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Students' Attitudes towards Textbook Types: Are Students Really Ready for E-Textbooks?

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Abstract - This study examines students' attitudes and preferences to the four primary textbook types currently on the market. These types include hardback, paperback, loose leaf, and E-textbook. Two hundred twenty-three students currently taking Principles of Marketing from a large public university in the southeastern United States completed the survey. Results found that students still prefer paperback textbooks, even when this textbook is at a higher price than other alternatives. When students were asked their opinions on the various textbook options, it was clear that price, ease of use, health concerns, and ownership desires were the primary reasons why they liked and/or disliked the various textbook options.

Keywords - Textbook decisions, Textbook attitudes, Marketing education

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners - This study examines students' attitudes towards four different textbook options. Results show that paperback textbooks are still the preferred option by students and these attitudes need to be considered by marketing educators when making textbook decisions.

Introduction

Textbook selection is just one of the many decisions a professor has to make when teaching a class. These selection decisions are sometimes made by the individual professor while other times the decision is made by committee or department. In many cases, students are not taken into consideration when making these decisions. However considering many professors complain that students do not buy or use the required textbook (Kingkade, 2014; Paxhia, 2011; Robinson, 2011), perhaps it is time to think about student's attitudes and preferences before making textbook adoption decisions.

Students' use of textbooks has changed as technology in society has changed. With the advent of smartphones, e-readers, and tablets, students have become accustomed to having access to information at all times. While e-books have become more common, the move from traditional textbooks to e-textbooks has been challenging and has had mixed results (Brown, 2013; Barber, 2011). Unfortunately there are only a few studies (e.g. Daniel and Woody, 2013) that have examined students' perceptions towards the different types of textbooks currently on the market. Because of this, student preferences have varied as some studies have found that students still prefer physical textbooks over e-textbooks (Woody, Daniel and Baker, 2010) while others have found the reverse (Miller, Nutting and Baker-Eveleth, 2013).

Literature Review

Recent studies have looked at some of the factors which impact students' preferences regarding textbook formats. Hao and Jackson (2014) looked at 115 subjects using e-textbooks in two different classes and found that gender, grade point average, and time spent weekly reading e-texts can significantly predict different dimensions of satisfaction with texts. Other research has focused on the actual use of print versus e-texts, showing that reading of academic texts on screen is more difficult than reading on paper, leading to lower recall and performance (Li, Chen and Yang, 2013). Johnston et al. (2015) found that even though students were able to easily use e-texts, they experienced a drop in enthusiasm for the e-textbooks over the course of their pilot study. Additionally, almost half of their subjects reported using an e-text less than they had used previous print textbooks. This tendency would be of obvious concern to faculty who are trying to motivate students to use textbooks more, not less. Daniel and Woody (2013) found that students spent significantly more reading time with e-texts, especially when reading at home as compared to reading in a laboratory situation—although the student performance between the two formats was not significantly different. However, subjects reported increased levels of multi-tasking when reading e-texts at home (including computer-based activities such as chat/IM and social media), possibly accounting for the increased levels of reading time.

Foasberg (2014) found that students tended to engage with print more deeply than electronic sources and were more likely to use print books for long-form reading. Electronic books were used for selected academic purposes only. Specifically, according to Foasberg (2014), "They (students) read electronically a great deal, but this reading consisted primarily of brief, nonacademic materials ... Their dislike of electronic textbooks was especially striking (p. 24)." This finding lends support to an earlier study by Hernon et al. (2007) who found that students used e-texts for small segments of material or skimming and were likely to print the material that they deemed useful/relevant to class. For concentrated reading, the students still preferred printed textbooks. Falc (2013) stated that "studying a text and using it as a resource are two clearly different functions (p. 8)."

When comparing print texts versus e-texts, Dwyer and Davidson (2013) found that “four times the number of students reported that they learned the most from reading the paper textbook compared to the e-textbook (p. 121).” In most weeks, almost 80% of students acknowledged that they rarely or never read the e-text, compared to only 25% of the students reporting the same for print texts. They concluded that while students are not yet ready for e-textbooks to fully replace print textbooks in education, they do believe that “e-textbooks are the future (p. 123)” and that society will transition over time as embedded cultural practices change.

Faculty have traditionally been responsible for making textbook adoptions that they consider to be most beneficial for their class and/or subject matter. However, changing technology allows for different textbook formats for classes. Meanwhile, textbook prices for students have consistently become more expensive and students have become vocal about demanding more affordable options, or electing to not purchase the textbook at all. As a result, faculty have, by necessity, had to adjust the way textbook decisions are made. Student preferences are much more likely to be taken into account, both in terms of price and format. Four primary textbook types are available when making textbook decisions. These textbook choices include more traditional textbook types such as hardback and paperback, as well as newer textbook options such as E-textbooks and loose-leaf printed texts.

This paper surveyed students’ perceptions of the different types of textbook possibilities in terms of preferences, ease of use, pricing, and health and ownership concerns. Open-ended comments were encouraged to allow students to provide feedback about their preferred textbook choices, including positive and negative responses for each of the four text formats. The goal of this study is to examine the attitudes and opinions of students towards the four possible textbook options (hardback, paperback, e-textbook, and loose leaf) in order to better assist in textbook adoption decisions. The research question being addressed in this study is as follows:

RQ: Which of the four primary types of textbook options (hardback, paperback, loose leaf, E-textbooks) do students prefer and why?

Method

Students taking Principles of Marketing from a large public university in the Southeastern United States were asked to complete a brief survey in exchange for extra credit. The survey was initially completed in order to provide insight into the attitudes that current students have towards different textbook options so that the textbook adoption committee could make a more informed decision. In this survey, students were asked about their current textbook purchase behavior, preferences to four different textbook options (hardback, paperback, e-textbook, and loose leaf), attitudes towards e-textbooks, and an open-ended opinion question about the respondent’s perceptions towards different textbook options.

Results

Two hundred twenty-three students completed the survey. Fifty-one percent of the students were females. One hundred thirty-four students (60%) were juniors while 26% were seniors, 12% were sophomores, and 1% were graduate students. A majority of students (62%) stated that they purchased required textbooks at least 75% of the time while 10% of the students said they purchased required textbooks less than 25% of the time. When asked how students currently pay for their textbooks, 50% stated they used their own money to pay for textbooks while 29% stated they used scholarships or financial aid and 20% stated they used their parent's money. Students typically purchased their textbooks at an off-campus bookstore (45%) or online (32%) with the remaining students purchasing textbooks from the campus bookstore (22%). As for prior E-textbook experience, 48.4% had used an E-textbook previously, 17.9% had E-textbook experience that was very basic (e.g. no search or highlighting features), and 33.6% had no prior E-textbook experience.

Textbook Preferences

When examining student preferences towards the four textbook options mentioned in the survey (hardback, paperback, loose leaf, and E-textbook), three different questions were asked (See Table 1 and 2 below). The first question asked the student to select the textbook option that they preferred if price was not an issue. The second question asked the student the likelihood of purchasing each of the four textbook options using a 5-point scale. The third question examined textbook preferences when price was taken into consideration. Except for the paperback price point, the prices used in this question were all real prices given by the textbook publishers for the textbooks being considered for adoption. In all three questions, it was clear that the paperback textbook option was the preferred choice among students.

Table 1: Summary of Key Findings Related to Textbook Preferences

<i>Question</i>	<i>Answer Options</i>	<i>%</i>
If given the option and price was not an issue, which of the following textbook options would you prefer MOST?	Hardback Textbook	33.3%
	Paperback Textbook	45.2%
	Loose leaf Textbook	2.7%
	E-Textbook	11.9%
	E-Textbook with Black & White Loose leaf	6.8%
If a textbook was required, which of the following textbook options would be most appealing?	Hardback Textbook, priced new at \$174.99 but you have the option to resell	4.9%
	Paperback Textbook, priced new at \$84.99 but you have the option to resell	67.3%
	E-Textbook, priced new at \$65 with no option to resell	20.2%
	E-Textbook with Black & White Loose leaf, priced new at \$75 with no option to resell	7.6%

Table 2: Likelihood to Purchase Each Textbook Option

<i>Textbook Option</i>	<i>Mean (SD)*</i>
Paperback	4.02 (1.06)
Hardback	3.61 (1.27)
E-Textbook	2.79 (1.30)
E-Textbook with Loose Leaf	2.76 (1.28)
Loose Leaf	2.65 (1.18)

* On a 1 to 5 scale where 1 = Very Unlikely and 5 = Very Likely

Attitudes towards E-Textbooks

When examining the students' attitudes towards E-textbooks, it was clear that most students were neutral towards this style of textbook. Students attitudes towards E-textbooks were measured using 6-items on a 5-point scale ($\alpha = 0.84$). Table 3 below displays the items in this scale as well as the mean scores for each item.

Table 3: Attitudes Towards E-Textbooks

<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Mean (SD)*</i>
E-textbooks are Easy to Read	3.02 (1.15)
E-textbooks are Easy to Use	3.22 (1.11)
E-textbooks can be Used Anywhere	3.51 (1.23)
E-textbooks are Desirable	2.86 (1.14)
E-textbooks are High Quality	3.13 (0.98)
E-textbooks are Reasonably Priced	3.16 (1.07)

* On a 5-point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree

Open-Ended Preferences and Attitudes Towards Textbook Options

To gain additional insights into student preferences, an open-ended question about the student’s perceptions and attitudes towards different textbook options was asked. One hundred seventy-nine students out of the original 223 students answered this question. When examining these responses, it was clear that the students’ answers fell into four distinct categories. These categories included ease of use, price, health concerns, and ownership. The first three categories could be further broken down by physical textbook (hardback, paperback, or loose leaf) and E-textbook.

Positive and Negative Ease of Use

Twenty-nine students mentioned how an E-textbook could be easy to use while 60 students mentioned how an E-textbook might result in a negative ease of use. A majority of the positive ease of use dealt with convenience and space savings while a majority of the negative ease of use dealt with difficulty reading online, increased distractibility, and additional hardware/software/Internet required. Table 4 and Table 5 below displays some comments made by students regarding both positive and negative ease of use as it relates to E-textbooks.

Table 4: Student Comments Related to Positive Ease of Use for an E-Textbook

<i>Sample Comments</i>
“An e-book at home is convenient.”
“E-books are better because they are online and don't take up any room.”
“With e-books it gives you videos and is interactive (better quality).”
“I believe that the e-book would be a better option because it is easier to carry and you can use it anywhere you have a computer.”
“E-books are fantastic! I can carry all of my textbooks everywhere I go on my tablet. E-books normally have practice problems with solutions that are very helpful.”

Table 5: Student Comments Related to Negative Ease of Use for an E-Textbook

<i>Sample Comments</i>
“With the e-book it is very annoying to have to "pinch and zoom" on the text and constantly "chase" the next paragraph to continue reading. It is also very distracting. With the e-book, I found myself on the internet more instead of reading what I was supposed to be reading.”
“With e-books if your internet goes out or have a problem logging on for e book, you are sunk.”
“E-book could be harder to access when needed.”
“Online textbooks can be useful but its limited on where you can use it. It's easier for me to use a normal textbook because I'm less likely to be distracted.”
“E-book was cheaper but difficult to use during class because there are no page numbers and you had to flip through individual pages. Hard to use if you jump around pages a lot.”
“If my textbook is online, I'm less likely to use it + more likely to get distracted by the internet.”
“E-books can be hard to figure out and may differ from other e-books. You have to have a computer for e-book which is not always convenient, Actual books do not need a power source. Overall the disadvantages of e-books currently outweigh the benefits. Technology can malfunction and books do not. I really do not like e-books. I also rarely use the books from any of my classes, but when I do I do not like having to log into something to use it.”
“Online books are convenient in the aspect that you can view them anywhere, but they are hard to read, don't have all the text and to me seem pointless.”
“I don't like e-books I don't want to be forced to take my laptop everywhere and print stuff all the time.”
“Hate everything about e-books, harder to focus, have to make sure laptop is charged enough. Can't highlight or make notes.”
“Basically, e-books suck. It isn't easy to flip through pages, and the search option doesn't actually make it any easier...Also, e-books run out of batteries... no bueno.”
“The E-book is the economic choice, but I like highlighting, and there's something about flipping pages that I love. An e-book just isn't the same.”
“With an e-book, you must buy and carry a device and might need access to WIFI. This adds costs like device insurance and risk of system failure or no WIFI access when needed.”

On the other hand, 57 students believed that a physical textbook could be easy to use while only 10 students mentioned negative ease of use aspects with this type of textbook. A majority of the positive ease of use comments related to convenience, increased study ability, and the ability to physically hold, highlight, or write in the textbook. The negative ease of use comments dealt primarily with the weight of a

book and durability. Table 6 below displays some comments made by students regarding both positive and negative ease of use as it relates to physical textbooks (hardback, paperback, or loose leaf).

Table 6: Student Comments Related to Ease of Use for a Physical Textbook

<i>Ease of Use</i>	<i>Sample Comments</i>
Positive Ease of Use	“I like being able to touch and turn the pages on the book I'm reading.”
	“Hardback or paperback, because I like to have the book on hand.”
	“I am the type of person that learns better if I have a physical book to read.”
	“I am very fond of having the physical book in my hands. I study better that way and looking at a computer screen for hours is something I greatly dislike.”
	“I like paperback books because they will be in my bag any time I need them and I can use them even in my 15 minutes break between classes.”
	“I choose hard/paper back because no matter where I am I can pull it out to study.”
	“I prefer something I can physically hold and write in.”
	“I like to have the physical copy. I prefer a paperback that small in size (the width can be thick).”
	“I find the paperback textbooks the most helpful because I can write on it and it's easy to carry around.”
	“I like the idea of ebooks, but I will always be willing to pay more for a copy in my hand. Makes a difference.”
	“I like to mark my textbook with either highlights or sticky notes, therefore an actual copy of the book is better than e book.”
	“I personally prefer a paperback textbook. I like those best because I easily flip through the pages and highlight while in class and when studying.”
“Paperbacks are durable enough, and they allow you to flip easily back and forth to better understand ideas presented in the book.”	
Negative Ease of Use	“Loose leaf was very awkward to handle. Had to buy a very large 3 ring binder + it was easy to lose pages.”
	“Soft back books tend to bend while I read them and keeping pages straight can be an obstacle.”
	“Hard back is more durable, but way too expensive. Paper back seems more reasonable, but less durable.”
	“Hardbacks are heavy.”
	“Some textbooks have pages so thin that they tear when you flip them.”

Price

A second major category of responses related to the price of the textbook. Seventy-three students mentioned price in his or her answer. For many, price was the key. Most students believe that the textbook prices, regardless of textbook type, are overpriced. Some students considered resell possibilities in their response while others considered renting or purchasing older textbook editions. A sampling of the comments made is shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Student Comments Related to Price

<i>Sample Comments</i>
"E-books are undesirable due to inflated prices. Loose-leaf is also very over-priced considering what it is."
"Price is most important for textbook as long as teacher can account for issues related."
"Price, Price, Price, Price, Price!"
"Physical books are way too expensive."
"Personally don't usually purchase textbooks. Extremely overpriced when I can find the same info for free online."
"Paperback is cheaper and you can resell it, so essentially you're spending less on the textbook when it is resold."
"It really doesn't matter to me; I just operate off of which is the cheapest."
"I would rather have a hard copy. I just simply prefer them, but as a student, money talks, so I would go with what's cheaper."
"I would go with a paperback version since they are much cheaper and many college students don't have the money for the more expensive hardback."
"I usually rent from amazon. About \$20 a book. E-books are a total scam designed to stop students re-selling textbooks."
"Personally I'm renting or buying the cheapest option available. If the price was the same I'd go with a paperback book."
"I like paperback because you can buy a used copy very cheap."
"E-books cost little to none to publish, yet they cost sometimes more than print books. We pay high prices to read it 2-3 times a semester then the money goes to waste."
"E-books should not be expensive as hard backs."
"While it is not a problem for everyone some students cannot afford the proper technology to make the e-book effective for them. I think by offering only an e-book you are singling them out and making it harder for them to succeed."
"If the e-book is more affordable than the textbook option, that is indeed the better choice. All we care about is saving money."
"It is more affordable and convenient for students to be able to get previous editions of books. New editions and e-books are extremely overpriced"

Health Concerns

Besides ease of use and price, another category of responses dealt with health concerns. Five students commented about health concerns for E-textbooks while seven students had comments about physical textbooks. For E-textbooks, these health concerns primarily dealt with eye strain while for physical textbooks, it was the weight of the textbook that caused the concern. Some sample student comments related to health concerns for E-textbooks include, “E-books are difficult on the eyes with too much exposure” and “Looking at a screen causes headaches after a while.” Some comments related to health concerns for physical textbooks include, textbooks “break your back” and “hardback textbooks are a bit heavier.”

Ownership

The final category dealt with ownership of the textbook (See Table 8). Forty-five students commented about ownership issues such as the ability to own the textbook, resell the textbook, have physical possession, and rental opportunities. Several students commented that they did not like that an E-textbook disappeared. Others did not seem to have a problem with that since they either rented or resold their textbook anyways. There were many that mentioned they liked having a tangible product that they could physically hold.

Table 8: Student Comments Related to Ownership

<i>Sample Comments</i>
“E-book would be nice if it was a little cheaper and didn't disappear.”
“I prefer something I can physically hold.”
“I generally try to rent my textbooks and if I can't I will buy a paperback version because I can sell it back.”
“I'm not a huge fan of e-books. You can't resell them, and I personally like to hold a book in my hands.”
“I like to re-use or sell my textbook. Therefore I can get my money back if I didn't like the book. It is much easier to have a book in your hands then to read it off the computer. I don't like the idea of it disappearing after your use. It is like a tangible item. why buy it? lower price, and more affordable than why not.”
“E-books also only allow you to use them once.”
“I like to keep my books so e-books are not a option.”
“Paperback because it's a tangible copy of the book.”

Discussion

This study examined student attitudes and preferences to four different textbook options (hardback, paperback, loose leaf, and E-textbook). This study is one of the few studies to distinguish between hardback and paperback textbooks, which have significantly different price points from publishers. In addition, loose leaf texts, which are often available as an inexpensive option from publishers, were one of the alternatives provided for student evaluation. Qualitative data in the form of student comments adds a richness to the results. The student comments provide insight for faculty on student perceptions of textbook decisions.

Given today's high-tech society and the textbook publishers push to E-textbooks, it was surprising to see that traditional students, typically considered digital natives, still preferred traditional textbook methods. In fact, many of the students held strong opinions against E-textbooks which may be why paperbacks were the preferred textbook choice. This preference may be more wide-spread than identified in earlier research which detailed the surge in sales of e-books and e-readers (Bradley, 2012). A recent *New York Times* article stated that e-book sales have begun to decline in popularity from their peak in 2011 as consumers preferences appear to be returning to print books or some hybrid combination of print and e-books (Alter, 2015). E-textbooks never experienced the surge in sales that e-books enjoyed as students were slow to accept e-texts as an acceptable way to learn and memorize material (Woody, Daniel and Baker, 2010).

Students in this study were more likely to purchase paperbacks over other textbook options, even if the paperback was more expensive than the E-textbook. Although one previous research study found that e-textbook adoption is more common in business fields (Miller, Nutting and Baker-Eveleth, 2013), this study did not support those findings. Another study found that non-business majors were more satisfied with e-texts than business majors (Ciampa et al., 2013). Non-business majors also found e-textbooks easier to use and were more likely to use them again in the future. Obviously, further research needs to be done to help clarify these contradicting results.

This study suffered from several limitations which future research may help to explain. No attempt to measure student's actual use of textbooks (reading, memorizing, etc.) or level of learning was attempted in this study. Future research could review how students use textbooks and whether different text formats made a difference in student learning. In addition, data collected were from a convenience sample at a large Southeastern university. Results may not be generalizable to smaller institutions of higher learning or different geographic regions. Age, grade point averages, learning styles, and international effects, which have been found to be significant in previous studies, were not reviewed for this study. These items could be included in future studies to determine possible effect. Future research is also needed to determine if there are differences in textbook preferences based on

the class and/or subject matter being taught. Students in different areas of study may exhibit different preferences for text formats.

In conclusion, based on the results of this study, business students still seem to prefer paperback versions of the textbook. Professors need to be cognizant of student attitudes towards textbook options prior to making textbook adoption decisions. Selecting the wrong textbook type may result in fewer students purchasing the required text or may mean that students are less likely to use/read the class material. A goal of professors in education is to determine what helps the student to best grasp the content of the class. Students who are unable or unwilling to buy and use a textbook are unlikely to gain the full benefit of the subject matter, providing them with less value in the class and devaluing their education as a whole. Selecting a textbook that is acceptable to the majority of students increases the likelihood of a positive outcome for both students and faculty.

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