

Chapter 28

Nature and Geography: Tragic Voids within Marketing Textbooks and the External Business Environment

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ABSTRACT

This chapter considers the appropriateness and importance of including the natural environment (i.e., nature and geography) as part of the external business environment featured in marketing textbooks. Based on myriad examples from industry, the natural environment is regarded as an uncontrollable force that constantly affects decisions about markets and marketing activities. Thus, it deserves some (greater) mention next to economic, competitive, regulatory, and other variables typically featured in most marketing textbooks. Based on a review of business news, industry concerns, and marketing textbooks, this chapter considers the current listing of uncontrollable environment forces typically discussed within twenty-five popular marketing textbooks. It is observed that nature and geography, common priorities for business decision makers, are conspicuously absent from mention within most of these textbooks. This chapter shows that the natural environment is mentioned in only five of twenty-five marketing textbooks: two introductory marketing; one marketing management; and two international marketing. Based on scholarly definitions and industry examples, nature and geography are, in fact, uncontrollable influential forces that affect markets and marketing activities. Consequently, there is reasonable cause for including them in more marketing textbooks. Textbook authors and instructors can provide students a more complete picture of how domestic and international markets and marketing activities are affected by the natural environment. In practice, business people acknowledge that the natural environment affects and is affected by markets and marketing activities in virtually all industries. Alas, marketing textbooks seldom little, if ever, acknowledge that nature and geography (e.g., topography, climate, weather, solar flares, natural disasters) affect how companies think about their markets and marketing mix. This chapter offers simple, actionable steps for discussing the natural environment in marketing textbooks and courses.

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Nature and Geography

Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished. – Lao Tzu

Nature is a mutable cloud which is always and never the same. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks continue to serve as primary course material for undergraduate and graduates studying marketing principles, marketing strategy, and international marketing. Elbeck et al. (2009) state, “An instructor’s decision to adopt a particular textbook will influence the marketing knowledge, business major selection, and career choices of tens, if not hundreds of students” (p. 49). In their early chapters, marketing textbooks generally provide established frameworks for understanding the external business environment and its relationships to markets and marketing activities. The external business environment, or marketing environment, is a multidimensional set of uncontrollable forces that can influence how companies and consumers might behave. Marketing textbooks generally identify five dimensions of the external business environment (see Tables 1-3) with slightly varying terms, including:

1. Economic,
2. Competitive,
3. Political/legal/regulatory,
4. Sociocultural, and
5. Technological.

The External (Business) Environment

In *Principles of Marketing, 15th ed.*, Kotler and Armstrong (2013) state that the company’s macro environment shapes both opportunities and threats for companies. In *Marketing, 12th ed.*, Lamb, Hair, and McDaniel (2013) agree that marketers generally cannot control elements of the marketing environment, but rather must understand how they change and can potentially impact target markets. In *Marketing Channels, 8th ed.*, Rosenbloom (2012) notes that channel managers must take into account how the uncontrollable environment can influence the activities of their member and nonmember participants. In their text, *Marketing Strategy, 5th ed.*, Ferrell and Hartline (2011) say the following:

The final and broadest issue in a situation analysis is an assessment of the external environment, which includes all the external factors — competitive, economic, political, legal/regulatory, technological, and sociocultural — that can exert considerable direct and indirect pressures on both domestic and international marketing (p. 101).

Emphasizing the importance of these factors, Lamb, Hair, and McDaniel (2013) assert that marketing managers cannot plan intelligently if they fail to understand the environment and its impact on how firms work and compete. In fact, they suggest the following:

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