow” (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1982, 1989). Thus, three fundamental marketing flows emerge in the marketing system (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1982, 1989):

- (1) the contactual flow;
- (2) the contractual flow; and
- (3) the corporeal, or material transformation flow.

#### *The contactual flow*

The contactual flow takes place within the social environment of the social system and it is concerned with information dissemination (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1982, 1989; Dixon, 1984). Specifically, communication helps bring the members of the social environment together. So, if a transaction is to take place, the parties involved should constantly communicate with one another. One of the functions of marketing is to make possible interaction between buyers and sellers. In other words, the marketing system contributes to the social environment by allowing the participants in a transaction to establish contact and to exchange necessary information (Dixon, 1971, 1984; Dixon and Wilkinson, 1982, 1989).

#### *The contractual flow*

The contractual flow takes place within the cultural environment of the social system and it is concerned with negotiation and “cultural imperatives” (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1982, 1989; Dixon, 1984). As argued, culture determines the behavior of societal members. Further, market transactions require suppliers to transfer the title of a good or a service to buyers. The specific way in which title is transferred in a market exchange is culturally embedded and the marketing system contributes to the social system by enforcing the commonly agreed upon rights of private property and contract in a given society (Dixon, 1984).

#### *The corporeal (material transformation) flow*

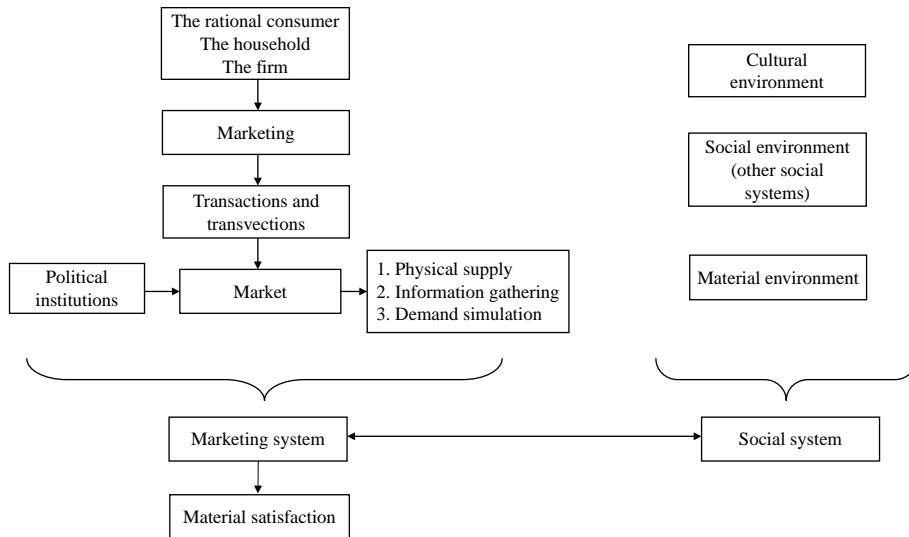
The corporeal flow, also referred to as material transformation flow, is fundamental for the material environment of the social system and it is concerned with transforming a given material input in form, time, and place (Dixon and Wilkinson, 1982, 1989; Dixon, 1984). The resources found in the material environment serve as inputs in the production process and are ultimately turned into outputs designed to satisfy consumer needs and wants. However, these resources change over time and differ across social systems. Consequently, the role of the marketing system is to adapt to the peculiarities of the material environment and assist in the generation of goods and services desired by societal members (Dixon, 1984).

### **Overview of the Dixonian systems perspective of marketing**

Figure 1 shows the Dixonian systems perspective of marketing based on our interpretation of Dixon’s work. The marketing system shown on the left-hand side at the bottom of the figure is comprised of six elements:

- (1) the rational consumer;
- (2) the household;





**Figure 1.**  
Dixonian systems  
perspective of marketing

- (3) the firm;
- (4) marketing;
- (5) transactions and transvections; and
- (6) the market.

At the top of Figure 1, the first three components of the marketing system are shown:

- (1) the rational consumer;
- (2) the household; and
- (3) the firm.

As buyers and sellers meet to exchange goods and services, they engage in marketing, which leads to the emergence of transactions and transvections. Transactions and transvections in turn give rise to the market. We pointed out that Dixon argues that political institutions should provide support to the market institution to ensure its proper functioning. This is shown by the box labeled “political institutions” which is connected to the box labeled “market” with a one-headed arrow. The market also serves three primary functions:

- (1) physical supply;
- (2) information gathering; and
- (3) demand stimulation.

Hence, the box labeled “market” is connected to the box listing these three functions with a one-headed arrow. Material satisfaction is the output of the marketing system. Additionally, the social system shown on the right-hand side at the bottom of Figure 1 consists of three core components:

- (1) the cultural environment;
- (2) the social environment (or other social systems such as the economic and political systems); and
- (3) the material environment.

Finally, the marketing system is not only affected by, but also affects the social system and the institutions comprising it. This means that the marketing system brings about change (Dixon, 1984). Hence, the marketing functions that need to be performed in order to satisfy societal needs change over time. The two-way interaction between the marketing system and the social system is what allows the marketing system to adjust and, ultimately, fulfill important societal functions whose purpose is to satisfy “the functional requisites of society” (Dixon, 1984). This is depicted by the two-headed arrow connecting the boxes labeled “marketing system” and “social system.”

### **The Dixonian systems perspective of marketing and Dixon’s research**

Dixon’s “macro,” or systems, view of marketing is reflected in his numerous articles, books, and book chapters. This view has influenced his well-known research on gasoline distribution in the USA and the UK, as well as the operation of the petrol industry and its impact on societal welfare in the two countries (Dixon, 1963, 1965, 1966, 1967c, 1969, 1997). Dixon has been particularly interested in evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of gasoline distribution. Although seemingly contrary to his claim that the political system should place certain limits on the market (Dixon, 1990), Dixon calls for minimum government intervention in the petrol industry because he believes that the market is the best predictor of the number and capacity utilization of gas stations (Dixon, 1969). He argues that, when given more flexibility, firms are generally better able to adapt to changing environmental conditions, which in turn leads to improved distributive efficiency and effectiveness and, hence, greater societal benefits (Dixon, 1963, 1967c, 1997; Dixon and Wagar, 1973).

Dixon has also examined the interaction between marketing and society across time (Dixon, 1998; Dixon and Polyakov, 1997). For example, he points to some of the major factors that served as the foundation of Russia and that helped integrate Russia into the rest of the world (Dixon, 1998). Dixon (1998) argues that “the economic and political strength of the Kievan state [Russia] depended on the control of markets, the routes to these markets, and agreements with trading partners”. He thus conceives of merchants and the development of international distributive systems as playing an instrumental role in the establishment of Russia as a nation.

Dixon has also evaluated the impact of potential discrimination against consumers inhabiting poor neighborhoods by larger chain stores as well as consumers’ shopping behavior on the food prices they pay (Dixon, 1971; Dixon and McLaughlin, 1971). In line with his marketing systems paradigm, Dixon once again studies the mechanisms through which marketing and society interact to affect societal welfare.

Considering the inefficiencies of centrally planned economies, Dixon and Polyakov (1997) offer an interesting perspective on quality of life in Russia between the end of the Stalinist era in 1953 and the years immediately following the fall of Communism in the nation in 1989. More specifically, the authors argue that although during the socialist era the Russian Government made attempts to modernize the marketing system and improve product quality, this initiative further worsened consumer well-being

due to great demand and supply side disparities. Essentially, this was a result of increased government control over the market, which proved to further undermine the proper functioning of the economic system. Even after the establishment of a market economy in Russia, the government failed to implement proper reforms in order to achieve stable economic growth. Additionally, while consumers were able to choose among a greater variety of products, they lacked the financial resources to purchase even bare necessities. This negatively affected the quality of life in the country. Thus, Dixon and Polyakov attribute social welfare deterioration during the early transition years in Russia to the improper operation of the marketing system which was a consequence of the failure of the political institutions to implement adequate economic policies.

### Conclusion

The four Ps, or marketing mix paradigm, has permeated the study of marketing as we know it today and has become the established framework in the discipline. In this paradigm, marketing is viewed essentially as a functional area of business. It is the responsibility of marketing managers to analyze the external environment in an attempt to better understand and satisfy consumer needs, tastes, and preferences. The four Ps of product, price, promotion, and place strategies are then adjusted or mixed in an attempt to develop a marketing mix that is optimized to meet the demands of the target market.

Dixon's view of marketing represents a radical departure from this micro/managerial marketing mix paradigm. Instead, Dixon takes a macro and systems view of marketing. He conceives of marketing as fulfilling an important societal function which provides benefits to society as a whole, not just to business entities and narrowly defined target markets. Dixon focused on the marketing system, its role in society, and the two-way interaction between marketing and society (Dixon, 1998, 1984, 1995; Dixon and Polyakov, 1997). This is what we refer to here as the Dixonian systems perspective of marketing. Specifically, the marketing system is comprised of six components:

- (1) the rational consumer;
- (2) the household;
- (3) the firm;
- (4) marketing;
- (5) transactions and transvections; and
- (6) the market.

Material satisfaction is the outcome of the marketing system. In order to adequately fulfill its role within a given society, the marketing system is in constant contact with the social system, which consists of:

- the social environment;
- the cultural environment; and
- the material environment.

Three societal functions of marketing emerge as a result of this marketing system/social system interaction:

- (1) a social environment function;
- (2) a cultural environment function; and
- (3) a material environment function.

Each one of these functions corresponds to one of the three fundamental marketing flows that emerge to facilitate market transactions:

- (1) the contactual flow;
- (2) the contractual flow; and
- (3) the corporeal, or material satisfaction flow, respectively.

Essentially, these flows provide the mechanisms which make possible the interaction between the marketing system and the social system.

Our interpretation of Dixon's ideas about marketing which we refer to as the Dixonian systems perspective of marketing is not presented here as a superior view of marketing compared to the widely received marketing mix paradigm. Rather, it is offered in the context of an interesting alternative perspective of marketing, which, as demonstrated in Dixon's own research on petrol marketing, food pricing in poor neighborhoods, and Russia, can provide ideas and insights about marketing that are not likely to emerge from the popular, but narrowly focused marketing mix paradigm.

Dixon's perspective can be particularly useful for scholars interested in studying broader marketing issues such as the impact of the marketing system on economic development, the ability of the marketing system to adequately satisfy food consumption needs of people in less-developed countries, and the influence of governmental policies (i.e. antitrust regulations, consumer protection laws) on the effective operation of the marketing system in a given country. Recently, there has been a call for papers addressing such macromarketing issues and "major societal concerns" (Reibstein *et al.*, 2009; Shapiro *et al.*, 2009). So, the Dixonian systems perspective of marketing can serve as the underlying conceptual framework for researchers eager to explore such research topics.

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