

Which Marketing Principles Text Should You Use?

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With respect to the choice of a marketing text for a basic “marketing principles” course, a key issue is which textbook will help people to make the best decisions as a marketing manager.

Hunt, Chonko & Wood’s (1986) study found no evidence that a formal university education in marketing led to better skills as a marketing professional. I suspect that this is partly because little attention is given to evidence-based knowledge in basic marketing courses. This, in turn, follows from the fact that textbooks lack such information.

In a 1993 study, Randy Schultz and I found that of the nine marketing principles textbooks that we analyzed, none provided evidence-based knowledge that would aid people in making better decisions about prices, promotion, product, or place. In fact, when we reversed the meaning of statements offering advice on the 4Ps, many of the statements were judged by marketing professors to be as correct as their original wording. No one has challenged our findings, nor am I aware of any new textbook that would alter our conclusions. On the other hand, there are some excellent textbooks in specialized areas such as pricing and advertising.

If you do not believe empirical studies, you might collect your own information. Ask students to describe the most important things they learned from the textbook in a recent marketing principles course. I have tried this and few are able to think of anything. Those that do, say things like the 4 P’s, positioning, and segmentation. (When I probe, they admit to having heard these terms prior to the course.) If they do mention important things they learned, think about how you might explain each item in a paragraph or two, rather than relying on a book.

Perhaps students are learning something useful from the marketing texts but we have not been clever enough to determine what that is. My own belief is that the advice in textbooks is of little value. Moreover, it is harmful in some cases, as we have shown, for example, with respect to the BCG matrix (Armstrong & Brodie 1994). Thankfully, some textbooks, such as Kotler and Keller, have recently removed the BCG material.

Given the research findings, my advice is that faculty should not use a textbook in the basic marketing principles course. There is the danger that some students might read it, which would then create the illusion of learning. In addition, business schools should discourage professors from using basic marketing texts.

Instead, I advise faculty to identify which evidence-based techniques should be learned, then to develop exercises that might help in applying these techniques. This might, on occasion, call for readings. Evaluation of progress should be done by a common assessment center testing service conducted by a third party.

I look forward to hearing about evidence that will challenge Armstrong and Schultz (1993). This is an important issue, and little research has been done on the topic.

References

Armstrong, J. S. & R. L. Schultz (1993), "Principles Involving Marketing Policies: An Empirical Assessment," *Marketing Letters*, 4:3, 253-265.

Armstrong, J. S. & R. Brodie (1994), "Effects of Portfolio Planning Methods on Decision Making: Empirical Results" (with R. Brodie), *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 11, 73-84.

Hunt, S. D., L. B. Chonko & V. R. Wood (1986), "Marketing Education and Marketing Success: Are They Related?" *Journal of Marketing Education*, 6 (Summer), 2-13.

P.S. Randy teaches a capstone marketing management course but has never used a text. His web based course is at <http://www.biz.uiowa.edu/class/6m147/>. I stopped using a text for the basic principles course; however, my approach did not fit with the school's plan, so it has been many years since I have taught the basic marketing principles course.