

THE EVOLUTION OF MARKETING TEXT BOOKS: SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares principles of marketing textbooks from the 1950s to principles of marketing textbooks of the 1990s to determine which approach from the 1950s survived to be the dominant approach of contemporary textbooks. Evidence suggests that it is a managerial orientation that is normative in approach concentrating on analyzing problems, focusing on skill building and preparing students for jobs in industry that is the approach that survived from the 1950s to the 1990s.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1950s, a handful of principles of marketing texts represented the universe of textbooks available to college professors teaching at four-year institutions. Today, a college professor has over 50 principles of marketing textbooks from which to draw upon. Yet, the level of variability among the set of textbooks from the 1950s seems much greater than the level of variability among the set of widely used textbooks available today. A college professor in the 1950s would likely have to make a conscious decision with regard to the perspective and point of view from which that professor would want to teach the principles of marketing. For professors of today, that decision has largely been taken out of their hands because, to a large extent, the marketplace has decided which perspective and point of view is the dominant, and generally accepted one.

We were interested in exploring which perspectives and points of view representing textbooks of the 1950s survived to become the dominant ones of the 1990s, and try to deduce why the range of available principles of marketing textbooks has narrowed so significantly over time. The specific purpose of this study was to explore the major similarities and differences between marketing textbooks of the 1950s and widely used contemporary marketing textbooks of the 1990s.

METHOD

The scope of our investigation was somewhat narrow. We specifically limited the research to include only introduction to marketing textbooks used primarily at four-year universities. We were not concerned with all ideas or concepts relating to marketing thought then and now, but rather only those concepts disseminated via principles of marketing textbooks.

It should be pointed out that we consider our investigation to be descriptive rather than normative. That is, we do not take a stance with regard to which time period was better or more correct than another or which textbook was better than another. Rather, we were interested in noting the trends in a non-judgmental and objective fashion in order to begin to document the evolution of the principles of marketing textbook from a historical perspective and within an overall framework of the development of marketing thought.

The methodology of our investigation was a content analysis of: (1) a near census of existing principles of marketing textbooks available in the 1950s:

- Maynard & Beckman: *Principles of Marketing* (1952 [5th]; 1957 [6th])
- Converse, Huegy & Mitchell: *The Elements of Marketing* (1952, C&H only [5th]; 1958 [6th])
- Phillips & Duncan: *Marketing Principles & Methods* (1952 [Revised 1st])
- Vaile, Grether & Cox: *Marketing in the American Economy* (1952 [1st and only])
- Duddy & Revson: *Marketing: An Institutional Approach* (1947 [1st and only])

and (2) the four most widely adopted principles of marketing textbooks of the 1990s:

- Perreault & McCarthy: *Basic Marketing* (1996 [12th]; 1st edition: 1960)
- Kotler & Armstrong: *Principles of Marketing* (1995 [7th]; 1st edition: 1980)
- Pride & Ferrel: *Marketing* (1996 [10th]; 1st edition: 1977)
- Boone & Kurtz: *Contemporary Marketing* (1995 [8th]; 1st edition: 1974)

For textbooks of the 1950s, because there was relatively few in number, it was easy to include almost all of the existing books from the time period. Because of the vast number of books available in the 1990s, it was decided to evaluate the four top selling books (i.e., representing more than two-thirds of four year college adoptions). Evaluation of the textbooks consisted of examining and recording the main points from the forwards and introductions of each of the books as well as a detailed documentation of the table of contents of each of the books.

We adopted what we considered a "matrix" approach to the content analysis. Nine textbooks representing our content set were evaluated by four judges. Each judge was responsible for evaluating four textbooks, two from the 1950s and two from the 1990s. That is, two judges reviewed each textbook.

FINDINGS

SOLIDIFYING THE MARKETING MANAGEMENT DOMAIN

From the 1950s to the 1990s, the core marketing management domain was broadened. While older textbooks focused on the marketing of physical products, contemporary textbooks acknowledge and focus upon the growing importance of the marketing of services.

In addition, older textbooks provided only a cursory acknowledgement of international marketing with little discussion beyond import/export and rates of exchange. With new marketing textbooks, there is a heavy emphasis on global marketing. In fact, many contemporary principles of marketing texts discuss the global environment within the framework of each chapter.

While the theories of older textbooks are rooted solely in economic theory, contemporary texts rely heavily on theories related to the social sciences such as psychology and sociology. Contemporary texts also stress the interdisciplinary nature of marketing to a greater extent than did textbooks from the 1950s.

Finally, from the period of the 1950s to today, there has also been an increased focus on tactics such as integrating the marketing mix as a tactical bundle. Also, contemporary texts provide a more detailed discussion of branding and brand management. While older textbooks viewed branding as advantageous to the consumer, newer texts view branding as advantageous to the firm. Also, the consumer has become more of an important focus with regard to marketing management in contemporary, compared to 1950s texts.

ESTABLISHING MARKETING'S PLACE/ROLE IN SOCIETY

New textbooks no longer question or feel the need to defend the existence of marketing as did the older textbooks. Contemporary texts seem to be of the opinion that marketing is now universally accepted and stress the role of marketing and the importance of marketing to the firm.

In addition, the focus between marketing and society has shifted from an emphasis on legislation, particularly with regard to protecting free enterprise and the competitive environment, to an emphasis on consumer protectionism and ethics.

FROM HETEROGENEITY TO HOMOGENEITY

One of the most obvious conclusions from the analysis is that although the early textbooks tended to be heterogeneous, even idiosyncratic with regard to their approach, the primary characteristic of today's pool of principles of marketing textbooks is homogeneity. Below are a number of possible explanations for this observation:

- The strategic/tactical marketing manager orientation of the four P's is the approach most desired by today's businesses. This orientation has manifested at the university level in a shift in emphasis from macro to micro approach to the principles of marketing.
- Textbook writers of the 1950s drew on their association with business and industry and the practical implications of executing marketing functions. Contemporary text book writers drawn primarily from academic marketing resources such as journals (e.g., JM, JMR, JCR, etc.).
- By the late 1970s/early 1980s, the domain and the content of *basic* marketing had been settled upon--there have been few major changes in the core of marketing thought.
- Unlike the 1950s, when smaller classes were the norm, many universities offer introductory marketing courses that are taught as very large lecture sections; the approach of current textbooks is the best one to accommodate this trend.
- In the 1950's, few journals existed as outlets for writings in marketing--textbooks were the primary outlet for individual scholarly perspectives. In the 1990s, there are many more journals--journals are now an important outlet for individual perspectives. In addition, in the 1990s, more specialized textbooks exist compared to the 1950s.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The basic utilities that marketing provides (i.e., time, place, form, possession) and the basic functions that represents marketing domains (i.e., transportation, wholesaling, retailing, etc.) are endogenous and dependent upon firm activities and have not changed dramatically in the past 45 years. Content changes between contemporary texts and the texts of the 1950s primarily reflect exogenous changes such as:

- The U.S. economy from a farm, to manufacturing, to a services economy
- Shift in channel power from wholesaler to manufacturer to retailer
- The global environment
- Technological innovations, particularly in the area of communications

The primary difference between the two groups of textbooks is a narrowing of focus over time from the macro economy, to the firm, to the marketing department/function, to the marketing manager. It is this micromanagement approach focusing on strategy and tactical tools provided to the specific marketing manager in order to solve specific marketing problems and make specific marketing decisions that represents the survival of the fittest text book.

All current textbooks are similar because they have all adopted this preferred, universally accepted approach, and alternative approaches are high risk (for the author and the publisher) because it would not be likely to receive large-scale adoption. Principles of marketing textbooks in the future will vary only at the individual chapter level, but wholesale, dramatic point of view differences will not be accepted by the marketplace. The reason is that the introduction to marketing courses reflect a managerial approach oriented toward the lowest common denominator for businesses in the U.S. Until the majority of companies conduct their business differently, the domain and the treatment of the domain of marketing will not change with regard to undergraduate textbooks.