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# Revisiting Textbook Adoption Decisions: Are Students Finally Ready for E-Books?

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**Abstract** – This study re-examines students' attitudes and preferences to the four primary textbook types (hardback, paperback, loose leaf, and E-book). One hundred eighty-three students currently taking Principles of Marketing from a large public university in the southeastern United States completed the survey. Unlike the 2014 study, where students overwhelmingly preferred paperback textbooks, even when this textbook is at a higher price than other alternatives, the 2018 study found that the textbook choice depended on if an access code to publisher's online course materials was required. When access codes were required, students preferred paperback textbooks, followed closely by E-books. When no access code was required, rental options were preferred. When students were asked their opinions on the various textbook options, it was clear that price and ease of use were the primary deciding factors as to why they liked and/or disliked the various textbook options.

**Keywords** – Textbook adoption decisions, Textbook attitudes, Marketing education

**Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners** – This study re-examines students' attitudes towards four different textbook options. Results show that the textbook option preferred depends on whether an online access code is required. It is important for marketing educators to consider student attitudes when making textbook decisions as this will impact whether students actually purchase and use the required textbook.

**Note** – A previous version of this paper was presented/published in the Proceedings of the 2018 Atlantic Marketing Association Conference.

# Introduction

Textbooks have long been a primary resource for instructional materials in the classroom. Instructors rely on student's use of textbooks to introduce new content, provide detailed explanations of material, and serve as a study guide for examinations. As a result, textbook selection can be a major decision affecting both faculty and students for a class. Textbook selection decisions are sometimes made by individual professors while committees or departments may make the decisions at other times, depending on the class being taught and the policy of the institution. In the past, students often were not taken into consideration when making book decisions even though professors frequently complained that students do not buy or use required textbooks (Kingkade, 2014; Robinson, 2011). However, with textbook prices skyrocketing, students often argue that they cannot afford to buy the books required for class. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), college textbook prices have risen 87.5% over the last ten years. With the textbook industry facing challenges as publishing increasingly moves from physical texts to digitized content and students' frustration at the continued increase in text book costs, colleges and universities are recognizing that student's attitudes and preferences deserve consideration in the selection process.

As the publishing industry changes, so too does the way students use textbooks. Technology has enabled students to have access to information at all times through the use of smartphones, E-readers, and tablets. Although E-books have become more commonly required for college classes, the move from traditional textbooks to E-books has had mixed results (Brown, 2013; Barber, 2011). There have been a limited number of studies (e.g. Daniel and Woody, 2013) that have examined students' perceptions towards the different types of textbooks currently offered by publishers. Of the studies performed, results have varied as some studies found that students prefer physical textbooks over E-books (Woody, Daniel and Baker, 2010) while others have found students are becoming increasingly comfortable with E-books (Miller, Nutting and Baker-Eveleth, 2013). Walton (2014) found that, while students embraced E-books when reading for leisure, they continued to prefer a physical text over an E-book for class purposes. If, however, a text was required and a physical book was not available, students did accept the use/requirement of an E-book. Obviously, student attitudes have not fully acclimated to changing textbook options.

## Literature Review

Recently, researchers have begun to look at some of the factors which may impact students' preferences regarding textbook formats. Chapman et al. (2016) investigated the E-text adoption process at a university for 50 class sections across 8 business disciplines with 27 different instructors. They found a wide variety of feelings expressed about how E-texts are implemented, ranging from strong dissatisfaction to strong satisfaction. The variables of most importance to students were: 'how effectively professors use the material', 'price', 'quality of the sign-up process', and 'how useful the E-textbook platform training was'. Chapman et al. (2016) noted that these factors can be largely influenced by faculty and how the E-book is implemented into the class. In another fairly large scale study involving 33 courses at five state university campuses in California, 662 surveys were collected from students in those courses (Baek and Monaghan, 2013). This study found that:

1) More than one-third of the students surveyed were satisfied with the e-Textbook; 2) more than half of the students found it easy to use; 3) older students (22 or older) tended to have more positive experiences with the e-Textbook than younger students; and 4) students most liked the e-Textbook's cost, accessibility, light weight, and keyword search features.

However, even with generally positive results, overall student satisfaction with the E-book was only 34%. Baek and Monaghan (2013) concluded that for students to be satisfied with an E-book requirement for class, the E-book must be high-quality and easy-to-use. While students like the lower price of an E-book, price alone cannot guarantee successful E-book implementation in a classroom. Somewhat contradictory to Baek and Monaghan (2016), deNoyelles, Raible, and Seilhamer (2015), found that convenience and lower book costs are the primary reasons students purchase an E-book, not the interactive features which publishers often stress as enhancing the learning experience for students. Joseph (2015) argued that content digitization had the potential to lower costs and improve access to books for millions of users, but that the promised cost savings has largely failed to materialize. DeNoyelles et al. (2015) also determined that the instructor's role did not significantly change over the course of their two-year university-wide study, suggesting that further professional development may be necessary on the part of faculty to improve instruction and increase awareness of content when using E-books in a classroom setting. One study summarized the argument by stating, "Perhaps the most important finding is the mandate that the technology should not get in the way of the learning (Chapman et al., 2016, p. 12)."

Additional research looked at specific variables in the effectiveness of textbook formats. Hao and Jackson (2014) looked at 115 subjects using E-books in two different classes. Their findings suggest that gender, grade point average, and time spent reading the E-book can significantly predict satisfaction with different dimensions of the texts. Other research focused on print versus E-texts, revealing that students find reading text on screen is more difficult than reading on paper, which Li, Chen and Yang (2013) theorized contributed to lower student recall and performance. Johnston et al. (2015) found that while students found E-texts easy to use, their enthusiasm for the E-book format dropped over the course of the study. Of additional concern, almost half of the students reported using the E-book less than previous print textbooks. This finding is a problem for faculty who are trying to motivate students to use textbooks more, not less.

Daniel and Woody (2013) found that while students spent significantly more time reading E-texts, subjects also reported spending more time "multi-tasking" when reading E-books, including such activities as chat/IM and social media. Foasberg (2014) found students were more likely to engage with print texts on a deeper level than electronic sources. Students were more likely to use print books for long-term reading, using E-books for selected purposes only. Specifically, Foasberg (2014), stated, "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)." Similarly, Hernon et al. (2007) found that students used E-texts for small segments of material (skimming) and frequently printed the material that they deemed useful/relevant to class. Falc (2013) lent additional support for these findings, stating that "studying a text and using it as a resource are two clearly different functions (p. 8)." While almost half of the students surveyed in her study reported enjoying the use of an E-book, 18% of students were very frustrated with the experience noting concerns with navigation, technology issues, and distractions with other online activities. She concluded that if faculty

intend for E-books to be more efficient for students' use, then the faculty should communicate the limitations of E-books to students and inform them as to how to annotate and bookmark digital files to help them maximize the usefulness of the E-text (Falc, 2013).

When comparing print texts to E-books, 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-book (p. 121).” Interestingly, approximately 80% of students reported an E-text was never or rarely read in any given week, compared to 25% of students who acknowledged the same for a print text. The authors concluded that students don't appear ready for E-books to fully replace print texts in education at this time, but that “E-books are the future (p. 123)” and society will transition to E-books over time as embedded cultural practices change.

As changing technology allows for different textbook formats in classes, the increasing cost of textbooks to students has resulted in students becoming more vocal in demanding affordable textbook options, or opting to not purchase the book at all. Consequently, faculty are faced with adjusting the decision-making criteria involving the choice of textbooks for a class. Student preferences are more likely to be considered, both in terms of price and format.

This paper surveyed students' perceptions of the different types of textbook possibilities in terms of purchase vs. rental options, preferences, ease of use, pricing, and online publisher materials. Four primary textbook formats identified in the survey, including traditional textbooks such as hardback and paperback, as well as newer textbook options such as E-books and loose-leaf printed texts. Open-ended comments were encouraged to allow students to provide positive and negative feedback about each of the four text formats. The primary goal of this study is to examine current attitudes and opinions of students towards the four possible textbook options (hardback, paperback, E-book, and loose leaf) in order to better assist in textbook adoption decisions. A secondary goal of this study is to compare the current results to one completed in 2014 in order to examine changes in students' perceptions (Edmondson and Ward, 2017). The research question being addressed in this study is as follows:

RQ: Four years later, have student preferences towards the four primary types of textbook options (hardback, paperback, loose leaf, E-book) changed?

## Methodology

Students taking Principles of Marketing from a large public university in the Southeastern United States were asked to complete a brief online survey in exchange for extra credit. The survey was originally completed in 2014 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 (Edmondson and Ward, 2017). An updated survey was completed in 2018 in order to re-examine students' attitudes towards different textbook options since a majority of publishers have modified their textbook offerings to incorporate more e-learning/online materials. In this survey, students were asked about their current textbook purchase and rental behavior, preferences to four different textbook options (hardback, paperback, E-book, and loose leaf), attitudes towards E-books, attitudes towards publisher online resources, attitude towards the new subscription model, and an open-ended opinion question about the respondent's perceptions towards different textbook options.

## Results

One hundred eighty-three students completed the survey. Fifty-one percent of the students were females. One hundred fifteen students (64.6%) were juniors while 16.9% were seniors, 18% were sophomores, and 0.5% were graduate students. Only 21.9% of students *purchase* required textbooks at least 75% of the time while 46.5% of students *purchase* required textbooks less than 25% of the time. However, when examining *rental* options, 53% of students rented required textbooks at least 75% of the time while 14.8% of the students rented required textbooks less than 25% of the time. This is a major shift from 2014 when a majority of students (62%) purchased required textbooks at least 75% of the time (Edmondson and Ward, 2016). This switch to rentals is further documented when students were asked to specify the percentage of textbooks purchased vs. rented for the current semester. Thirty-eight students (20.8%) stated that at least 75% of their Spring 2018 textbooks were purchased while seventy-six students (41.5%) stated that at least 75% of their Spring 2018 textbooks were rented. Twenty-one students (11.5%) indicated that they purchased or rented less than 50% of the required Spring 2018 textbooks.

When asked how students currently pay for their textbooks, 51.1% stated they used their own money to pay for textbooks while 28.1% stated they used scholarships or financial aid and 19.7% stated they used their parent's money. How students pay for textbooks in 2018 is very similar to the results from the 2014 study (Edmondson and Ward, 2017). Students typically purchased their textbooks at an off-campus bookstore (53%) or online (25.7%) with the remaining students purchasing textbooks from the campus bookstore (20.2%). As for prior E-book experience, 61.3% had used an E-book previously, 19.3% had E-book experience that was very basic (e.g. no search or highlighting features), and only 19.3% had no prior E-book experience. For those that had prior E-book experience, the average satisfaction level was a 3.2 (SD = 1.05) on a 5-point scale. This indicates that considerably more students have experience with using E-books than in the 2014 study (Edmondson and Ward, 2017).

## Textbook Preferences

When examining student preferences towards the four textbook options mentioned in the survey (hardback, paperback, loose leaf, and E-book), four 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 and fourth questions examined textbook preferences when price was taken into consideration. The third question focused on textbook preferences when an access code was required while the fourth question focused on textbook preferences when no access code was needed. Except for the hardback price point, the prices used in this question were all real prices given by the textbook publishers for the textbooks being considered for adoption. Unfortunately, hardback textbooks were not available for the textbooks being considered so a fictitious price point was selected. Unlike the 2014 survey where the paperback textbook option was preferred in each case, the 2018 study results indicate a major shift in student preferences. When price was not an issue, students preferred the Hardback Textbook. However, when price was considered and an access code was required for the class, students preferred either the paperback textbook (33.3%) or the E-book (29.0%) options. If an access code was not required, students overwhelmingly preferred the rental option (60.2%).

**Table 1**  
**Summary of Key Findings Related to Textbook Preferences**

QUESTION	ANSWER OPTIONS	2014	2018
If given the option and price was not an issue, which of the following textbook options would you prefer MOST?	Hardback Textbook	33.3%	44.3%
	Paperback Textbook	45.2%	29.5%
	Loose leaf Textbook	2.7%	4.9%
	E-book	11.9%	11.5%
	E-book with Black & White Loose leaf	6.8%	9.8%
If a textbook with access code was required, which of the following textbook options would be most appealing?	Hardback Textbook (Access Code Included), priced new at \$199.99 but you have the option to resell	–	9.8%
	Paperback Textbook (Access Code Included), priced new at \$100.00 but you have the option to resell	–	33.3%
	E-book (Access Code Included), priced new at \$60 with no option to resell	–	29.0%
	E-book with Loose leaf (Access Code Included), priced new at \$75 with no option to resell	–	12.6%
	Rental Textbook (Access Code Not Guaranteed), rented at \$32.50	–	15.3%
If an access code was not required, which of the following textbook options would be most appealing?	New Hardback Textbook, priced at \$199.99 but you have the option to resell	–	2.2%
	Used Hardback Textbook, priced at \$140.00 but you have the option to resell	–	7.7%
	New Paperback Textbook, priced at \$100.00 but you have the option to resell	–	3.9%
	Used Paperback Textbook, priced at \$70.00 but you have the option to resell	–	19.3%
	E-book, priced at \$60 with no option to resell	–	3.9%
	E-book with Loose leaf, priced at \$75 with no option to resell	–	2.8%
	Rental Textbook, rented at \$32.50	–	60.2%

**Table 2**  
**Likelihood to Purchase Each Textbook Option**

TEXTBOOK OPTION	2014 MEAN (SD)*	2018 MEAN (SD)*
Paperback	4.02 (1.06)	3.78 (1.01)
Hardback	3.61 (1.27)	3.78 (1.15)
E-book	2.79 (1.30)	2.74 (1.36)
E-book with Loose Leaf	2.76 (1.28)	2.70 (1.32)
Loose Leaf	2.65 (1.18)	2.58 (1.15)

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

## Attitudes towards E-books

Similar to 2014 (Edmondson and Ward, 2017), when examining the students' attitudes towards an E-book format of a textbook, it was clear that most students were neutral towards this style of textbook (Mean = 3.11, SD = 0.75). Students attitudes towards E-books were measured using 6-items on a 5-point scale ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ). Table 3 below displays the items in this scale as well as the mean scores for each item.

**Table 3**  
**Attitudes towards E-books**

ATTITUDE	MEAN (SD)*
E-books are Easy to Read	2.88 (1.14)
E-books are Easy to Use	3.12 (1.18)
E-books can be Used Anywhere	3.65 (1.10)
E-books are Desirable	2.83 (1.05)
E-books are High Quality	3.10 (1.03)
E-books are Reasonably Priced	3.09 (1.12)

\* 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, an open-ended question about the student's perceptions and attitudes towards different textbook options was asked. When examining these responses, students' answers typically fell into two categories. These categories included ease of use and price. Ease of use was then broken down by valence as well as by physical textbook (hardback, paperback, or loose leaf) and E-book. All student comments shown in the tables below are directly as worded by the student, including any misspellings and grammatical errors.

### Positive and Negative Ease of Use

Twenty students mentioned how an E-book could be easy to use while 30 students mentioned how an E-book might result in a negative ease of use. A majority of the positive ease of use comments dealt with convenience and portability while a majority of the negative ease of use dealt with difficulty reading online, increased distractibility, eyestrain, and a lack of maneuverability. Compared to the 2014 study (Edmondson and Ward, 2017), there were significantly fewer negative ease of use comments in this study. This implies that students might be more accepting of E-books than in previous years. Table 4 and Table 5 below display some of the comments made by students regarding both positive and negative ease of use as it relates to E-books.

**Table 4**  
**Student Comments Related to Positive Ease of Use for an E-book**

SAMPLE COMMENTS
"E-books are very useful now. It seems like everyone has a laptop or tablet, and you can just pull it up wherever and whenever."
"Ebooks also are more convenient and often time more reliable because you always have your mobile device with you, whether it be your cell phone or your iPad or tablet."
"E-books are the by far the easiest to use and eliminate having to carry around extra weight in your back pack. The online platforms that typically come with e-books also provide more methods of learning."
"Ebooks are way more portable and easier to stay organized with such an instrument."
"I love the aspect of E-Books being mobile and easy to open in a device. I just prefer scrolling through pages to find determined information."
"I prefer e-books...because it more convenient because I generally take my laptop to class everyday and it takes up less space in my backpack."
"I prefer ebooks. Easy to access, easy to follow. very easy to keep up with work when presented with due date/timetables."

**Table 5**  
**Student Comments Related to Negative Ease of Use for an E-book**

SAMPLE COMMENTS
"E-books can be difficult to flip back and forth through."
"I am not a fan of ebooks because each time I've used them it does not work well at all. The images and examples never load and it's frustrating."
"e-books are okay...but you have to search for everything on an actual device which I feel takes a lot longer than just flipping through a book."
"E-books seem to be harder for me to read especially when I do not have a computer around. Sometimes the E-books can be a bit overwhelming because there' so much information on a tiny screen."
"online is more difficult and I do not carry my laptop to class"
"I do not like e-books only. It's hard on your eyes after a while"
"I prefer tangible textbooks and assignments due to being prone to technical difficulties affecting my grades on occasion."
"While tech stuff is also easy and convenient, they've never been good quality or easy to navigate and I can't stand reading off of a screen."
"when I use online books I tend to get distracted with access to the internet on the same device that I am using to study."
"EBooks put a strain on my eyes because of the computer glare, which I am already exposed to too often."
"E-Books suck simply because our wifi sucks. I've spent whole class periods waiting for an eBook to load to do practice problems."
"My eyes hurt from staring at a screen too long. I also don't have money for a tablet and the text is too small for e-books to be efficient on my phone and I have too many distractions on my phone anyways."

On the other hand, 40 students believed that a physical textbook could be easy to use while only six students mentioned negative ease of use aspects with this type of textbook. A majority of the positive ease of use comments are similar to the 2014 study as the comments related to convenience, increased study ability, and the ability to physically hold, highlight, or write in the textbook. Similar to the 2014 study (Edmondson and Ward, 2017), the negative ease of use comments dealt primarily with the weight of a book and durability. Table 6 and 7 below display 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 Positive Ease of Use for a Physical Textbook**

SAMPLE COMMENTS
"I like being able to touch and turn the pages on the book I'm reading."
"A handbook text is the best option only because I am old school and it's easier to read."
"I prefer hard back just because they are easier to use, and I know for sure I can use them anywhere."
"I dont really prefer online textbooks just because it is easier for me to have a hard copy that i can read, right in front of me. I would rather be able to flip through the pages back and forth then scrolling on my computer."
"looseleaf is better so we dont have to carry the heavy books everywhere."
"I am a hands on kind of girl. I like to be able to write on what I am reading to make notes. You cant do that with e-books. Also with loose leaf, you can organize notes with each chapter in one binder so you do not have to carry a book and a binder full of notes."
"I feel as though i work more efficiently with a hard copy of the book."
"I like to have tangible books so that I can easily flip through pages and make notes if I need to"
"It is much easier for me to use printed versions while studying."
"I believe that physical copies of books are better than Ebook options for the fact that it has a feel to it and easier access than Ebooks...I prefer the old style method of reading from a physical book and doing homework on paper."
"I typically prefer paperback textbooks in my classes. These have always been the easiest for me to learn from. Being able to physically write and take notes in these books helps me retain the information better than e-books."
"maybe I am old fashioned but I love physical copies of a book. It's hands on, it can't glitch, it can't shut down on a server, it's mine and its easy to navigate."
"I preferably like to have the textbook in front of me so I can have full access to it and write and high light in the book."
"I prefer to read a physical textbook where I can highlight and annotate as I read"
"I am a bit traditional. I enjoy paper, easier to read and can write notes."

**Table 7**  
**Student Comments Related to Negative Ease of Use for a Physical Textbook**

SAMPLE COMMENTS
“Loose leaves are hard to manage and tear easily.”
“I try not to get hardback textbooks if it can be avoided because I don't want the additional weight to carry around.”
“Textbooks are not cool anymore due to the fact that they're too heavy to take to class everyday to only use the once a semester.... I don't like soft cover books either due to the fact that they wrinkle easily in my book bags”
“Hardbacks are so heavy- when all you have is Tues/Thurs classes carrying around 5 hardback books is so heavy. i cant afford student loans and chiropractor bills. Paper backs arent as bad but they can tear if you are in a hurry.”

### Price

The other major category of responses related to the price of the textbook. Fifty-seven students mentioned price in his or her answer. Just like in the 2014 study (Edmondson and Ward, 2017), for many students, price was the key. Most students believe that the textbook prices, regardless of textbook type, are overpriced. It is noteworthy that there seems to be a major movement towards renting textbooks instead of purchasing as a way to save costs. A sampling of the comments made is shown in Table 8 below.

**Table 8**  
**Student Comments Related to Price**

SAMPLE COMMENTS
“For a class like Marketing or other non-math related classes where you don't work problems and it is simply memorization/repitition, I don't think an access code for homework would benefit me. I prefer to not have to buy these because they are always so much more expensive than renting a text book and you can't ever rent or resell them because students need the access code.”
“Cheapest option is always best for students. A lot of students work 1 or more jobs and have bills to pay.”
“I dislike ebooks because they require purchasing a code which can be very expensive. I also prefer to rent because school already costs enough as it is, so if I can save money by renting then I will.”
“Do not make a [university] version as they are nearly 115% more expensive than other books made for general classes. I'd rather have a teacher pick and choose information and us save money on textbooks. I have had teachers in the past require a book that was \$120.00 on top of that require an app that is \$30.00, just for attendance purposes, and then required an online access code for \$50.00. So please just keep that in mind when requiring a textbook or resources.”
“When it comes to making the decision if I am going to purchase or rent a text, I rent for my general requirements, and purchase all my major books. I am much more likely to pay extra to purchase a hardcover book.”
“Books and access codes are so expensive. we are still students. sometimes we cannot purchase them.”
“renting textbooks to me is the best way to save money”
“e-books can be just as expensive as a regular textbook, with no option to re-sell it. So I suggest either a condensed paperback with a re-sell option or a cheaper e-book.”
“For textbooks I want to spend the least amount of money as possible, especially if it is for a general

class and not something involved in my major. If I need a code, I will get it online by itself or with an e-book. If I need the book to read I will choose an e-book or rental, either of which depends on which one is cheapest.”
“Another point is that even though you can resell your books, they NEVER give back as much as you’d hope. Ive had a 100 dollar book be resold for as little as 8 dollars.”
“E- books are too expensive considering there is not much cost associated in providing them.”
“Classes that require a textbook and an access code are hard to afford on a college budget....The access codes are also overpriced, gaining access to online material should not cost upwards of \$100. I understand the information should be paid for, but to pay that much without receiving a physical product is frustrating.”
“ebooks can be cheaper, since multiple people can pitch in to buy one book and share the log in.”
“price is the main determinant when purchasing textbooks”
“Textbooks are extremely over priced and often not used.”
“Books are very pricey and in my opinion will stop buying them and google everything.”
“I like books that are cheap and affordable. Not everyone has enough money to buy text books.”
“As a college student, I believe affordability should be a priority.”

## Other Interesting Tidbits

In addition to ease of use and price, two other interesting tidbits came about when reviewing the student comments. First, eleven students mentioned that their purchase decision process was based on the discipline. Specifically, students indicated they were more willing to pay for textbooks in their major area of study. Comments revealed that these books were more likely to be kept by students and thus, they were less willing to resell and did not like that e-books expired after the semester. For example, one student stated:

“I prefer to buy a used hardback or paperback book in good condition. After the semester is over, if I don’t wish to keep the book, I can either resell the book to a fellow student or a bookstore. If I wish to keep the book, I have a book that is in good condition to use for future reference. I prefer not to use ebooks with an access code because, depending on its features, once the semester or allotted time is expired you can no longer access the information in the book. So the information in the ebook would not be helpful to me in a future career, if I needed to reference something.”

Another interesting tidbit is that five students liked physical copies of the text because they considered themselves more “old-fashioned” or “old-school.”

## Attitudes towards Online Publisher Materials

This study incorporated five additional questions related specifically to student’s prior usage and attitudes towards online materials provided by the publisher. Students have used all three of the major publisher’s online platforms (McGraw Hill’s Connect, Pearson’s MyLab, and Cengage’s MindTap). Students have also completed a variety of activities on the publisher’s online platform, with quizzes, tests, or study modules being the most commonly used. See Table 9 for more details. Overall, 49.1% of students were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the resources provided in the publisher’s online platform while only 12.9% of students were dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied with these materials (Mean = 3.44 out of 5, SD = 0.9).

**Table 9**  
**Summary of Key Findings Related to Publisher’s Online Platforms**

QUESTION	ANSWER OPTIONS	N	%
In the past, what publisher’s online platform have you used? [Select All That Apply]	McGraw Hill’s Connect	136	74.3%
	Pearson’s MyLab	150	82.0%
	Cengage’s MindTap	93	50.8%
	I have not used any publisher’s online platforms.	10	5.5%
In the past, what type of activities and/or assignments have you completed on the publisher’s online platform? [Select All That Apply]	Quizzes or Tests	161	88.0%
	Written Assignments	68	37.2%
	Video Assignments	67	36.6%
	Study Modules	106	57.9%
	Games	22	12.0%
	Mini-Cases	20	10.9%
	Simulations	43	23.5%

Eighty-five percent of students were either likely or extremely likely to purchase a required access code in order to complete graded assignments (e.g., assignments, practice quizzes, study modules, games, mini-cases, simulations, etc.) (Mean = 4.4 out of 5, SD = 1.09). Twenty-four percent of students indicated a willingness to purchase an access code even if less than 10% of their class grade was based on required assignments only available via the publisher’s online platform. On the other hand, 31.1% of students required 50% or more of the class grade to be based on the publisher’s online platform assignments before the student would be willing to purchase the access code. Only 2.7% of the students were not willing to purchase the access code under any conditions.

Many publishers have recently created a mobile app for their online platform which would students to access content via smartphones, tablets, etc. Thirty-four percent of students believe that an app is very important or extremely important while 19.3% believe that having an app is not at all important. However only 29.3% of students have used a publisher’s mobile app previously. Of those, 60.8% report being satisfied or extremely satisfied with the mobile app used.

### Future Trend: Subscription Model?

One of the major publishers is launching a subscription-based model for their textbooks in the Fall 2018. This model is similar to other subscription-based services students may already be using such as Netflix, Hulu, and Spotify. With adoption of this subscription-based model, students can receive access to all of the publisher’s E-books, including access codes, for a flat fee of \$119.99 per semester. Because this is a new type of publishing business model, students were asked how appealing this type of offering was to him or her. Overall, students found the idea to be somewhat appealing (Mean = 3.29 on a 5-point scale, SD = 1.32). See Table 10 for a breakdown by answer option.

Table 10  
Opinion towards Subscription Model

ANSWER OPTION	N	%
Not at all appealing	20	11.2%
Slightly appealing	33	18.5%
Somewhat appealing	45	25.3%
Moderately appealing	36	20.2%
Very appealing	44	24.7%

## Discussion

This study is a follow-up to a 2014 study by Edmondson and Ward (2017) that examined student attitudes and preferences to four different textbook options (hardback, paperback, loose leaf, and E-book). There are very few published studies that have examined student preferences and attitudes to the four different textbook options available on the market. Qualitative data is also collected to provide enhanced depth to the results. In addition, this is the only study found which has investigated attitudes and satisfaction with online publisher materials (e.g., McGraw Hill's Connect, Pearson's MyLab, etc). These results can be used by faculty to help make textbook adoption decisions. This is especially true for a survey-style of class such as Principles of Marketing where the course is taught by multiple faculty, student enrollments are typically higher, and/or multiple majors are represented.

This study found that when price was not an issue, students preferred the hardback version of the text. The selection of the hardback textbook differs from the 2014 finding in which students preferred the paperback textbook option the most. This is an interesting change, especially when considering students still commented that one of the reasons they dislike hardback books is due to their carrying weight. However, when price was a consideration, the type of textbook desired depended greatly on whether an online access code was required for the class. If an online access code was required, students preferred the paperback textbook followed closely by the E-book option. Some students would opt to purchase solely an E-book in order to save money while other students still desired the physical textbook in addition to the online resources. If an online access code was not required, over 60% of students opted to rent the required textbook instead of purchase. This is a drastic shift than in prior years as textbook rentals which are typically cheaper have become more readily available to students both online and through bookstores.

When examining the qualitative feedback provided by students, it was clear that most of the comments could be categorized into two areas: ease of use (positive vs. negative; E-book vs. physical) and price. Even though students have more experience with E-books than in 2014, overall student attitudes towards E-books were still neutral, at best. However, when examining the number of negative student comments, students had significantly fewer negative E-book comments than in the 2014 study (60 students in 2014 vs. 30 students in 2018). This implies that students may be more receptive to E-books due to increased exposure to this type of textbook format. By contrast, the majority of comments regarding physical textbooks are overwhelmingly positive (40 positive comments vs. 6 negative), implying that this textbook style is still desirable to students. Similar to 2014, students still remarked how price was a major deciding factor when

purchasing textbooks. Students believe that textbooks are priced too high which may be why students now lean towards the rental option.

The textbook industry has experienced significant changes over the past decade due to the increasing pressures to provide lower cost textbook options to students or to create additional value options in the form of ancillary materials such as online publisher materials. New to this study, students were asked about their attitudes and satisfaction with online publisher materials such as McGraw Hill's Connect and Pearson's MyLab. Only 5.5% of the students surveyed had no experience with at least one publisher's online platform, implying that the use of these online platforms has become widely adopted by faculty. This might be due, at least in part, to the fact that publishers now often package these platforms with new book purchases. Faculty adopting this technology typically then require activities from the platform to be part of graded course requirements. Because of this, 85% of students were likely or very likely to purchase access, if required. Almost half of students surveyed were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their online platform experience.

Other recent changes to the textbook publishing industry include the creation of mobile apps for the textbook's online publisher materials as well as the upcoming release of the textbook subscription-based model. In a bold move, one of the major publishers is launching a new subscription-based business model where students can pay a set price per semester and have online access to all textbooks and online materials produced by that publisher. Students found this model to be somewhat appealing. For example, one student commented, "The idea of an Unlimited textbook option is genius. This will make preparing for a school semester easier and more affordable." Others saw potential cons given that it is unlikely that all classes will require textbooks from the same publisher. If students find value in this type of subscription model, faculty may face increasing pressure to adopt textbooks from a single publisher.

In addition, textbook adoption decisions by faculty may become more limited in the future due to changes in the product offerings in the textbook publishing industry. For example, when examining textbook offerings for Principles of Marketing for the Fall 2018 semester, only one of the publishers offered a paperback version of their text for consideration. The other two publishers had eliminated hardback and paperback versions and instead only offered E-book or E-book with Loose leaf options. If this trend continues, faculty may find they are forced to adopt E-books with or without a Loose leaf version solely because no other option will remain.

This study suffered from several limitations. For example, this study did not investigate how students use textbooks and whether different text formats and/or online publisher materials made a difference in student learning. In addition, since data was collected from a convenience sample at a large Southeastern university, results may not be generalizable to smaller institutions of higher learning or different geographic regions. Future research is also needed to determine if there are differences in textbook preferences based on the discipline being taught. Anecdotal evidence from the open-ended question in this survey suggested that textbook decisions related to courses in a student's major were often considered differently than general education and/or elective classes.

In conclusion, based on the results of this study, the decision on what type of textbook is desired by business students depends on if an access code is required. If it is required, students still seem to prefer paperback versions of the textbook although E-books are a close second. If an access code is required, it is important that the professor mandate utilization of these online resources by making it a part of the student's grade. If no access code is required, students will

opt to rent a textbook a majority of the time. It is important that professors be cognizant of student attitudes towards textbook options prior to making adoption decisions. If the wrong textbook type is selected, fewer students may purchase the required text. When students are unable or unwilling to buy and use a textbook, they 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.

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