

The Social Disorder of the Broadened Concept of Marketing*

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Recently, the controversy concerning the scope of marketing has abated somewhat as growing numbers of marketers have come to accept the broadened concept of marketing. For example:

- (a) Hunt has been recognized (with the 1976 Harold H. Maynard Award) for his classificational schema—the Three Dycotomies Model—which positions the discipline as having macro-micro, positive-normative and profit-nonprofit dimensions (17).
- (b) Shuptrine and Osmanski have traced the meaning of marketing to its present expanded domain (42).
- (c) Nickels has found that most marketing educators believe marketing appropriately includes numerous nonbusiness activities (34).
- (d) Takas, a businessman, has written that increasingly broadened horizons for the marketing practitioner are inevitable (48).

In short, broadened marketing is almost a *fait accompli*, explained in most recent textbooks as being rooted in the generic concept of *exchange*—the premise initially advanced by Kotler and Levy (21,23,28). The contemporary view of marketing therefore goes far beyond the traditional conception, articulated by Luck and others which held marketing to involve *business* activities central to *market* transactions (29,30). In contrast, the essence of broadened marketing concerns any free exchange

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between two parties and holds that "marketing is specifically concerned with how transactions are created, stimulated, facilitated and valued" (22).

Given the emerging consensus about the nature of marketing, this article analyzes the broadened concept of marketing in terms of its implications for social order. The authors maintain the widespread acceptance and practice of broadened marketing has the potential to diminish social order and ultimately damage the reputation of the discipline of marketing. This is not to say broadened marketing will undermine the entire social fabric. Rather, there are certain marketing-like practices which are occurring with growing frequency in the society. They may also bring about some major changes. The purpose of this paper is to pinpoint their nature and to argue that from the viewpoint of the marketing professional they are best *not* defined as *marketing*. By examining broadened marketing from the perspective of social order, some needed theoretical support is also provided for a recent article by Arndt which questions the expansion of marketing (2). Further, some specific reservations are added to those initially expressed by Tucker (51).

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL ORDER IN SOCIETY

Social order refers to the long run homeostasis which must exist between social phenomena—ideas, practices, organizations—and the society of which they are part. When a phenomenon has social order it is unambiguous; that is, it is widely recognized as having a defined place, role or function in the society (based on 11,13,50). In fact, the general concept of order is fundamental to the maintenance of any system. The behavior of celestial bodies is ordered by the principles of physics. The plant and animal kingdom possess a definite ecological order (20). Human behavior too seems to be ordered by the end result of a chain of concepts including values, attitudes, culture, previous behavior and other causal factors, although the precise interrelationship of these elements has yet to be discovered (26,53). Order is essential to society (13).

What are the tenets of social order? Volumes have been written on this topic, but some generalizations have emerged (20). At the most fundamental level, *language serves to transmit order*. That is, order is implicit in the definitions of the words with which we choose to communicate. Segerstedt said it well: "When a word is defined, the meaning of the word is stated. Definitions of scientific terms consequently must be explanations

of the meanings of terms. . .we must remember that a word has meaning only in a language system—people using that language behave in a certain way toward the object, as the object is perceived as equipped with certain properties” (40). The point is that human behavior, and therefore social order, is determined by the meaning and properties of the concept under scrutiny and that as one learns a concept’s meaning, his behavior is likely to reflect that interpretation (8). Thus, social order is partially dependent upon an existing language system which is composed of concepts having precise definitions. Simply put, stable social systems—those having social order—place a premium upon assuring that communication in the system is unambiguous.

The above point, that precise meaning is the highest form of ordering (20), is more than just an arcane pontification. For example, some economists argue that one major reason why it is so difficult to convince the general public that the nation should switch from a “growth” to a “steady-state” economy is because of the positive connotation of the term “growth” (7). Similarly, one reason it has taken so long to repeal “fair trade” laws (resale price maintenance) is that it was psychologically difficult for many individuals to take a position against something so beneficial sounding as “fair trade.” In summary, while disorderliness or ambiguity may provide satisfaction, pleasure and interest in the realm of art, literature or the cinema, major scientific or social concepts (*e.g. velocity, democracy, marketing*) demand precise definitions for the purpose of enhancing social order.

On a more pragmatic level, order in the society is dependent upon the *efficient interaction of social institutions*. Talcott Parsons, the eminent sociologist, was an eloquent spokesman for this point of view. His views have received wide support (18, 32, 43, 44, 55). Parsons identified four institutional functions which were central in the maintenance of social order (35, 36).

- (1) Goals had to be set and institutions (such as government) had to be formulated in order to attain them.
- (2) Values inherent in the society had to be maintained and perpetuated. Institutions such as religious organizations, universities and the family provided this needed “pattern maintenance.”
- (3) An *integrative* function which would systematically allocate the society’s benefits among the public was necessary. Traditionally, this meant some type of judicial institution.

- (4) An adaptive function (i.e., an *economic* institution) to efficiently manage the social system's resources was essential.

Taken together, these four requirements suggest that social order is preserved by institutional direction and control over certain essential functions. Harmonious interactions of necessary institutions each performing required functions produce social order (54, 15).

Parsons and others have also warned that for such social systems to be responsive to the needs and welfare of its members, *institutional power and responsibility* had to be *balanced* (36, 12). In other words, the accountability for particular actions taken in a social system falls to those having power to cause the actions to be initiated. As one philosopher put it: "The demand of the law in a well ordered society is that responsibility shall lie where the power of decision lies. Where that demand is met, men have legal order; where it is not, they have only the illusion of one" (49). Writers have also noted that in the long run, social systems where power and responsibility are not in balance will eventually be shaken, then reconstituted, and will move to equilibrium (10). In other words, power and responsibility are fastened together, in the long run, by an iron law.

In summary then, social order is based upon and depends on the following:

- (1) **Definitional specificity:** definitions in the language system which clearly specify the nature (meaning) of a concept and communicate the activities within its scope;
- (2) **Institutional specialization:** the division of essential tasks among appropriate institutions—including institutions which provide the *adaptive* and *integrative* functions.
- (3) **Equated power and Responsibility:** social systems where the power and responsibility of institutions are in balance.

MARKETING'S TRADITIONAL ROLE IN SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Previous discussion has identified the economic function as one prerequisite in the orderly maintenance of a social system. That is, viable social systems require economic institutions to manage the development of their physical resources. This is what Parsons called the adaptive function.

Historically, the task of marketing has been to efficiently distribute economic goods and services throughout the country. Marketing has served primarily as a subsystem in the provision of this economic function. This view is consistent with the initial development of marketing as a formal field of study. It is rooted in the application of economics to the distributive process by institutional economists who believed this to be a neglected aspect of economic analysis (3). Over the years, the domain of marketing management has expanded in order to integrate marketing related factors more effectively into the firm, but it has, until recently, been limited to *managerial* considerations influencing *marketplace* transactions by businesses. The expansion of marketing which had occurred until recently, was premised on the notion that if marketing were more integrated in the thinking of the firm (e.g., the marketing concept, marketing research), the distribution of goods and services would be more efficient.

The question which must be raised is: has the historical concept of marketing been consistent with social order and does the broadened marketing concept threaten to diminish social order?

TRADITIONAL AND BROADENED MARKETING COMPARED

To address this issue it becomes **necessary** to evaluate both the traditional and broadened concepts of **marketing** with respect to their impact on the three dimensions of social order.

Definitional Specificity

Denotatively, traditional marketing is perhaps best represented by the definition of marketing sanctioned by the American Marketing Association. It states that marketing is "the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services by producers to consumers" (7). What are the conceptual implications of this definition? First, the definition serves to circumscribe the nature of marketing to managerial activities stemming from market transactions (producer/middleman/consumer exchange). Second, the definition serves to limit the scope of marketing to the "profit sector" half of Hunt's classificational schema (17). In other words, marketing's purview is within the business system and consequently like the business system in total, is primarily a subsystem of the economic

function, although like any sophisticated subsystem, marketing draws some of its content from other basic fields. This traditional definition of marketing is forthright and unambiguous. It clearly communicates the jurisdiction of marketing. A manager knows that he cannot be doing "marketing" unless he is part of a business firm performing activities that facilitate economic transactions.

Broadened marketing, in contrast, suggests that marketing is a universal concept. Kotler says, "marketing is a human activity directed at satisfying human needs and wants" (22). All that is required for marketing to occur are two persons able to communicate and deliver, each having something of value to exchange freely. Staudt, Taylor and Bowersox state: "...there is a universality to the application of marketing functions wherever there is an interface" (45). Hunt has observed that a distinction between marketing and marketing-like activities must be considered trivial (17).

What are the implications of this broadened concept of marketing? First and foremost, it places diverse activities such as campaign speeches, marriage and vows and the solicitation of a prostitute in the domain of marketing (See Figure 1). Each of these situations meets Kotler's criteria for a marketing transaction. Exchange freely occurs between two parties—

Figure 1

A Sampling of Activities within the Domain of Broadened Marketing

- The exchange of wedding vows
- The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the U.S. and the Soviet Union
- Plea bargaining by an alleged felon turned State's witness
- The solicitation of a prostitute
- The Behavior Modification "chip system" in the State Mental Hospital
- A political candidate pledging labor reform in order to receive a union's endorsement
- A plenary indulgence granted by the Church in exchange for the performance of a novena
- A phone call
- The pass of a baton in an Olympic relay race
- The bidding process in a game of Bridge

each with something of value to deliver whether it be a political platform for a vote, fidelity for fidelity or money for sex. The *scope* of marketing is so extensive that it occurs almost everywhere, including such mundane instances as when a parent offers a child a cookie in exchange for good behavior. Thus, the *nature* of marketing conceivably involves the facilitation of activities such as political “stumping,” aspects of courtship, and even pimping. Everyone is a “marketer,” because virtually everyone engages in some social transactions. Social order is not served in that the definition of marketing is so broad as to render distinctions between marketing and any free mutual exchange among persons as meaningless. As Figure 1 suggests, current definitions of broadened marketing conceivably subsume a vast terrain of human interactions.

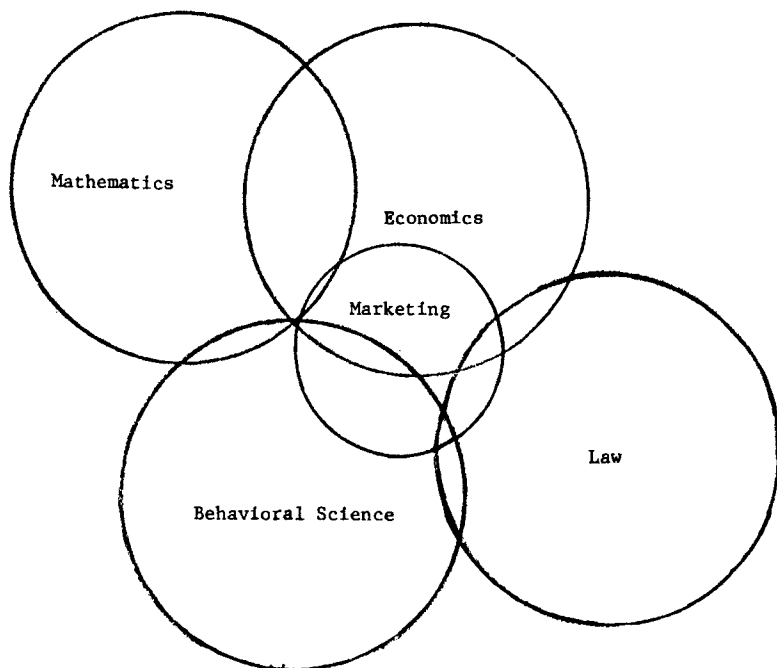
Institutional Specialization

Traditional marketing is consistent with social order in that it is clearly a subsystem of a necessary primary function (economics). Figure 2A is a depiction of the discipline of marketing as it has been traditionally conceived. It is basically applied economics but also borrows generously from the behavioral sciences, law and mathematics. The point is that since traditional marketing is primarily a subsystem of economics, we can rightfully look to *economic* criteria in order to assess whether traditional marketing is being conducted efficiently. In practice, this evaluation may be difficult and measures of marketing efficiency such as *value added* at the *macro* level and the *marketing audit* at the *micro* level, are demonstrably crude. Most experts agree that marketing managers need to make a greater commitment to refining these evaluative tools. Nevertheless, there is little debate that traditional marketing practices should be analyzed with respect to economic performance standards—subject of course to social constraints, such as the law, which are provided by the social system’s *integrative function* (to again use Parson’s terminology). Thus, the role of traditional marketing in a social system is ordered in that marketing practices are constrained by the actions of other institutions such as government, and the economic market place. In addition, marketing is evaluated by criteria stemming from the essential (adaptive) function of which it is a part—economics.

Broadened marketing on the other hand, as a universal concept, with its boundaries encompassing the vast terrain of human exchange does not suggest any specific evaluative mechanism. The broadened definition of

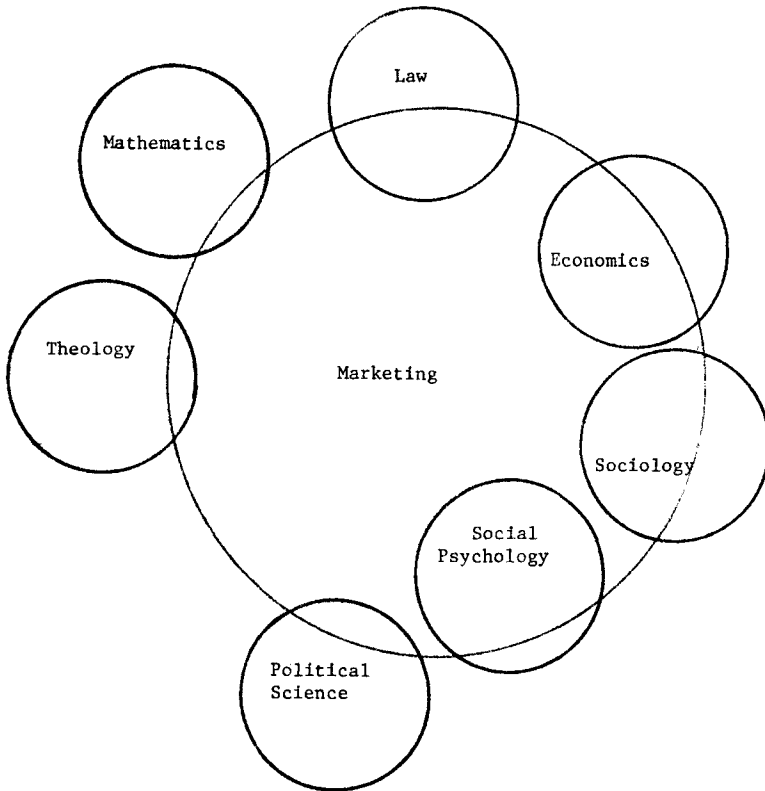
Figure 2A

One Perspective of the Composition of Traditional Marketing



marketing paints the field as a giant discipline which encompasses substantial portions of other areas of study (See Figure 2B). Clearly, economic criteria are inappropriate in examining the role of marketing in the diffusion of a political personality, a religious belief or a controversial social organization, since social consequences far outweigh any economic considerations. How then should such marketing practices be evaluated? Theoretically, any concept should be evaluated according to the criteria of the *primary* function of which it is part (25). That is, evaluational standards should be based upon the function or purpose the object of evaluation serves. For example, the actions of a politician are constrained by a code of behavior based upon the Constitution; if that most basic code is violated the individual can be removed (directly or indirectly) from power because his primary service function is not being properly discharged. The Watergate affair vividly demonstrates this.

Figure 2B

Broadened Marketing: A Perspective

Significantly, the broadened perspective of marketing does not define the discipline of marketing as a part of any social institution or primary social function. Rather, marketing is perceived as a fundamental human interaction itself. Traditional fields of business specialization such as accounting, finance, personnel and production management make no such

universal claims. Yet curiously, marketing, a field without trained specialists at the Ph.D. level until the 1940's, purports to be the fountainhead of a fundamental human activity not previously identified for purposes of analysis. Marketing alone, among the specializations in business, stipulates that its activity permeates basic human exchanges. Interestingly, few academics outside the field of marketing would recognize such universality. The public does not. The fact that only marketers assert this expanded view of their field could be dismissed as egotistic arrogance if not for a third disturbing factor. When the broadened concept of marketing is applied in various instances, power and responsibility are not in balance. This consideration is treated below.

Equated Power and Responsibility

Marketing as traditionally practiced has never been a bastion of ethical propriety (47). Theoretically, however, the checks and balances necessary to provide the impetus for equated power and responsibility are present. As historically conceived, marketing is part of the business system which in turn, is the major executing force of the economic function. The business system draws its license from an implicit "social contract" which exists between the business system and society (19, 46). This social contract is one of tradition and convention rather than one with is specified in writing. Society's benefit from the contract is that business system will provide the goods and services society needs. Marketing's major role in this delivery process was discussed earlier. Business' reward for providing this economic service is the potential of profit.

A major aspect of this business-society relationship is that society retains enough mechanisms (e.g., governmental action) to assure that the powerful actions of business are tempered by responsible behavior (15, 54). Society, through government, draws its ultimate justification as "controlling partner" from the words of the founding fathers which gave government the "right to regulate commerce" as specified in Article 1, Section 8 of the U. S. Constitution. Over time, the courts have held that this phrase gives society the ability to regulate business in the public interest in any manner it sees fit, subject to a proper legal procedure. In other words, social order is served because legal mechanisms exist to assure a balance of power and responsibility in business decisions. Marketing falls within this jurisdiction.

Other less specific mechanisms, beyond the law, are also operative to achieve a relatively close balance between marketing power and responsi-

bility. For example, in the largest corporations—and therefore those likely exercising the most power—the majority of the marketing executives have had training in the study of marketing. Thus, they bring to their job a degree of professionalism that formal study in marketing management and business administration instills. This professionalism, embodied partially in the marketing concept, as well as corporate codes of ethics and other industry standards for socially responsible behavior provide constraints which usually prevent gross power-responsibility imbalance.

However, in the broadened approach to marketing, a workable framework to insure that the balance of power and responsibility exists is very difficult to identify. When marketing is broadly defined few of the participants engaging in marketing have had formal training in the field of marketing and therefore lack the consequent professionalism this might instill. Even when professional marketers “practice” outside the business system, complications are likely. One aspect of the broadened perspective, social marketing (the marketing of people, organizations and ideas), serves to illustrate this point vividly (24).

Consider the broad application of sophisticated marketing methods to the dissemination of ethically charged ideas such as neofascism, euthanasia, pornographic entertainment, gay rights and other controversial concepts. The “marketing of ideas” is a major dimension of broadened marketing. Certainly the application of marketing-like analysis would make the presentation of such ideas more persuasive and palatable. Indeed the right to promulgate controversial ideas is protected in our society by the first amendment to the Constitution. The normative questions become: what responsibility do the marketers of these ideas bear if they are accepted by the general public as a result of the persuasive way marketing techniques permit them to be presented? What level of responsibility is it desirable for the marketers to assume?

Regarding the first question, marketers of social ideas have a convenient dodge to avoid assuming any responsibility. They can (and sometimes do) argue that they have simply helped a sender of a message more effectively “encode” his communication to his intended receivers by applying marketing expertise to a given situation. If society suffers because some members of the population accept a controversial and ultimately dysfunctional message, the marketer is not to blame since the only role served by marketing was to help the sender of a message exercise his right of free speech. Stated another way, marketing merely facilitated an intellectual exchange but in no way coerced the parties into a meeting of the minds.

This defense is unsatisfactory because it can be logically argued that the application of marketing techniques to a controversial situation provided the balance of communicative power to culminate a successful transaction. If no responsibility for subsequent events is accepted by the marketer in cases of broadened marketing, accountability breaks down and the power-responsibility equation is not in balance. It should be added, however, that in the long run the general public will perceive the power of marketing in contributing to the success of certain communication campaigns, and will call for marketers to be held proportionately responsible. This is the "iron law" alluded to earlier which balances power and responsibility.

It is also worth mentioning that some writers have noted that marketers selling traditional economic goods also attempt to avoid responsibility (6, 14). For example, Lavidge and others write that too many marketers ask regarding their product, "*Can it be sold?*" rather than "*Should it be sold?*" (29). It is true that among business marketers there are some crooks, pitchmen, hawkers and cheats. Nevertheless, the mechanisms to maintain social order are present because government can and does impose constraints on business practices. The advances of consumerism in the past fifteen years are testimony to this. However, when someone "markets" an idea, the first amendment limits the level of restraint which is possible (52).

BROADENED MARKETING AND THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

The continued application of systematic managerial thinking to situations outside the business sector is inevitable. Clearly, the methods of analysis used in management in general and marketing in particular can make a valuable contribution to the efficient operation of diverse activities such as political campaigns, hospitals, charitable organizations, performing arts companies and so forth. The current involvement of persons with formal training in marketing in these areas verifies the benefits which are possible. But the question at issue is whether such applications should be defined as marketing? That is, is it beneficial for the field of marketing to expand its scope beyond business activities facilitating economic transactions? Should the application of marketing-like methods and marketing-like thinking outside the business system be called "marketing"?

In our view, it should not. It is undesirable because the implications of the calculus discussed previously lead to the following observations:

- (a) Broadened marketing is defined so universally as to not suggest any functional standards by which its efficiency might be measured. Economic and legal criteria alone are definitely not a sufficient standard by which to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of marketing outside the business sector. In the realm of broadened marketing, judging what distinguishes “good” marketing from “bad” marketing in terms of social necessity or morality becomes as difficult as attempting to define the elusive “public good.”
- (b) Responsibility for the consequences of broadened marketing can be denied by arguing that marketing concerns itself with the exchange *process*, not the *content* of the exchange. This results in a situation where responsibility does not lie where the locus of power is to be found (i.e., with the marketing practitioner). Thus, the earlier discussed prerequisite of social order is undetermined.
- (c) If marketing practitioners choose to accept responsibility for their involvement outside the business sector, the field of marketing is claiming expertise in areas which exceed the scope of almost any other institution. Is marketing so basic and marketers so secure as to desire this responsibility? If marketing denies responsibility for its action when problems and abuses occur, the public will eventually perceive the shaping role of marketing in the social arena *and severely regulate it*. Social complications caused by dysfunctional transactions will hurt the reputation of marketers in the eyes of the public. Many bright young persons may shy away from careers in marketing. Furthermore, any regulations generated to cope with *social* marketing or other forms of broadened marketing will likely be applied to traditional marketing as well. Alternatively, if the field of marketing succeeds in convincing the public that the domain of marketing rightly involves all transactions, the discipline of marketing is asking to play the role of a symbolic Atlas with the weight of the world upon its theoretical shoulders.

**AN ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO:
DISORDER → SOCIAL INTERVENTION → SOCIAL ORDER**

Broadened marketing seems destined to be increasingly accepted by marketing professionals as specifying the “true” domain of the field of marketing. Is it irrevocable then that events must culminate in the severe regulation of marketing practices suggested earlier? Will marketing professionals be discredited in the public’s eyes due to abuses in the practice of social marketing? Must the “social disorder” scenario detailed above inevitably occur? Probably. But not necessarily, for the following reason.

Much of the previous analysis is based upon Parsonian structural sociology (35, 36, 37). A common general criticism of this school of thought has been its tendency toward equilibrium (or static) analysis without sufficient concern for the dynamics of social change (4, 5, 31, 39). Thus, while it can be argued (as was done above) that broadened marketing does not meet Parson’s criteria of social order thereby causing dysfunctions for marketing and society to occur, an alternative and more dynamic interpretation of recent events is also possible.

Initially, the widespread application of broadened marketing may cause some problems and negative reactions as posited in this paper. But in the main, the public may come to believe that the application of marketing methods to public’s health care, culture, social organizations and other nontraditional areas holds more social benefits than costs. Consequently, policy makers and other decision makers could take rapid steps to intervene upon the budding social disorders wrought by broadened marketing. Specifically, various social interventions may be used to (a) help balance power and responsibility when broadened marketing, especially social marketing is practiced; (b) assure the presence of specialized institutions (e.g. public review boards) to oversee broadened marketing; (c) resolve the lack of definitional specificity associated with broadened marketing.

In short, such a series of social interventions suggests that the evolution of broadened marketing might be more dynamic than the Parsonian framework would predict. In particular, while broadened marketing may be viewed as causing some momentary disturbances in the social system (disorder), the society may be flexible enough to interject social mechanisms (such as requiring increased professionalism by marketers) which will modify the existing state of affairs and culminate in a restored social order. This dynamic interpretation of events is no doubt forecast by some members of the marketing profession. However if it is to materialize, considerable thought must be given *now* to the nature of these social interventions.

Failing this, the social disorder predicted by the Parsonian framework may be unerringly accurate.

CONCLUSION

Every branch of specialists tends to see the world from its own perspective and it is a natural manifestation of the self to do so. Thus, marketers wish to see the domain of marketing as including all human transactions. In doing so, the principles of social order are violated. Marketing becomes the ultimate illustration of empire building. As it is presently evolving, marketing is defined so broadly as to barely differentiate it from a multiplicity of human behaviors; it circumscribes so large a terrain as to place it beyond the perimeter of any of the traditional functions in a social system; and it is claimed to be so applicable and universal as to aspire to a role in the social system where the power of the discipline could be so great that it is tempting to avoid responsibility for some of the social changes it could cause. If abuses in the practice of broadened marketing occur, the reputation of marketing practitioners will steadily erode in the eyes of the public.

Marketers should take enough pride in the scope of traditional marketing. Marketing is a powerful force in society and essential to the business system. Traditional marketing bears an important responsibility in the social system. The activities of traditional marketing are not narrow. Marketers use the tools of classical economics, mathematics, social science and many other fields of study to bring about the essential and efficient exchange of goods and services. Just as marketing borrows concepts from other disciplines and applies them to its task, marketing perspectives and methods can be borrowed fruitfully by non-profit organizations and individuals! But before we place these applications within the strict domain of marketing and call them our children, the discipline of marketing should think long and carefully about what is required of a responsible parent.

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