

Evaluating the Benefits and Values of Textbooks: Perceptions of Vietnamese Business Students

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Abstract This study aims to examine students' perceived benefits and values of textbooks, with a specific focus on emerging markets. A paper-based survey was used to collect data from 459 Vietnamese students in three business disciplines including accounting, international business and marketing. The findings reveal that Vietnamese business students view textbooks as having greater short-term benefits than long-term ones. They also believe that textbooks have relatively low economic value. Interestingly, marketing students perceive that textbooks provide primarily benefits of improving class performance, while accounting students tend to view textbooks to have benefits of clearer understanding of relevant concepts. Implications for key stakeholders in the higher education book publishing industry are discussed and future research directions presented.

Keywords Business textbooks · Book publishing industry · Perceived benefits · Perceived value · Higher education book · Vietnam

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Introduction

Encouraging the purchase of higher education textbooks is important for both educators and publishers [1]. This is particularly the case in emerging markets including Vietnam, where high enrolment levels in higher education institutions are being observed and textbook piracy is rapidly rising [2]. Prior research suggests that the high price of textbooks and the scourge of textbook piracy have threatened the sales of original textbooks [2–4]. In addition, students perceive textbooks as being boring and cumbersome [5]. Nevertheless, little is known about perceived benefits and value of textbooks among students [6].

This study contributes to the literature by examining business students' perceived benefits and values of textbooks in Vietnam, which represents a great market opportunity for sale of higher education textbooks. According to a report from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam [7], there are approximately 1.8 million students enrolled in 229 universities. Publishers and book distributors are therefore paying particular attention to the university textbook sector [2]. In particular, this study evaluates short-term benefits of textbooks in improving class performance and also long-term benefits relating to their usefulness in understanding concepts and future jobs. Furthermore, it examines student perceived economic and emotional values with regard to textbooks. Importantly, the study seeks to explore the differences in perceived benefits and values between students who hail from different majors.

The remainder of the paper is structured follows. The research methodology including the survey method and sampling is initially discussed. Subsequently, the key findings on students' perceived benefits and values with regard to textbooks are presented, which is followed by a discussion of managerial implications for key stakeholders in the publishing industry. Finally, the conclusion and future research directions are presented.

Research Methodology

This study employed a paper-based survey to obtain data from business students who had purchased original textbooks for their classes in two well-known universities in Vietnam. Respondents were selected using systematic random sampling from the universities' class schedules. In total, 12 classes of majors in international business, marketing and finance were chosen. The authors obtained the approval from the classes' instructors to administer the surveys 2 weeks before the end of the semester.

In each class, the respondents were asked to provide responses to a series of items (statements) evaluating their perceived benefits and value of the textbook for that particular class. Six items were adapted from Unni [6] to seek respondents' perceptions of short-term and long-term benefits of textbooks. To measure economic value and emotional value, five items were adapted from Sweeney

and Soutar [8] and Koller et al. [9]. Economic value was conceptualized as the utility the textbook provided in proportion to the overall costs. Emotional value described the utility the textbook created through feelings or affective states. These items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, which was anchored at 1 for ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 for ‘strongly agree’. Additionally, the respondents were asked about their demographic profile and majors.

The authors attended each class and administered the survey instrument to eligible respondents. Also, the authors briefly explained the research information and remained in the classes to collect all completed surveys. The respondents voluntarily participated in the study and their participation was taken as informed consent. The total of completed surveys returned was 459. Of these, 285 were female (62.1%) and 174 males (37.9%). The majors of study that the respondents were enrolled in were accounting (139 or 30.3%), international business (141 or 30.7%) and marketing (179 or 39.0%).

Results and Discussion

Perceived Benefits and Value of Textbooks

Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of the items used to measure perceived benefits and value of textbooks. The mean scores and standard deviations for these items are also included.

In general, the respondents believed that textbooks provided more short-term benefits than long-term benefits. Specifically, they acknowledged the role of textbooks in preparing for exams ($M=3.95$) and improving their grades ($M=3.73$). However, they did not strongly believe that textbooks were helpful for understanding material ($M=3.19$) and concepts ($M=3.33$). In addition, among the items used to measure perceived benefits, the lowest mean score was for the item “The textbook for this class will be useful in my future job” ($M=3.06$). This implies that Vietnamese students perceive that textbooks are more theoretical oriented than practical oriented.

Table 1 Perceived benefits of textbooks

Items (statements)	Mean	SD
<i>The benefit of improving class performance</i>		
The textbook for this class is useful in preparing for exams	3.95	1.017
The textbook for this class is useful in class discussion and assignments	3.65	1.340
The textbook for this class could potentially improve my grade	3.73	1.347
<i>The benefit of clearer understanding of concepts</i>		
The textbook for this class helps me better understand the material	3.19	1.160
The textbook for this class helps me better understand the concepts	3.33	1.151
<i>The benefit in a future job</i>		
The textbook for this class will be useful in my future job	3.06	0.972

Table 2 Perceived value of textbooks

Items (statements)	Mean	SD
<i>Economic value</i>		
The textbook for this class offers value for money spent	2.73	1.306
The textbook for this class is reasonably priced	2.71	1.137
The textbook for this class is economical in comparison with other textbooks	2.77	1.409
<i>Emotional value</i>		
The textbook for this class is one that I enjoy	3.00	1.361
The textbook for this class makes me want to use it more often	2.97	1.198

On average, the respondents perceived that textbooks had relatively low economic value as all the means scores were below the midpoint of 3.0. Specifically, the first item “The textbook for this class offers value for money spent” had a mean value of 2.73, indicating the low utility of textbooks in relation to their costs. Furthermore, the item “The textbook for this class is reasonably priced” had the lowest mean score of 2.71, implying the perceived high price of textbooks. This is in line with earlier finding that high price is the major barrier to Vietnamese students’ purchases of textbooks [1].

Regarding the emotional value of textbooks, the item “The textbook for this class is one that I enjoy” had a mean score of 3.00, while the item “The textbook for this class makes me want to use it more often” had a mean value of 2.97. These collectively demonstrate that using and reading textbooks do not bring enjoyment to the respondents.

Differences Between Majors

To examine the differences in students’ perceived benefits and values of textbooks among the three majors, a series of one-way between group analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed. This technique can be used to test for statistically significance differences between the means of three or more groups [10]. The results demonstrated that there were significant differences between students from different majors with regard to three items measuring their perceived benefits of textbooks. These items and their mean scores for the three majors are illustrated in Table 3.

Post hoc analyses employing Tukey’s HSD (honest significant difference) demonstrated that marketing students ($M=4.03$) had significantly stronger belief in the usefulness of textbooks for exam preparation than international business ($M=3.60$) and accounting students ($M=3.47$). There was no significant difference between international business and accounting students. Additionally, accounting students ($M=3.52$) had significantly higher mean score on the role of textbooks in helping understand concepts than international business students ($M=3.18$). However, there was no significant difference either between accounting and marketing students, or between marketing and international business students. Similar findings were found with regard to the benefit of textbooks for future job.

Table 3 Selected results of ANOVA tests

	Accounting	International business	Marketing	<i>p</i> value (between groups)
The textbook for this class is useful in preparing for exams	3.47	3.60	4.03	0.000
The textbook for this class helps me better understand the concepts	3.52	3.18	3.30	0.042
The textbook for this class will be useful in my future job	3.20	2.87	3.09	0.015

The aforementioned findings suggest that while marketing students believe that textbooks primarily have short-term benefits of improving class performance, accounting students tend to view textbooks as having long-term benefits of understanding key concepts relating to their future jobs. This is consistent with earlier research which suggested that accounting courses and textbooks focus on providing specific job-related information and professional practices [6, 11].

Managerial Implications

This study's findings have several important implications for enhancing perceived benefits and values of higher education textbooks. In particular, key stakeholders including publishers, distributors, universities and authors would do well in considering the following tentative proposals:

Enhancing Perceived Benefits of Textbooks

Given that students do not strongly believe in the long-term benefits of textbooks, it is imperative to improve the quality of textbooks towards more practically and career oriented. In this respect, authors should ensure that their textbooks provide a detailed and clear explanation of every concept as well as incorporate widely accepted practices that are essential for students' future jobs, especially those relating to marketing and international business. Universities' scientific committees should carefully inspect and manage the quality of textbooks intended to be used in their courses. Publishers and distributors' advertising campaign should deliver a compelling message that textbooks are practical-oriented and they are useful for students' future jobs.

Improving Perceived Value of Textbooks

Given students' low perceived economic value of textbooks, publishers, distributors and retailers should endeavor to reduce the price of textbooks. Promotional programs such as price discounts, purchase incentives should be also applied. Higher education institutions should improve the efficiencies of their textbook subsidy schemes aimed at reducing costs for learners. Considering that using and reading textbooks do not bring enjoyment to students, authors should provide up-to-date contents and use more case studies and practical examples in their books. Furthermore, publishers should improve the quality of printing and packaging of textbooks that could improve students' perceptions of the emotional values of textbooks.

Conclusion and Future Research

It is apparent that Vietnam represents a colossal market opportunity for higher education textbook publishers and distributors. Understanding students' perceived benefits and values of textbooks is important for publishers and bookstores that aim at

promoting the purchase of such products. This study makes an important contribution by investigating Vietnamese business students' perceived benefits and values of textbooks. Moreover, it provides fresh insights into the differences in perceived benefits and values between students of different study majors. This study's findings facilitate the development of recommendations for publishers, distributors, universities and authors engaged in the promotion of the purchase and usage of business textbooks.

This study was undertaken with business students from three majors of accounting, international business and marketing. Perhaps future research might want to interview respondents who hail from other areas of study such as management, finance, hospitality and tourism. Future research could also investigate the impact of students' perceived benefits and values on their purchase behavior and retention of textbooks. Finally, it would be beneficial to investigate changes in perceived value of textbooks over time by performing a longitudinal study.

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