

# A Reply to the Commentaries on “Business-to-Business Marketing Textbooks: A Comparative Review”

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**ABSTRACT.** In this article, the authors respond to the commentaries from Professors Butaney, Honeycutt, McLoughlin, Snehota, Thelen and Tunisini on their article “Business-to-Business Marketing Textbooks: A Comparative Review.” The issues we discuss involve responses to particular aspects of each commentary, as well as some general thoughts on future considerations that were raised, particularly with respect to the autonomy of the “specific” approaches and the future development of the Business Marketing textbook market. doi:10.1300/J033v14n04\_08 [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.]

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**KEYWORDS.** Comparison of business marketing textbooks, approaches to business marketing, business marketing course, future developments of business marketing textbooks

### ***INTRODUCTION***

We are grateful for the opportunity to reply to the relevant and insightful commentaries on our paper “Business-To-Business Marketing Textbooks: A Comparative Review” in the current edition of the *JBBM*. We are very pleased that Professors Butaney, Honeycutt, McLoughlin, Snehota, Thelen and Tunisini, six renowned researchers in business-to-business marketing, have responded to our paper. We wish to thank them for their input.

The four commentaries display considerable heterogeneity. While Honeycutt and Thelen focus primarily on the methodology we used (“the analysts”), the other three commentaries view our paper primarily as a basis for developing proposals for course design and other objectives (“the developers”). However, within these later three commentaries, the proposals are also quite varied.

Our response is therefore divided into three parts. First, the three commentaries that used our article as a basis, will be replied to jointly, bearing in mind particularly the independence of the specific approaches. Our response to the fourth commentary will then follow and our reply concludes with some general thoughts on the future development of the Business Marketing textbook market.

### ***REPLY TO THE COMMENTS OF PROFESSORS BUTANEY, MCLOUGHLIN AND SNEHOTA/TUNISINI (THE “DEVELOPERS”)***

The three commentaries of the “developers,” despite showing constitutive similarities, differ significantly with respect to the following two dimensions (Table 1):

1. their valuation of the autonomy of the “specific approaches”
2. focus of content/object of proposal

TABLE 1. Comparison of the Commentaries of the “Developers”

Focus of Content/Object of Proposal	Valuation of the Autonomy of the “Specific Approaches”		
Teaching	Butaney		McLoughlin
Discipline		Snehota/Tunisi	

While, from Butaney’s perspective, the managerial and the specific approaches are complementary in nature and can thus easily be combined and integrated, McLoughlin interprets the specific approaches as independent and holistic approaches to Business Marketing. Based on these differences in interpretation, the two commentaries, even though both aiming towards a teaching-oriented proposal, come to opposing conclusions.

Based on his evaluation of the differences between the managerial and specific approaches, Butaney develops a course design which is based on the modified managerial approach, but also integrates topics and ideas from the network, value and global approaches to a different extent.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the value approach, the propositions of which “revolve around the four marketing-mix-instruments” (Butaney, 2007, p. 67-77), should be used to complement the considerations on strategic, operational, and implementation levels of managerial work (SOI), while the network approach should be depicted by means of specific topics as examples (e.g., marketing high tech products or supply chain management). The global approach, and especially its macroeconomic implications, should be integrated into the sections on OBB and selling/distribution.

In contrast to this approach, the interpretation of the specific approaches by McLoughlin as holistic, raises the question of whether the MA should be used at all to teach Business Marketing. The author discusses the MA’s advantage of being closely related to Consumer Marketing, and its disadvantage of displaying a low fit with problems specific to Business Marketing. He concludes that Business Marketing should be taught strictly in terms of one of the specific approaches in a graduate setting, in which the Business Marketing course is primarily taught.

Furthermore, the author encourages placing a higher emphasis on problems and tools unique to Business Marketing in an undergraduate setting. A stronger integration of this specific content into the “classic” standard literature, which usually employs the MA, might make students more curious about this special area of marketing early on in their studies.

The first two commentaries, despite their great differences, focus their proposals on the classic function of a textbook, which is to serve as the basis for course design. This raises the question of the consequences of these commentaries for a Business Marketing instructor.

Interpreting the different approaches as combinable makes it necessary that either the instructor integrates them without being able to use one single textbook (because it does not yet exist) or that a textbook has to be written according to Butaney's proposal. Focussing on one specific approach, as proposed by McLoughlin, would lead to Business Marketing courses, in which the topic is considered consistently from one specific point of view.

The third commentary by Snehota and Tunisini takes an intermediary position between the above-mentioned commentaries with respect to the interpretation of independency, but differing with respect to the second dimension by focussing on scientific dialogue, rather than on teaching-oriented aspects. The authors regard the discrepancies between the managerial and the specific approaches as inherently different, thus considering a combination or integration of the two as almost impossible. They identify the main differences between the MA and specific approaches to be

- the object of investigation (single company vs. multiple interdependent players in a single market) and
- the objective of the approach (the normative aim of "how to solve the problem" vs. the rather explicative aim of "interpreting the problem")

Especially the second difference is viewed by the authors as a starting point for an "interplay" between the approaches, which they view as a major stimulus for scientific debate: "the dialogue process among the various approaches that, without ever ending in a generally shared view, is what drives the development of the discipline" (Snehota/Tunisi, 2007, p. 93-97).

We agree completely on that. It is interesting to note that this statement is the result of a textbook review. Normally, textbooks are published as a result of scientific discussions and not in order to stimulate debate. We nevertheless warmly welcome the fact that our emphasis on different approaches has animated cross-approach discussions.

**REPLY TO PROFESSORS HONEYCUTT/THELEN'S  
COMMENTS (THE "ANALYSTS")**

In their paper, Honeycutt and Thelen undertake a thorough analysis of our article, touching upon a variety of different topics. Our response to the manifold comments is structured in terms of three main principles.

1. *The Global Approach of Our Article.* With our analysis, we aim explicitly at giving the readers an international overview of English and non-English textbooks.

Given this standpoint, the comment that our classification of the approaches is too differentiated, is surely relativized. The authors criticize the fact that only one textbook exists for many of the identified approaches. However, this is clearly not accurate, when taking a global perspective. In addition, the name of the chosen classification (i.e., specific) already suggests a certain degree of autonomy with respect to approaching the subject of Business Marketing, which, per se, only allows for a small group size.

The authors furthermore critically discuss our not having integrated the textbook prices as a criterion in the analysis. When undertaking a global analysis, comparing textbook prices can be problematic, because "overseas editions [. . .] can be purchased for 20-30% of what our university bookstores charge for the same edition" (Honeycutt/Thelen, 2007, p. 79-83), as the authors state themselves.

2. *Explicit Abandonment of Valuations in our Article.* We abstained quite deliberately from any rating or assessment in our article whenever possible (please see the how-to-use-guide for our reasons in detail).

Judgements on the applicability of a specific textbook as the basis for a course can only be derived from the objectives of the course. However, these are not uniform, because there are "differing needs that are based upon the goals of the respective course" (Honeycutt/Thelen, 2007, p. 79-83).

Honeycutt and Thelen advocate a content analysis instead, which is always judgemental and at least partially subjective, as the authors state themselves: "The suggested approach [. . .] raises the question of subjectivity" (Honeycutt/Thelen, 2007, p. 79-83). We do not share this opinion, for the reason named above, because there can be no consensus on "the most important or most commonly found concepts that are essential for a student completing a B2B class to know" (Honeycutt/Thelen, 2007, p. 79-83). With our article, we wanted to provide the necessary tools and information to enable the reader to derive his or her individual judgement for him-/herself. Insofar, we agree with Honeycutt and Thelen

in stating that “the original article by the authors offers an initial point for better understanding existing B2B marketing textbooks” (Honeycutt/Thelen, 2007, p. 79-83).

3. *Focussing on Outcome Rather Than Formation of the Textbooks in Our Article.* We wanted to compare the outcome, rather than to understand why an author had written a book in a specific way. For that reason, we abstained from an examination of both the background information of the authors, as well as the influence of the respective country’s economic development. Even though these aspects might have delivered additional insights, an analysis of individual and cultural influences on the outcome would have increased the risk of “significant potential for misunderstanding” (Honeycutt/Thelen, 2007, p. 79-83) also mentioned by Honeycutt and Thelen in the context of cultural studies. We believe that our decision to consider the textbooks at a more abstract level reduced this risk.

### ***SOME THOUGHTS ON THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE GLOBAL MARKET OF BUSINESS MARKETING TEXTBOOKS***

Apart from the aspects considered above, both Honeycutt and Thelen, and McLoughlin raise the question of whether the total number of nearly 40 textbooks might be too large for the size of the market.

From our point of view, this variety can be explained by the fact that, unlike many other disciplines, the subject of Business Marketing can be accessed from many different angles. On the other hand, we believe that the market could be subject to a consolidation process over time, resulting ultimately in a few “standard” textbooks, due primarily to the large number of new textbooks published within the last five years and the increasing relevance of the English as the academic language, not only for research, but also for teaching. However, selecting these “standard” textbooks should be left to the market. We (merely) aimed at furthering the evoked set of Business Marketing textbooks. One can only derive a subjective opinion, if one knows all available options. This, however, we cannot do for our readers. Ultimately, they must form their own opinions.

#### **NOTE**

1. The Product-Life-Cycle and the Business-Type approaches are regarded by the author as already integrated into the modified MA.

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