



SMA Teaching Moment: Seeking a Balanced Perspective of Marketing

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Abstract

This teaching moment focuses on an exploratory analysis of the table of contents of thirty marketing textbooks, based on book sales rankings. The timeframe was spring 2020, and data collected included: name of the book, number of chapters dedicated to the bright side of marketing, number of pages covering the bright side, chapters dedicated to the dark side of marketing, and pages dedicated to the bright side. The search revealed that marketing is primarily presented as a force for good, which could give students an unbalanced frame of reference. This finding suggests that marketing textbooks are predominantly one-sided. The teaching moment implication is that educators can go out the way to present a balanced perspective (the good and the bad) of various aspects of marketing.

Keywords: Textbooks, Balanced Perspective, Dark Side of Marketing

Introduction

In this teaching moment, we bring to light a concern in marketing education in that many of our undergraduate marketing students may not be receiving “a balanced perspective of marketing” when reading some of the leading textbooks in the field. A balanced perspective of marketing is defined as a consideration of both the positive/beneficial and negative/harmful outcomes of marketing decisions for stakeholders including: consumers, business, and/or society.

The need for a balanced perspective for a field is not an original idea. In fact, scholars for years have sought a more balanced perspective of aspects of fields in business as well as for a

“cultural transformation” in marketing (Gebhardt, Carpenter, and Sherry 2006). Marketing undergraduate textbooks mythologize marketing indirectly by not enough presentation of a balanced perspective of the field. The concern is that many of the leading textbooks focus or present primarily the “good side” of marketing, while largely neglecting the “dark side” of marketing such as the unintended consequences of marketing on various stakeholders.

Methods

In this exploratory work, we did a content analysis of the table of contents of thirty marketing textbooks. The sampling frame was based on the book sales rankings on Amazon. The timeframe for pulling the textbooks was spring 2020, and the books analyzed were of various years but tended to be the latest edition available. The data collected included: name of the book, number of chapters dedicated to the bright side of marketing, number of pages covering the bright side, number of chapters dedicated to the dark side of marketing, and the number of pages dedicated to the bright side.

Findings

Our exploratory content analysis of these textbooks confirmed that marketing is primarily presented as a force for good, which we call an unbalanced frame of reference. This exploratory analysis proved that our textbooks are predominantly one-sided when representing marketing decision making. There was significantly much more positive content, or material that shows marketing strategy having a positive effect on marketing problems and marketing playing a positive role in society. There was little coverage of negative effects, or potential problems that marketing creates, or unintended negative consequences. *Our analysis found that 95% of the content was of a positive nature. Only about 5% of content painted marketing in a negative light.*

In conclusion, marketing textbooks are overwhelmingly not focusing enough on balanced perspectives. This teaching moment serves as a call for a more balanced presentation of the field.

This teaching moment also is a reminder to marketing professors of the importance of a focus on marketing ethics education and research, following calls for such in the past by marketing scholars who have long stressed the dire importance of a broader and more societal view of the field of marketing (e.g., Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Ferrell and Keig 2013; Wilkie and Moore 1999; Wilkie and Moore 2012).

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