

Commentary on “Business-to-Business Marketing Textbooks: A Comparative Review”

Gul T. Butaney

ABSTRACT. Selecting a textbook for the business-to-business (b-to-b) marketing course is an important decision and deserves careful consideration. Many of us view the textbook as a prime component of instruction and rely on it to organize the course. The comparative review of 36 B-to-B marketing textbooks written in English and other languages by Backhaus, Mell and Sabel have produced a valuable piece of work that will help the instructor make a more informed textbook selection. The review also compels the instructors to keep the global student’s educational needs in mind when determining course design. Given the varied approaches that the authors of the 36 textbooks have adopted as well as the choice of classic, current, and emerging b-to-b topics, the process can be very complex. The textbook selection and the course design decisions indeed are intertwined. This commentary extends the contribution of the authors’ article and provides a preliminary framework for integrating the Value, Network, and Global perspectives along with the basic b-to-b core approached at the strategic, operational, and implementation levels of managerial orientation, which underlie the Modified Managerial textbook. The framework reinforces the fact that these perspectives represent

Gul T. Butaney is Professor of Marketing at Bentley College, Waltham, Boston, MA (E-mail: gbutaney@bentley.edu).

The author gratefully thanks Dr. Pierre Berthon, Clifford F. Youse Chair of Marketing, McCallum Graduate School, Bentley College, Waltham, MA, for his insightful comments on positioning of this article.

Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing, Vol. 14(4) 2007

Available online at <http://jbbm.haworthpress.com>

© 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

doi:10.1300/J033v14n04_04

the current B-to-B marketing thought, and are in fact complementary. When incorporated in the course design, the multi-perspective approach can significantly enhance the quality of marketing decisions, and as a result, the value of B-to-B marketing education for the student. doi:10.1300/J033v14n04_04 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Business marketing, education, textbooks

The comparative review of Business-to-Business (B2B) textbooks represents a systematic analysis and overview of 16 textbooks written in English and the 20 textbooks written in other languages. The review is comprehensive and provides valuable information for B2B marketing educators, including both instructors and textbook authors. It may result in collaborative efforts among textbook authors around the globe to produce a multi-perspective textbook. This review also encourages instructors teaching B2B marketing courses to engage in a more informed textbook selection process. The article will be saved, undoubtedly, and used as a resource to strengthen B2B curriculums and revitalize the basic B2B courses offered at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Moreover, it provides insights on developing advanced elective courses, such as International Business Marketing Management, Seminar on specific B2B marketing topic(s) or perspectives, Contemporary Topics, trends and practices in Business Marketing.

The authors, in their review of the textbooks, have taken the student-oriented perspective. They place emphasis on enhancing student learning, skills, and knowledge for the practice of B2B marketing; this is evident from the nature of the criteria that the authors use to perform their comparative analysis of textbooks. The review focuses on formal aspects/structural attributes of textbooks such as a textbook's readability level, inclusion of illustrative elements, figures, tables, real-life company examples, research findings, pedagogical aids, and topical coverage available from various textbooks.

Many of those teaching B2B courses do not have the time and resources required to undertake a comprehensive analysis of various textbooks. To avoid switching costs, we tend to use the same textbook year after year. However, this article provides the instructors with a wake-up call. It broadens our mindset for selecting textbook, providing insights

on approaches that different textbooks have pursued in treating the B-to-B subject matter. Those approaches are labeled as Managerial Approach (MA), Value Approach, Network Approach, Business-type Approach, Product life cycle Approach, and International (Global) strategy Approach. The textbooks pursuing the managerial approach are further categorized as traditional MA, extended MA, and modified MA (MMA), based upon the “core” of traditional and current topics covered in the textbook. The MMA textbook is likely to offer the most comprehensive set of classic/traditional and current b-to-b topics; however, the authors provide an “unbiased” descriptive analysis of the textbooks, leaving the choice of the textbook selection to each respective instructor’s judgment.

The review clearly highlights the need for the instructor to first determine the course design (objectives, structure, topics, etc.) and then to select appropriate course material. Karns (2005) points out that the role of the marketing educator has evolved. Student learning, rather than “teaching,” has become the defining element of the instructor’s role. Another significant contribution made by the author’s review of the textbooks is the identification of a confluence of current mainstream thinking on B2B marketing. The number of textbooks published in the field in different languages as well as in different parts of the world has also increased significantly in recent years. This fact reflects the importance and need for keeping the “global student” needs perspective while selecting B-to-B educational material. This would be an especially relevant course goal at the schools where global business education is emphasized or schools which have undertaken steps to internationalize their programs of studies, in an effort to better serve the needs of national and international student population that they target. Most of the international students coming to study in the U.S., go back to work for companies in their home countries, who may also transact business with organizational customers from other countries. When managers from a Chinese or Indian company pursue an MBA degree program abroad, one important goal is to learn about business practices and buying processes of target firms in those markets.

Given the trend toward globalization of business practices, the U.S. student also stands to gain from a global course perspective. Many software and consulting companies serve clients outside of the USA. Several U.S. universities and colleges have expanded their operations and offer courses and programs in international markets, collaborating with local universities, governmental organizations, or other private organizations. There has been a gradual increase in course offerings at international locations using distance-learning technology (Bardach, 1993;

Narayandas et al., 1998). Increasingly, international internship opportunities are arranged for both the U.S. and international students through various outreach programs and alumni associations. Not only are there implicit demands to internationalize curriculums and programs, but also explicit dictums stated in the mission statements of several major schools. Thus, it is important to keep the global student perspective in mind in determining the b-to-b course design and material.

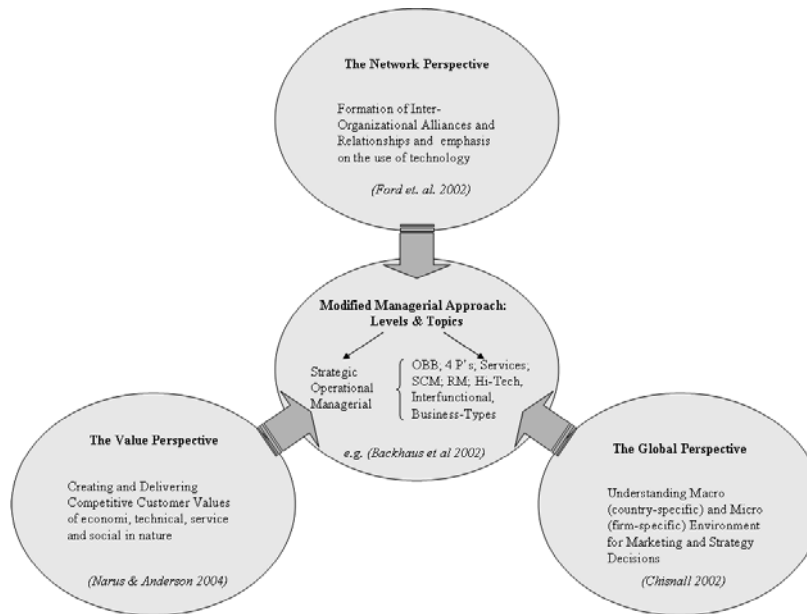
RELEVANCE TO B-TO-B COURSE DESIGN

There is a general consensus among educators that it is essential to prepare B2B students for successful adaptation to the marketing environments that they are likely to face in the real world (e.g., Hutt and Speh, 2003). Determining the ideal design for the B2B marketing management course at the undergraduate level, can be very a complex task especially with different perspectives and combinations of potential current and traditional topics. The course material and pedagogical approach should not only provide the student with knowledge and skills necessary for succeeding professionally at their first B2B job but also develop the student's conceptual framework so that they may continue to integrate new information and changing trends within B2B marketing long after the completion of the course or their first job. The textbook selection and the course design decisions, therefore, are important and closely intertwined. In addition to the core marketing topics that are treated at managerial level, that is, on various strategic, operational, and implementation aspects of the topical core, the core should be related to marketing perspectives that represent current thinking on B-to-B marketing issues. A multi-perspective approach, therefore, should significantly improve the quality of treating the core topics and enhance the value of the course to the student. To extend the contribution of the authors' article, a preliminary framework for integrating the perspectives with the modified managerial textbook approach is presented in Figure 1.

AN ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK FOR B2B COURSE DESIGN

Ideally, the course design should strive for comprehensive coverage of topics, both current and traditional. It should also incorporate various perspectives as they are represented in current B2B marketing practice.

FIGURE 1. An Organizing Framework for B-to-B Marketing Course Design: Integrating Managerial Approach with B-to-B Marketing Perspectives.



Initially, designing and implementing such a course may appear complex and not feasible. However, closer examination of the specific approaches or perspectives will reveal that many of these perspectives are in fact complimentary. Effective integration of the perspectives is likely to improve the quality of B2B marketing strategy and implementation decisions, as well as to broaden the student's preparation for a career in the B2B marketing field.

The center piece of the proposed course design framework, as depicted in Figure 1, is the assimilation of some of the traditional and current B2B topics, along with three levels of managerial tasks, viz., strategic, operational, and implementation decisions and issues that underline the MMA textbook. This is the basic perspective or the orientation that underlies the Managerial Approach and has been the central organizing framework for marketing textbooks (Webster, 1984; Gronross, 1994; Backhaus et al., 2007). The topical core includes business products/services; types of

organizational buyers and markets; organizational buying behavior and processes (OBB); marketing-mix elements; e-Commerce strategies for business markets; supply chain management; relationship marketing; ethical issues; marketing and uses of hi-technology products; business market planning, strategy development, implementation, and control; customer relationships management; and business strategies for global marketing, among others. Because of the managerial orientation of the MA textbook, the B-to-B topical core is looked at the strategic, operational, and implementation (SOI) levels of managerial work. The Modified MA textbook may provide material on some aspects of the Value, Network, Global, Business-Type, and Product Life Cycle perspectives; the material, however, is not treated as a part of the integrated textbook design. The primary mission of the MA textbook would be to cover the fundamentals relevant to the chapter topic, and not how each of the perspective may influence various aspects of the topic of each chapter. The availability of the broad core of topical structure and the managerial orientation of the MMA textbook can serve as a strong base for integrating various perspectives. Supplementary reading material from journal articles and/ or the textbooks pursuing the specific perspectives would be required to address that gap in the course design.

Integrating Value, Network, and Global Perspectives with Managerial Core

The marketing decisions and strategies as they relate to various B2B marketing topics are influenced by three major perspectives viz., the Value perspective (Anderson et al., 2004), the Network (Ford et al., 2002) Perspective, and the Global Perspective (Chisnall, 1995) as depicted in the Figure 1. As stated previously, the Business-type (Backhaus et al., 2005; Backhaus et al., 2007) and Product Life Cycle (Rangan et al., 1995) are other important perspectives; however, they are expected to be integral parts of the managerial and SOI core, and consequently, they are not explicitly included in the framework. The Modified Managerial approach, to restate and emphasize, covers the broad spectrum of business marketing topics, both traditional and current, with intense focus on technology. Because of the managerial nature of this perspective or approach, attention is given to marketing decisions and issues involved in various MA textbook topics at the strategic, operational, and implementation (SOI) levels. One way to integrate the SOI with the Value, Network, and Global perspectives is to examine their impact on various marketing issues relevant to the managerial core in terms of the opportunities and

constraints that these perspectives would bring to bear on decisions and tasks at each of the three SOI levels. In that sense, the perspectives can be viewed as complementary in nature, with synergistic effects on marketing decision-making. The complementary nature of the above four perspectives as they would facilitate integrated marketing decision-making on the core, is now briefly explained.

The Value Perspective (TVP)

The focus of this perspective is on creating and delivering competitive value propositions to customers, which is rooted in the marketing concept (Webster, 1992) and has been the basic tenets of creating and nurturing the exchange relationships between the marketing and customer organizations. Anderson and Narus (2004) define business marketing management as “the process of understanding, creating, and delivering value to targeted organizational customers.” Value is defined as the sum of economic, technical, service, and social benefits that a customer firm receive in exchange for the price it pays for the offering (Anderson, Jain and Chintagunta, 1993). This approach complements the strategic, operational, and implementation perspective as the customer value propositions revolve around the four marketing-mix elements. This perspective strengthens and provides direction for strategy formulation and implementation decisions. To complement the integration of the Value and the SOI perspectives effectively, the design and marketing of the customer value propositions should be examined at each of the three level of the SOI perspective, that is, in terms of their implications at the strategic, operational, and implementation (SOI) levels. To enhance the contribution of the Value perspective, each of the customer value proposition and the related marketing-mix element(s), therefore, need to be viewed at the three managerial levels, that is, SOI, for attaining the maximum level of effectiveness, efficiency, and control in developing and marketing the value propositions to the customer.

The Network Perspective

According to this perspective, business marketing is seen as multidirectional, where both customer organizations and marketing firms are actively involved to establish, nurture, and manage marketing relationship, and strategically collaborating and sharing their respective skills, resources, technologies, strategies, and objectives for mutual benefit (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2001; Ford et al., 2002). The use of technology

to manage relationships and resources is seen as a vital part of network and business marketing. Therefore, the network perspective is broadly positioned to include inter-organizational marketing alliances for cultivating favorable marketing resources and arrangements necessary to implement the partner firms' marketing strategies. This perspective includes the development of relational marketing strategies for forging long-term business relationships with strategic marketing partners, upstream and downstream value chains partners firms, third party services providers, and customer organizations. The Network perspective is obviously related closely to the Value perspective as the firm's strategic network of partners contribute in creating and delivering competitive value propositions to the firm's customers. For planning inter-organizational relationships, the related marketing arrangements need to be examined from the strategic requirements and operational issues. Utilization of inter-organizational management techniques would be crucial for nurturing and implementation of relationships with network partners.

Marketing of technology products/services (e.g., software tools and systems), for instance, generally involve working with several internal and external partners. These partners may be involved at different stages of the selling process to deliver augmented product/service bundle of values to the customer. Effective management of working relationships with independent partner and customer organizational members can be complex. It requires the use of relational marketing strategies as well as constructive power and conflict management skills. Several topics included in the MMA textbook such as marketing of high technology products, relationship marketing, management of relationships with supply and demand chain partners, and the use of information technology tools, etc., can be helpful. They can facilitate the discussion on how to manage and nurture partner and customer relationships and to fully actualize the potential available in the network. It can aid in discussion of relationship building marketing strategies, inter-organizational management techniques, and the role of information technology tools (e.g., PRM, CRM, and ERP) to solidify the marketing relationships. Thus, the B-to-B core can be easily integrated with the Value perspective as well as by discussing how relationship marketing and information technology products result in creating and delivering several types of values to the customers and partners within the network. This integrative process and thinking thus makes the perspectives as integral to the decisions that the core managerial/task levels entail.

The Global Perspective

The Global perspective focuses on understanding the country specific macro environmental factors (e.g., economic, technological and cultural forces, and business customs) as they influence the company's market entry decisions or planning potential business transactions with firms in the international market. The perspective also requires an understanding of micro environmental factors (e.g., suppliers of products and services, intermediaries, competitors, customer buying behavior, and decision-making process) that affect the company's ability to cultivate and nurture resources for effectively implementing strategies. International trade is booming and global competition has intensified. Companies engaged in international marketing activities have increased substantially across the globe. Foreign firms are expanding aggressively into new international markets and home markets are no longer considered rich in marketing resources and/or opportunities (Kotler et al., 2001). Therefore, it is an important perspective that needs to be integrated with the topics included in the MMA textbook.

An analysis of country specific macro and micro environmental factors is an initial step in performing an opportunity analysis as a part of the strategic marketing planning process, the key perspective that underlies the MMA core. Additionally, the firm-specific factors and characteristics (e.g., the organizational customer purchasing process, business cultural norms, and customs), would facilitate and enrich the discussion of the classic B2B topic of organizational buying behavior and process, and determination of selling and distribution strategies. Development of effective global marketing strategies are also likely to call for cultivating and building inter-organizational alliances and partnerships for enhancing the creation and delivery of value propositions to customers in international business markets. In doing so, the global perspective becomes intertwined with the SOI, the Value, and the Network perspectives.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COURSE DESIGN

It is obvious that the strategic and operational perspective, value perspective, network perspective, and global perspective can significantly enhance the value of the business marketing course for the student, if integrated in the course design. Since no single B2B marketing textbook includes the four perspectives systematically, the instructor is left to integrate them in the course design. If an MMA textbook is selected,

supplementary reading materials (e.g., journal articles, book chapters) on the Value, Network, and the Global perspectives can be included as “required reading” for the course.

The sequence of the topics must be considered and modified to effectively achieve integration of the various perspectives. One suggested sequence would be to first provide a solid introduction to the nature of business products and markets; organizational customers and their buying behavior, processes, and purchasing organization practices. These topics should be followed by required readings on the perspectives, viz., (1) creating and delivering customer values, (2) creating network of strategic alliances/partnerships and understanding the role of relational marketing strategies and information technology tools in nurturing/managing the partner relationships, (3) the global marketing perspective and relevant issues, and lastly, (4) the strategic marketing and planning process and designing marketing-mix strategies. After providing a solid orientation to the nature of business products, types of organizational customers, and organizational buying behavior, and the fundamental perspectives, the traditional sequence of various business-to-business marketing topics as covered in the selected textbook might be pursued. Each of the course or the textbook topics should be looked at from each of the three perspectives concurrently. This will strengthen the identification, development, and implementation of marketing strategies as they relate to the B-to-B core. Utilization of short and comprehensive B2B marketing cases would be an ideal vehicle to reinforce this integration through active application (critical reasoning and problem solving) to real-life situations. Student assignments involving research on the best practices, and current events about the real-life companies’ applications of value, network, and global perspective oriented strategies would also be helpful. They would provide a window of opportunity within class discussion to integrate the four perspectives with B2B marketing topics and issues, culminating the student involvement in the learning process at the highest level.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, D. C., J. C. Jain, and D.C. Chintagunta (1993), “ Customer Value Assessment in Business Markets : A State-of-Practice Study, in : *Journal of Business to Business Marketing* , Vol. 1, No. 1, 3-30.
- Anderson, J. C. , and J. A. Narus (2004), *Business Marketing Management : Understanding, Creating, and Delivering Value*, 2nd edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

- Backhaus, K. and Meuhlfeld, K. (2005) "Strategy Dynamics in Industrial Marketing: A Business Type Perspective, in: *Management Decision*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 38-55.
- Backhaus K., B. Mell, and T. Sabel (2005), "Business –to-Business Marketing Text-books : A Comparative Review", in *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, Vol XX, No.x .
- Bardach , K. C. (1993), " Patterns and Trends in Executive Education ", *Selections*, 14, (1), 18-25.
- Chisnall , P. (1995), *Strategic Business Marketing*, 3rd ed., Harlow, great Britain: Prentice-Hall.
- Ford, D., P. Berthon, S. Brown, L. Gaddle, H. Kakansson, P. Naudi, T. Ritter, and I. Snehota (2002), *The Business Marketing Course : Managing in Complex Networks*, Chichester : J. Wiley & Sons.
- Gronross, C. (1994), " Quo Vadis Marketing? Towards a Relationship Paradigm, *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 10. No. 5, 347-360.
- Hutt, M. and T. Speh (2003) , *Businessarketing Management : A Strategic View of Industrial and Organizational Markets*, 8th ed., Mason : S.W.College.
- Karns, G. L. (2005), " An Update of Marketing Student of Perspection of Learning Activities ; Structure, Preferences, and Effectiveness", *Journal of Marketing Education*, Vol. 27, No.2, 163-171.
- Kleinaltenkamp M., F. Jacob (2001), " German Approaches to Business-to-Business Marketing Theory : Origins and Structure", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 55, 149-155.
- Kotler, P. K. L. Keller, (2001), *Marketing Management*, 12th ed., Upper Saddle River:, Prentice Hall.
- Narayandas N., V.K. rangan, and G. Zaltman, (1998), " The Pedagogy of Executive Education in Business Markets", *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, Vol. 5 (1/2), 41-63.
- Rangan , V. K., B. P. Shapiro, and R. T. Moriarty (1995), *Business Marketing Strategy: Cases, Concepts, and Applications*, Chicago : McGraw Hill.
- Webster , F. E. (1984), *Industrial Marketing Strategy*. New York : J. Wiley & Sons.
- Webster , F. E. (1992), " The Changing Role of Marketing in the Corporation, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 56, No.4, 1-17.