

# DESIGNING MARKETING TEXTBOOKS FOR STUDENTS IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION

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## Abstract

Textbooks remain a central aspect of marketing education. Solomon's Consumer Behavior and Kotler and Associates' marketing management textbooks are standard issues in marketing courses, and organize a large body of marketing knowledge into a single compilation. Textbooks are designed to be students' primary source of information, and students can understand core concepts by reading the textbook, without having to consult alternative sources (Garner, Alexander, Gillingham, Kulikowich, & Brown, 1991).

## Introduction

There is evidence that students no longer regard marketing textbooks as primary educational resources. Researchers report an overall decline in reading compliance amongst students (Burchfield & Sappington, 2000). One study found that only 27% of students read textbooks on a regular basis (Clump, Bauer, & Bradley, 2004). Reading compliance drops even further when there are no assignments or tests attached to the reading. In certain instances, students do not purchase textbooks for courses (Sappington, Kinsey & Munsayac, 2002).

There are several explanations for low reading compliance. One perspective holds that contemporary students, dubbed "millennials," grew up with digital media and avoid traditional formats, such as printed textbooks (Tapscott, 2009). Additionally, millennials (versus previous generations) have shorter attention spans, a penchant to multi-task, and consume digital resources as alternates to textbooks (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Other reasons for low textbook use could also include lack of perceived value and price sensitivities (Podelefsky & Finkelstein 2006).

To market to millennials, publishers augment existing textbook offerings with digital accompaniments such as e-books, online course labs (e.g. MyMarketingLab), and CD/DVD-ROMs. These product offerings are not purely capitalistic; there is an altruistic aspect to digital formats. Research shows that the incorporation of interactive media in course preparation improves students' performance and soft communication skills (Kaplan, Piskin & Bol, 2010;

Stelzer, Galdding, Mestre, & Brookes, 2009). Students are more likely to adopt digital formats if motivated by instructors.

The premise of this research is that textbooks are still vital to marketing education. However, textbooks in their current forms do not fit students' flow of study, resulting in low reading compliance. In designing textbooks that deliver value to students, publishers need to re-evaluate the textbook's role in students' course preparation. This research will adopt a user-centered design approach to textbook redesign (Rosenthal & Capper, 2006). Based on study patterns of students, implications will be directed on how publishers, instructors and designers can re-design marketing textbooks to better meet the needs of students. The research questions in this paper include: 1) what is the role of the textbook in students' course preparations, 2) how do students use digital accompaniments, 3) what are students' preferred study practices, and based on these findings, 4) how can publishers redesign textbooks that deliver value to contemporary students.

To investigate these questions, the researcher embarked on a qualitative methodology. The researcher recruited eight undergraduate marketing students through purposive sampling. Two criteria were used to select participants: students had to have used textbooks in course preparations and must have had experience with digital formats. The main mode of data collection was long, semi-structured interviews lasting between 40 to 90 minutes (McCracken, 1988). Interview sessions started with grand tour questions, while subsequent questions focused on the role of textbooks in students' lives, impressions of digital accompaniments, their study habits, and the resources they used to succeed in course assignments and exams. Interviews were transcribed and subjected to the iterative stages of grounded theory data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

The results reveal important insights into the role of textbooks in students' lives, and student study practices. First, students use textbooks as a "secondary source" to reference marketing concepts. Students prefer to skim for key points in the textbook that they subsequently insert into assignments and notes; they do not read the full narratives. Furthermore, student usage of textbooks is characterized by a pulsing pattern that spikes at the beginning of the semester and the periods before a midterm; they do not regularly interact with the textbook.

Second, there is limited evidence that students use digital accompaniments, such as e-books, online labs or CD/DVD-ROMs. Students reported that digital formats require too much

time to access, such as loading a CD or logging into an online lab. Additionally, digital formats forced students to spend even more time sitting in front of a computer monitor. Finally, while digital formats are designed to be portable, many students do not feel comfortable taking their laptops and e-readers to the beach or on vacation because their electronic equipment may get sullied.

Third, the empirical investigation unpacks students' preferred study practices. Today's students are bricoleur learners, who reference marketing concepts from multiple sources including, but not limited to, PowerPoint slides, textbooks, lectures, Google, and fellow students. Additionally, students internalize course concepts through embodied cognition, such as repeatedly writing things down. Furthermore, students use visual cues such as bolded text, visual representations and white space to skim textbooks for relevant concepts.

The findings have important implications for textbook design and research. In developing textbook concepts, the researcher implemented user-centered design, a design philosophy that positions consumers as a source of product innovation (Rosenthal & Capper, 2006; Veryzer & deMozota, 2005). In other words, publishers could consider study practices in the development of textbooks to provide value to contemporary marketing students. There are three important insights to consider. First, publishers should acknowledge that textbooks are secondary resources that students access before exams to reference concepts. Second, textbooks are just one tool in the constellation of tools that students use to learn concepts. Third, textbooks should complement the study behaviors of students, such as skimming behavior and embodied cognition.

One possible design is a lightweight softcover book designed like a reference manual. Pages within the textbook concept are designed similar to PowerPoint slides. Each two-page spread features a large focal image. Bold headlines and visual cues guide the readers' eyes to definitions of marketing concepts and a concise example of the concept in a real world setting. The text is written in condensed fashion, with the use of bullet points whenever possible. The purposive use of white space is important to break up the text and provide a clean looking surface for the reader. Designated spaces encourage students to write down notes into the book. The textbook could be printed on inferior paper, to encourage students to write within them.

There are some notable limitations in this current study that could be addressed in the future. The researcher will increase the sample size to achieve validity and reliability in the data.

Emergent themes from a larger sample could result in more textbook concepts. Subsequent quantitative analyses (conjoint analysis, Fishbein model of attitudes) could be conducted to test students' preferences towards these textbook designs.