

MARKETING TEXTBOOKS IN EMERGING MARKETS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF INDIAN ADAPTATIONS OF US TEXTBOOKS

Avinash G. Mulky, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore

Abstract

Although there has been research on textbooks used in marketing, there is a dearth of research on marketing textbooks in the context of emerging markets. The aim of this exploratory study is to examine textbooks assigned for Marketing courses in MBA programs in India, evaluate their readability, analyze the extent of Indian content in the books and understand student perceptions about the textbooks.

Extant research on marketing textbooks covers several streams such as textbook selection and adoption process (Elbeck et al, 2009; Lowry & Moser, 1995; Smith & Muller, 1998); inquiries about the presence of specific topics in textbooks (Orsini, 1988; Saegert & Fennell, 1991); comparative analysis of textbooks (Backhaus, Mell & Sabel, 2007; Finn, 1985); readability (Shuptrine and Lichtenstein, 1985; Backhaus, Mell & Sabel, 2007) and students' perceptions of textbooks (Unni, 2005; Rich, Powers & Powell, 1988; Vafeas, 2013). There is no prior research about marketing textbooks used in emerging markets. Informal observations at Indian business schools indicate that publishers use three approaches for providing textbooks: i) printing the original US textbook in India and offering it at an affordable price ii) developing an India specific "adaptation" of the US textbook by using a local co-author for incorporating local content and iii) publishing a new textbook written by a local author.

This paper focuses on the second category—"Indian adaptations" of US marketing textbooks. The study was carried out at a leading business school in India which is ranked among the top three schools in the country. The specific research questions are: a) How is adaptation realized—what elements of the book are "adapted"? b) What is the extent of local content in the adapted book? c) What are the readability levels of Indian adaptations? d) How do students perceive these Indian adaptations?

Content analysis was used for exploring the first two research questions. The content analysis process involved examining each textbook, counting the number of figures, advertisements, pictures, tables, cases and net pages, identifying the local content in each element, and calculating the proportion of local material for each element. For evaluating local content in text material, a simple rule was used -if at least three lines of Indian material were noticed on the page, that page was classified as containing Indian material. Readability was evaluated using the readability statistics facility in Microsoft word. Following Shuptrine and Lichtenstein (1985), the total text pages in the textbook were divided into five strata and a random page was selected from each strata. A continuous passage of approximately 100 words was chosen from the randomly selected page in each stratum. The five samples were consolidated the total sample of approximately 500 words was analyzed using Microsoft Word's readability facility. Microsoft Word provides two readability metrics, Flesch Reading Ease (FRE) and Flesch-Kincaid Grade level (FKGL). The FRE is a number between 1 and 100, higher numbers indicate easier readability. The FKGL number corresponds to the grade level (US grades) for which the book is appropriate. Student perceptions, attitudes and textbook reading behavior were examined using depth interviews of students of the two year full-time MBA program. Four first year MBA students and four second year students were interviewed. The interviews lasted between 30 to 40 minutes. Audio recordings of the interviews were made and transcripts were prepared.

Results

Of the twelve marketing courses offered at the school, ten courses have assigned textbooks. Three textbooks are Indian editions of US books (no Indian content); six books are Indian adaptations of US textbooks with varying degrees of Indian content; and one is an Indian textbook written specifically for the Indian market. Four of the six Indian adaptations of US textbooks include case studies. In these four books, the number of cases ranges from 6 to 42 per book. Very few Indian cases have been included and the proportion of Indian cases is just 8.2%. The Indian content in figures and tables in the textbooks is even lower. The number of figures per textbooks range from 49 to 156. The average percentage of figures with Indian content is just 4.4% (range of 0 to 17.6%). The number of tables per book ranges from 0 to 126. The average percentage of tables with Indian content is 6.1% (range 0 to 13.4%). Three of the books carried 1 to 3 advertisements each, while the remaining three books carried from 24 to 104 ads each. On the average, the proportion of Indian advertisements was 39.9%. Except one book which had just one picture, the others had between 14 and 164 pictures per book. On the average, the proportion of Indian pictures 53.8%. This analysis indicates that the Indian content in the textbook elements was mainly in the form of pictures and advertisements and Indian content was quite low in cases, figures and tables.

With respect to the text pages, the number of net text pages (excluding summary, assignments & references) in the adapted textbooks ranges from 390 to 765 per book. The average proportion of pages with Indian content was 19.8%. Indian content in text pages varied from a low of 9 % in the retailing textbook (Levy, Weitz & Pandit, 2012) to a high of 43% in the core marketing textbook (Kotler *et al.*, 2013). The Indian content included facts about India; information relating to firms operating in India; marketing initiatives in India; and specific material about India (rural market; retail in India; Indian consumers etc.). Readability of the six Indian adaptations was measured using the Flesch Reading Ease (FRE) and Flesch Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL) metrics. The Flesch Reading Ease ranged from 30.6 (for Marketing Management by Kotler *et al.*, 2013) to 41.2 (for Consumer Behavior by Schiffman, Wisenbelt & Kumar, 2014). The Flesch Kincaid Grade Level ranged from 12.2 for Retailing Management (Levy, Weitz & Pandit, 2012) to 13.8 for Marketing Management (Kotler *et al.*, 2013).

The depth interviews with students revealed that there was consensus about the relevance of textbooks in achieving learning goals. One student indicated that “the textbook is important for learning marketing”. Another mentioned that “One needs to read the textbook to understand the difference between segmentation, targeting and positioning”. Students seem to prefer Indian adaptations of textbooks compared to entirely international books or entirely Indian books. One of the students mentioned that “I have read both the American and Indian version of the book. I could not connect with most of the American examples, but the Indian adaptation has been very useful.” With respect to one of the textbooks that had very little Indian content, another student indicated “the examples in this book are very few, more Indian content would have been nice.”

Discussion

Adaptation of US textbooks appears to be a popular method of providing affordable and attractive textbooks in emerging markets like India. Adaptation is advantageous compared to promoting local editions of US textbooks or textbooks written by entirely by local authors. Student interest can be enhanced if there is local content in a textbook written by U.S. authors. Moreover, students will be able to relate to the textbook better if there is local material along with US and international material. Adaptations also score over local textbooks because they leverage the brand equity of the US authors who may be authorities in the field.

One of the interesting findings in this study was that the adaptation strategy varied significantly across the six textbooks reviewed. One possible reason for the variation in Indian content

across textbooks could be that some of the Indian co-authors have had more leeway in incorporating local content and in rewriting the US material.

The Flesch reading ease metrics for the six adapted textbooks lie between 29.2 and 41.2 with an average of 35.7. The FKGL figures of the reviewed books ranged from 12.2 to 13.8 with an average of 13.1. The grade level may appear to be quite low when we consider that the textbooks are assigned at MBA level (above grade 16). Although most Indian graduate students are fluent in English, they usually converse with each other in local Indian languages. Hence the lower FKGL levels of the MBA course textbooks may be quite appropriate in India.

The depth interviews with students revealed that textbooks are considered valuable but are not read on a regular basis. Portions of the textbooks are generally read only before exams and the book serves mainly as an examination support item. This confirms the findings of the focus group research carried out by Vafeas (2013) among students in the UK. Textbooks with substantial Indian content are appreciated by Indian students. Indian content and examples help them to relate to the concepts better and enhances student understanding of the text material. Hence publishers and authors of adapted textbooks with low levels of Indian content may benefit from incorporating more Indian content in the future editions.

This study had a few limitations. The main limitation was that it was carried out at only one site. Future research should examine textbook usage at more schools in India. The student perspectives in this study were obtained using qualitative research. In future, quantitative research could be used to explore student perceptions and attitudes. Finally, this type of study can be carried out in other emerging markets like China and Brazil where there may be a need for not just adaptation, but also translation of textbooks.

References Available upon Request