

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

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ABSTRACT. Professor Backhaus and his colleagues undertake ambitious research to evaluate American textbooks on business-to-business marketing. Yet, in the process they do not report formal and universally accepted standards for business-to-business marketing textbook design and content, choosing instead to draw upon their own informally derived preferences. They apply the Bloom et al. (1956) taxonomy, on a limited basis, without providing validity and reliability test results. They evaluate several textbooks on the coverage characteristics of “instrumentally-oriented” and “marketing-management” approaches to marketing. They conclude by promoting the “transaction-types” approach and in particular the Backhaus version as a suitable framework for a business-to-business marketing textbook. My assessment follows. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2002 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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I want to begin by discussing my own experiences with textbook writing, addressing a number of critical issues overlooked in the Backhaus et al. article. Later on, I will reflect on the research of Professor Backhaus and his colleagues.

CRAFTING A BUSINESS MARKETING TEXTBOOK

A good place to begin is with a question that many instructors will initially assume that they can answer, “What is a management textbook?” To resolve it, I telephoned representatives of the AACSB International, the American Marketing Association (AMA), and our publisher, Prentice Hall. Officials at the AACSB International, the premier accreditation organization for academic management schools worldwide, informed me that there are “no formal and universally accepted standards as to what constitutes a management textbook.” At the AMA, the leading professional marketing association in the United States (U.S.), representatives similarly responded that the AMA does not have any formal standards concerning the makeup of a marketing textbook. A manager at Prentice Hall provided the answer that the business-book publishing industry appears to use, “A textbook is a book that an author and a publisher mutually agree to market as a textbook.” Thus, potential authors have broad latitude as to how to structure a textbook and what materials to include and/or exclude.

Given the absence of formal standards for a management textbook, one might now ask, “What subjects should be covered in a business marketing textbook?” Self-confident instructors might quickly respond that it should address the “common body of knowledge” for business marketing. However, representatives of the AMA have assured me that that organization has no formally agreed upon statement of the common body of knowledge for business marketing. And, according to AACSB International officials, when their evaluation teams inspect university courses such as business marketing during a program accreditation review, they do not assess whether or not assigned textbooks address the common body of knowledge for those subjects. Instead, they examine the “total collection of materials an instructor uses” in relation to the course objectives that the individual instructor and the institution have jointly specified.

In the book *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Bloom et al. 1956), which Professor Backhaus and his colleagues purportedly use as the foundation of their paper, Bloom and his colleagues state that in de-

termining the amount and kind of knowledge to be covered in a curriculum or course of study individual instructors must strike a balance between attempting to be exhaustive, including all knowledge known about a subject, and focusing exclusively on knowledge that is most germane to the subject. Furthermore, this decision must be tempered with an understanding of how much knowledge a student can reasonably digest and retain within the timeframe of the course. Thus, when selecting a textbook for inclusion along with other educational materials used in a course, the individual instructor can legitimately select from books along a continuum from “encyclopedic” (i.e., containing all knowledge) to “focused” (i.e., containing only the most germane). According to the AACSB International, the ultimate decision should be a function of the objectives that the individual instructor hopes to achieve and the total collection of materials to be used in a given course.

With such an extensive range of possibilities, a reader might ask, “So, how did you and Jim Anderson determine how to structure your textbook and what topics to address?” As the reader hopefully knows, our book, *Business Market Management: Understanding, Creating, and Delivering Value* (1999), does not follow the traditional “4 Ps with Industrial Examples” approach. Rather, we sought to provide a more progressive approach for business markets. Among our key goals for the project were the following.

1. We wanted *value* to be the cornerstone of the book. As we see it, *Business Market Management* is the process of understanding, creating, and delivering value to targeted business markets and customers. For doing so, a supplier firm is entitled to an equitable share of that value. We intended that all aspects of the book would ultimately relate to the provision and sharing of value.
2. We wanted to demonstrate that business market management decisions are based on rigorous value assessment and data gathered from the marketplace.
3. We wanted to meld emerging and proven management concepts and approaches such as *business processes, doing business across borders, and working relationships and networks*. These along with value serve as the guiding principles of our book. They enable us to integrate all materials across each chapter. At the same time, they demand that we be cross-functional in our approach rather than focusing exclusively on marketing issues.
4. As we targeted the book for Master’s level students, we wanted to write in a managerial style, providing practical approaches to

business market management and furnishing abundant examples from global businesses.

5. Most importantly, we wanted our textbook to be part of a customized solution that an instructor offered to his or her students. Center stage in this solution would be the instructor and his or her unique perspective on business marketing. To enable an instructor to deliver a course tailored to the unique requirements of his students, institution, and geographic area, we would provide a focused textbook plus an Instructor's Manual in which we recommend discussion cases, exercises, simulation games, and supplemental readings along with detailed lesson plans, chapter summaries, student preparation questions, and useful information sources and Internet websites.

With a prospectus in mind, we met with representatives of all the major publishers of business marketing textbooks in the U.S. We quickly learned that textbook publishing (as contrasted with academic journal publishing) is primarily profit-driven. Not only would our textbook have to be academically sound, it would have to be commercially successful. Furthermore, the top selling marketing textbooks fall in three mainstream categories—marketing management, marketing research, and consumer behavior. With total annual sales falling well below those in the three mainstream categories, business marketing textbooks constitute a small niche.

As a result of limited profit potential, publishers severely constrain the resources committed to a business marketing textbook project. For example, to most publishers the ideal length of a business marketing textbook is between 400 and 500 pages. Why? Because as page length increases so do production costs. To maintain a reasonable profit margin, the publisher would have to correspondingly increase book price, an increasingly unpalatable option in the highly competitive textbook market. You may have noticed that most business marketing textbooks appear in black and white or have one or two colors. Why? Additional colors dramatically increase costs. The same can be said about illustrations and photographs, particularly those that are copyrighted and require royalty fees for reproduction. To keep costs low, publishers provide niche-textbook writers with scant funds to develop support materials such as an Instructor's Manual, discussion cases, test banks, and presentation slides. Lastly, niche textbooks are likely to be placed on a three- or four-year revision schedule (as contrasted to a two- or three-

year cycle for mainstream textbooks). Thus, how current a textbook's content is will be a function of where it is in the revision cycle at the point of evaluation.

I emphasize these points for several important reasons. First, authors who write niche textbooks such as business marketing are doing so primarily to contribute to the discipline. Second, the constraints on number of pages, colors, and illustrations that publishers impose force authors to agonize over what topics "not to include" in the textbook. Presenting all knowledge from a discipline is becoming increasingly untenable. As one publisher's representative told me, "The market requires only one encyclopedia of marketing. And that spot is competently dominated by Kotler's *Marketing Management* (2000)." Third, any evaluations of textbook content, pages, illustrations, and colors that do not include economic considerations come across as overly simplistic and naïve.

To select content for our textbook, we began with a comprehensive review of the academic, popular management, and trade literatures. Then, Jim and I conducted focus groups and surveyed business marketing instructors, students, and business managers. We discovered that the preferences of these latter three constituencies had many similarities.

What have we learned from business marketing instructors? To begin with, instructors, particularly at the Master's level, want to be able to clearly differentiate their course content from other marketing electives as well as from business marketing courses offered at the undergraduate level. Increasingly, administrators are calling upon instructors to justify the continued presence of a business marketing course in their school's curriculum. Instructors need to be able to demonstrate that their course is unique, covering materials not found in other electives. We firmly believe that a course designed around our approach to Business Market Management enables them to do so. And, we routinely work with instructors to help them develop and distinguish their courses in business marketing offering guidance on session topics, discussion cases, exercises, and projects.

As is common in Master's level programs, instructors want to be able to customize their courses to the local requirements of their students by selecting their own discussion cases and supplemental readings that address current topics of interest. To accommodate them, we do not include discussion cases within the textbook. Instead, we recommend a handful of Harvard Business School, University of Western Ontario, or IMEDE discussion cases that instructors can use along with each chapter and provide summaries of those discussion cases in our Instructor's Manual. In addition, we furnish at "no charge" to adopters of our text-

book a number of proprietary discussion cases that we have written for instructors to reproduce and use. By doing these things, we help to hold the textbook's price in check while freeing up space to discuss other contemporary topics such as e-procurement, outsourcing, and network management in greater detail. Lastly, instructors want a textbook with between 400 and 450 pages that has a reasonable price tag for students.

What have we learned from business marketing students? Most importantly, they don't want a long book. Ideally, they would like 10 to 15 chapters with not more than 25 pages of text per chapter. Of course, they expect the text to be supplemented with numerous charts, illustrations, and break out boxes. As with publishers and instructors, students believe that a book with a total of 400 to 500 pages is reasonable. Clearly, students would prefer reading a textbook that discusses fewer, critical topics in greater detail to one that provides superficial treatment of a myriad of seemingly unrelated and unimportant topics. As one student complained to me, "Studying marketing entails memorizing a large number of lists." In response to this observation, we have made a deliberate attempt to avoid the "marketing list syndrome" (i.e., covering a broad range of issues superficially). Instead, we focus on what we believe to be the most germane topics and attempt to integrate them across the book via our guiding principles.

Students said they prefer a managerial orientation to a theoretical one and want examples from business practice that illustrate concepts, frameworks, and strategies described in the text. In response, Jim and I conducted extensive field research at major U.S., European, and Asian companies over a three-year period and devised 57 mini-case studies to improve student understanding of important concepts. These 57 mini-cases appear as "break out boxes" throughout the text. Simultaneously, we summarized our findings in three, management practice articles for the *Harvard Business Review*.

Finally, students want reasonably priced textbooks. We feel that one way to keep price in check is to eschew the "more is better" syndrome. To do so, we carefully scrutinize every potential topic, avoid rehashing subjects that are covered thoroughly in introductory marketing textbooks such as Kotler's *Marketing Management*, and limit ourselves to those topics that we believe deliver the greatest practical value to students.

Ultimately, the purpose of management education is to prepare students for careers in business. For this reason, Jim and I felt that it was critical that our textbook be relevant to business managers. To insure that it was, we sought out topics from, brainstormed with, and reviewed materi-

als repeatedly with senior executives from major corporations across a variety of industries. These corporations included ABN-AMRO Bank, Arthur D. Little, Asea Brown Boveri (ABB), Allegiance Healthcare, Dresner Klienwort Benson, DuPont, GLS, Grainger, Heineken, Microsoft, and Sonoco Products. The directors of Institute for the Study of Business Markets (ISBM) and managers from select sponsoring corporations also assisted us in grounding our book in reality. When we completed rough drafts of our chapters, Jim and I sent copies to these executives and asked them along with their colleagues to review the content and writing style for relevance and comprehensibility. And their contributions have paid off in that to the best of my knowledge about 20% of our textbook sales come from corporations. Our publisher tells us that this rate is unusually high for a textbook and reflects the relevance of our subject matter and approach to business managers.

CRITICISMS OF THE BACKHAUS ET AL. RESEARCH

Although Professor Backhaus and his colleagues may be well intentioned, this is not sound academic research. Let me raise a few “reasonable doubts” about their procedures and conclusions.

Where Are the Validity Test Results?

Professor Backhaus and his colleagues indeed undertake ambitious research. Standards for research in the behavioral sciences call for validity tests in such instances. Yet, the authors neither discuss validity nor provide appropriate supporting validity test results in this paper. Here a few instances where validity tests are clearly needed.

The Adaptation of the Bloom et al. (1956) Taxonomy. As the following quotes from the book indicate, Bloom and his associates had specific applications in mind for their taxonomy.

Teachers building a curriculum should find here a range of possible educational goals or outcomes in the cognitive area . . . (pp. 1-2)

It should be noted that we are not attempting to classify the instructional methods used by teachers, the ways in which teachers relate themselves to students, or the different kinds of instructional materials they use. We are not attempting to classify the particular subject matter or content. What we are classifying is the *intended*

behavior of students—the ways in which individuals are to act, think, or feel as the result of participating in some unit of instruction . . . The emphasis in the Handbook is on obtaining evidence on the extent to which desired and intended behaviors have been learned by the student. (pp. 12-13)

Bloom and his associates intended that the taxonomy be used to evaluate a curriculum or course of study, not a textbook. Individual teachers set the educational objectives for their courses, not academic researchers. Teachers are under no obligation to pursue every educational objective in every course. All six specified educational objectives are concerned with the cognitive domain of learning, not just the last five as Table 4 of Backhaus et al. paper implies. To evaluate the degree to which educational objectives have been met, teachers and/or administrations must assess students after they have completed the course, not by counting words, pages, topics, and illustrations in a textbook. Clearly, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues have applied the Bloom taxonomy out of its intended context in way not originally planned. Without validity tests, there is no way for the reader to determine whether or not Professor Backhaus and his colleagues' adaptation is appropriate and meaningful.

The Development of Indicators for Educational Objectives. As Professor Backhaus and his colleagues state, “. . . no conclusive and general operationalization of Bloom's six fundamental cognitive abilities as educational activities has yet been undertaken . . .” Thus, their overriding task in this research is to develop and test indicators of Bloom's educational objectives. Yet, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues do not follow standard procedures for measurement development, reliability testing, or validity testing (APA 1985). Without validity tests results, how can you know, for example, whether or not “knowledge conveyed” is in fact a function of net page area, number of lines, depth of subdivisions, and the use of various structuring models? After all, an unread textbook achieves no educational objectives!

Professor Backhaus and his colleagues merely declare that their proposed indicators measure corresponding educational objectives. Several of these unsubstantiated indicators are highly questionable. For example, they rely upon pricing discussions to indicate “depth of coverage,” the extent to which 10 arbitrarily selected market segmentation approaches are covered to indicate the “theory-practice connection,” and the presence of case studies to indicate “more complex capabilities.” Again, without validity test results, how do we know this is so?

Perhaps the most specious procedure for measurement development that they employ is the LIX index. For starters, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues offer a confusing explanation as to the connection between LIX and the underlying educational objective. Bloom et al. (1956), define their second educational objective as “comprehension.” For no apparent reason and without explanation, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues change this to “understanding.” Then they argue that “readability” is a criterion for the “transfer of knowledge,” without explaining how this relates to understanding. They state that the LIX index measures readability and then assert, “LIX represents comprehensibility quite adequately.” In simple terms, what does this all mean?

Readers who have successfully modeled behavioral phenomenon know that a latent construct has multiple facets. To capture each of its dimensions, researchers must develop several measures or indicators. LIX, which is calculated as the sum of the average number of words per sentence and the percentage of words with seven or more letters in sample passages, is but a single measure of readability. And, there are a number of critical limitations to this measure. Most notably, there is the assumption that words with less than seven letters are more readily comprehended than longer words. However, consider the following list of paired synonyms: important-basal, express-indite, eliminate-exsect, boundary-bower, and posterior-caudal. The first synonym in each pair has seven letters or more while the second synonym has less than seven. Which of these word pairs do you think your students would find easier to read? Of course, to answer that question you would have to survey students and not just count words and sentence length in textbooks.

There are a number of other unanswered questions concerning measure development in this article. Bloom et al. (1956) specify six educational objectives. With no explanation, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues combine the last three—analysis, synthesis, and evaluation—into a single objective. Furthermore, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues devise three indicators of knowledge, two indicators of understanding, one of application, and one for combined objectives. Aren't readers entitled to know how and why these operations were performed?

The Specification of Business Marketing Topics. As mentioned earlier, AMA representatives state that there is no formal and universally accepted statement of the “common body of knowledge” in business marketing. Thus, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues' listing of business marketing topics and subsequent evaluation of textbook content is based solely on their own opinions and preferences. They provide

no evidence whatsoever that their opinions and preferences are better or worse than anyone else's. In fact, had any other researcher conducted this evaluation, they would likely come out with significantly different results!

Let me give you but one example. Professor Backhaus and his colleagues state, "The Anderson and Narus book presents market segmentation criteria, but no particular approach." In fact, our approach is embedded in "market sensing," a contemporary and progressive process that Professor George Day of Wharton has developed (Day 1994). And, we advocate value-based segmentation that is driven off of value assessment (see Dowling, Lilien, Rangaswamy, and Thomas 2000 for a recent treatment). As neither Day's market sensing nor value-based segmentation appear on the Backhaus et al. list of "preferred" segmentation approaches in Table 9, we receive no credit for covering market segmentation. Had another researcher who acknowledges market sensing and value-based segmentation as legitimate approaches conducted this evaluation; we would have received credit for covering market segmentation.

To assemble a list of their "preferred" topics, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues turn to Reid and Plank (2000) and Narus and Anderson (1998) for the academic perspective. However, the Reid and Plank article is a "positive" (i.e., descriptive) literature review that catalogues academic marketing research over a twenty year period and is not intended to provide "normative" guidance on which topics to address in a business marketing textbook. In fact, a book designed around the Reid and Plank article would probably be better suited for a Ph.D. seminar on academic marketing theory and research than an undergraduate or Master's level course. Furthermore, the Reid and Plank article is structured around the traditional 4 Ps of marketing and would likely lead to a bias favoring textbooks organized around the 4 Ps. Similarly, the Narus and Anderson (1998) articles reports on topics that business marketing professors currently teach and not those that they should teach.

Perhaps even more curious is their selection of the Plank (1982) article as the source of the practical perspective. The Plank article is about twenty years old. To put this in perspective, Professor Plank wrote the article three years prior to the widespread acceptance of the personal computer and ten years before the adoption of the Internet as business tools. Based on the research presented in this article, there is no way for the reader to determine whether or not the topics listed in the Plank article capture the current thinking of managers. In fact, I would argue that many of the managers Plank surveyed in 1982 have long since retired.

What Methodology Did the Authors Actually Use?

Although Professor Backhaus and his colleagues claim to have been systematic, the manuscript does not provide sufficient detail to allow the reader to make such a judgment. In fact, it is not really clear what procedures the authors followed. For example, they neither describe the sampling approach (e.g., quota, convenience, random) they used to select the 10 passages for the LIX evaluation nor how the textbooks were sorted into 3 groups (e.g., discriminant analysis, cluster analysis). Here are other major gaps in the description of their methodology.

Selection of Textbooks. Professor Backhaus and his colleagues state that they gathered the names of business marketing textbooks from the *Marketing Education Review* (1999), the *Industrial Marketing Practitioner* (1999), and the study of Narus and Anderson (1998). The *Marketing Education Review* website lists 11 textbooks. Why did the authors choose to review only 7? Conspicuous in its absence is *Business Marketing: Connecting Strategy, Relationships, and Learning* by F. Robert Dwyer and John F. Tanner, Jr. (2001), which is now in its second edition. Given that Professor Dwyer is an eminent scholar in business marketing and marketing channels, the exclusion of his textbook merits a full explanation. Equally questionable is their inclusion of *Industrial Marketing Strategy* by Frederick E. Webster (1995). At the 2001 AMA Summer Educators' Conference in Washington, D.C., a representative of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. informed me that his firm no longer actively promotes the Webster book. And, it was not even on display in the exhibition hall. If the publisher no longer promotes it, why did Professor Backhaus and his colleagues evaluate it?

Coverage of Business Topics. To assess the educational objective of "knowledge," Professor Backhaus and his colleagues go to great length to report on the level of coverage that each of the seven textbooks provides to the listing of business topics based on their opinions and preferences. Curiously, they never provide an operational definition of the word "coverage." And they alternate its use with other undefined terms including handle, portrayal, treat, isolated treatment, and integrated in overall treatment. What are the distinctions among these various terms and are they important? Furthermore, they never explain how a textbook merits the rating of "covered" for a given topic or what procedures were followed when the textbooks were evaluated. To top it all off, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues provide no reliability test results for their coverage measures. As a result, there is no way to know whether or

not other researchers can replicate the results of this study. Let me give you but a few examples from their assessment of our textbook.

When referring to our textbook, the authors state, “Consequently, the instrument ‘price’ is considered, with the focus on value-based pricing, and channel management as a component of the instrument ‘distribution.’ All other aspects of the marketing mix [product and promotion] are consequently ignored.” In fact, we address “product,” which has been subsumed into the more relevant and contemporary notion of market offerings or total solutions in two separate chapters—Managing Market Offerings (pages 161-199) and New Offering Realization (pages 200-249). Promotion, on the other hand, is part of the chapter on “Gaining Customers” (e.g., integrated marketing communications are discussed beginning on page 302 and personal selling beginning on page 306).

They similarly claim that we ignore organizational purchasing behavior. In fact, this topic is addressed in our chapter on “Understanding Firms as Customers.” For example, we discuss the variety of purchasing orientations that firms adopt and their implications for buying behavior from pages 84 to 104. We examine how purchasing professionals interact with other functional areas as part of the resource acquisition process from pages 105 to 113. We describe how actual purchase decisions are made and evaluated from page 113 to 121.

In another passage they state, “Apart from the consideration of individual pricing strategies, all other areas are excluded.” As we mention in our Preface, we have adopted a process approach. Instead of grouping all discussions of pricing into a chapter in pricing, we introduce them throughout the book whenever a given process requires that they be considered. Here are some of the pricing topics we address: price analysis (p. 86), target pricing (p. 88), the Lopez Approach (p. 88), target costing (p. 95), trading higher price for lower total costs (p. 95), value-in-use price (p. 99), the SPI Index (p. 117), operational excellence strategy (p. 130), commodity pricing trap (p. 164), flexible market offerings approach to pricing (beginning on page 167), augmenting service pricing (p. 173), cost-plus pricing (page 186-187), competition-based pricing (187), pricing across borders (pages 194-196), initial use discounts (p. 244-246), reseller discounts (p. 280), negotiating initial price (pages 326-327), revenue management (p. 330-331), constructing a reseller pricing sheet (pages 346-348), cooperative pricing (p. 381), pricing as a function of customer relationship offerings (p. 380-381), base-loading (p. 382), collaborative risk-sharing and gain

sharing agreements (p. 401), transaction pricing (pages 403 to 404), loyalty programs (p. 404), and price defections (p. 410), among others.

In fact, I could provide page numbers in our text where most of the “themes” listed in Tables 2 and 3 are discussed. Why then is there a discrepancy between my evaluation and theirs? A reader simply cannot answer the question because Professor Backhaus and his colleagues do not describe their assessment process in sufficient detail.

Moreover, passages within this article hint that the methodology described is not the one they actually utilized. For example, in “Concepts and Methodology” section, the authors state that they will compare the seven textbooks based on the characteristics of the “instrumentally-oriented approach” (i.e., the 4 Ps) and the “marketing-management approach” (i.e., analysis, planning, implementation and control). Later on in the “Results” section, they say that in addition to the instrumentally-oriented approach and the marketing-management approach, “. . . we analyzed the extent to which other approaches were used in all the textbooks considered.” They conclude with the statement, “This confirms the statement made by Backhaus (1998) that no English-language textbook really uses a transaction-types approach for structuring . . .” The reader must wonder, “Which approaches did Professor Backhaus and his colleagues actually study and what is the true purpose of this article?”

Do the Research, Data, and Findings Support Their Conclusions?

Other than the LIX index, all of the data that Professor Backhaus and his colleagues collect is “nominal” and they report no statistical “tests of differences.” Yet, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues don’t hesitate to draw many profound and far reaching conclusions. Let’s examine a few.

“. . . the books of Anderson and Narus and Webster do not offer either case studies or test questions. Therefore, it is doubtful that, on their own they contribute much toward developing complex skills.” To begin with, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues never provide an operational definition of case studies. I can cite four types. A “mini-case” or “case-ette” is a short (i.e., one or two pages) illustration of an approach, strategy, or tactic a company has used. These typically appear as break out boxes in textbooks and management practice magazine. They are used to demonstrate a concept or approach. For example, we provide 57 mini-cases in our textbook. A “research case study” provides a compendium of findings from a qualitative research project. A “consulting case study” recounts the entire set of activities from design, data collection,

analysis, and recommendations that a team from a management consulting firm completes for a client. A “class discussion case study” is a pedagogical tool instructors often use to teach management concepts and frameworks in a class setting. To which of these types of cases does Professor Backhaus and his colleagues refer?

More importantly, they provide no data, validity tests, or statistical tests that enable them to link the presence or absence of case studies (whichever variety they mean) to the development of complex skills. To do so, they would have to conduct a survey or controlled experiments among students who have used these books.

“No English-language textbook uses a transaction-types approach for structuring.” The research conducted and data reported in this manuscript do not support this conclusion. Apparently, Professor Backhaus and his colleagues are unaware of the fact that in the U.S. instructors often use the transaction-types approach to structure marketing electives courses entitled, “Relationship Marketing” or “Strategic Account Management.” In the field of operations, the approach is similarly used to structure “Supply Chain Management” courses. According to the search engine of Amazon.com, there are some 75 books on relationship management and 90 on supply chain management on the market. Some of these are used as textbooks. Before Professor Backhaus and his colleagues can draw this conclusion, they need to thoroughly evaluate these 165 books. They do not do so in this manuscript.

“Although the authors frequently acknowledge that the various transactions in business-to-business markets are particularly heterogeneous, and that this requires differentiated marketing strategies, the actual approach followed in the books is undifferentiated. A possible solution to this could . . . be found in structuring a textbook according to an explicit typology of transactions . . .” As Professor Backhaus has advocated a transaction-types approach to marketing in previous works (e.g., Backhaus 1998), I am not at all surprised that he comes to this conclusion. In fact, over 50% of both the “Conclusions” and “Limitations and Directions for Future Research” sections of this paper deal with the transaction-types approach. Yet, neither the research procedures described in the “Concepts and Methodology” section nor the nominal data reported in the “Results” section of this paper lend any credence to this claim. Furthermore, until the authors reach the end of the paper, they never mention differentiated versus undifferentiated marketing strategies at all. When they do, they do not bother to provide and then use standard academic definitions of those constructs.

Having reflected upon and reviewed this article, I wonder if the true purpose of its content is to promote the transaction-types approach and in particular the Backhaus version (Backhaus 1998) as a structure for a business marketing textbook. If so, the authors should have stated it clearly in the Introduction and designed research to demonstrate its utility. Professor Backhaus and his colleagues may be convinced of the superiority of the transaction-types approach; however, this research neither supports nor discredits that view.

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