

Awakening Awareness and Application: Utilizing Guest Speeches and Reflective Learning to Teach Ethics in Marketing

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Abstract. There has been considerable debate on how to teach ethics within the marketing curriculum to accommodate the AACSB requirements requiring emphasis on ethical issues within the business curricula. Since introducing a separate course on marketing ethics has limited reach, we propose incorporating the ethical dimension through guest speeches and reflective learning in a mandatory Marketing course for all business majors. Through phenomenographic analysis of 121 student reflections, we report evidence supporting the effectiveness of this approach in significantly raising awareness of ethics in the marketing domain and in initiating the nurturing of ethical reasoning abilities in undergraduate business students early in their college careers. Students absorbed substantial amounts of knowledge at different levels and demonstrated significant cognitive processing within the revised Bloom's taxonomy. Using this method to teach marketing ethics promotes awareness and application of ethical reasoning without compromising discipline-specific instruction.

Keywords: teaching marketing ethics, guest speeches, reflective learning, Bloom's taxonomy.

1. Introduction

Despite the widespread consensus that teaching marketing ethics at business schools is absolutely necessary, students perceive the level of marketing ethics education as poor or, at best, adequate (Shannon and Berl 1997). Attempts to resolve this discrepancy in the past two decades have not yet produced an ideal and universal answer. Consequently, many business schools and programs face a dilemma amid increasing pressure to educate ethical business professionals. According to the AACSB's revised standards (2020), the curriculum must include elements that promote positive societal impact (Standard 4.3) and demonstrate overall positive societal impact through initiatives and/or activities (Standard 9.1).

Indeed, ethical reasoning is one of the recommended goals for accredited business programs; yet the accrediting organizations – AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), ACBSP (Accreditation Council for

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Business Schools and Programs), and IASCB (International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education) – leave the implementation decisions to the discretion of individual business colleges and programs. Only a small number of AACSB-accredited schools in the United States offer a standalone business or marketing ethics course in their curriculum (Paul 2019; Rutherford, Parks, Cavazos, and White 2012). The majority of business schools distributes the teaching and learning of ethical reasoning skills throughout the curriculum (Chiu and Fischer 2018; Waller *et al.* 2014). When spread out across multiple courses, it is difficult to ensure the learning of ethical understanding and reasoning when discipline-specific learning goals are prioritized over ethical learning outcomes. Alternatively, some schools distribute ethical training across extracurricular and cocurricular activities (Parks-Leduc, Mulligan, and Rutherford 2021), which encumbers the issue of assessing student learning outcomes due to muddled accountability.

AACSB standards mandate that students must be capable of “identifying ethical issues and addressing them in a socially responsible manner” within the general skill areas (AACSB 2020). Especially in colleges whose mission statements explicitly prioritize ethical reasoning as a core value, it becomes imperative for their sustainability to strategize how students can attain this learning objective. Some colleges approach this challenge by implementing non-credit ethics courses or dedicating university-wide assessment days throughout the academic year for students to undergo training, engage with ethical scenarios, and respond to quiz questions (K. Smith, Fulcher, and Sanchez 2017). However, these initiatives are limited in reach, as they only benefit those who attend these events. Additionally, it remains challenging to establish best practices for teaching ethics within a business curriculum that lacks a separate ethics course, whereas guidelines are readily available for teaching business ethics in distinct ethics education programs (Gulseren, Turner, and Weinhardt 2021).

Teaching ethics in Marketing is essential. Marketing instructors often confront prevailing negative perceptions of marketing, laden with vivid imagery of deceptive advertising and unscrupulous salespeople. (Cobb-Walgren, Pilling, and Barksdale 2017). Defining Marketing as creation, communication, and delivery of customer value (American Marketing Association 2023) frequently surprises our students, who often overlook ethical dimensions inherent in Marketing. However, the inclusion of ethics in teaching remains limited, typically confined to upper-level electives when a standalone course is offered in the curriculum (Gulseren *et al.* 2021). On the contrary, Principles of Marketing stands as a core mandatory course for all business majors in AACSB or ACBSP-accredited business programs. Consequently, educators teaching introductory Principles of Marketing courses possess an opportunity to rectify misconceptions about marketing and lay the groundwork for ethical thinking processes (Hajjat 2021). Even dedicating a single lecture day to marketing ethics in the introductory marketing class holds significant promise, particularly for non-marketing majors

(Hopkins, Ferrell, Ferrell, and Hopkins 2021). Instructors can foster reflective thinking regarding the issues and dilemmas associated with marketing ethics.

An effective strategy to subtly integrate ethical reasoning into the introductory marketing curriculum involves leveraging guest speakers who illustrate real-world cases and dilemmas concerning ethical issues in marketing. This method is particularly advantageous for business majors enrolled in introductory marketing courses, typically known as Principles of Marketing, as they are often at the onset of their business education and may not have encountered other business courses yet. Introducing multiple perspectives apart from the instructor's voice proves highly effective in business education, enhancing subject credibility and aiding better retention of learning (Fanguy, Costley, and Baldwin 2017). The efficacy of engaging guest speakers who deliver industry-specific insights and discuss current issues has been well-documented across various disciplines, including hospitality and tourism programs (Lee and Joung 2017), nutrition (Conklin, Parham, and Robison 2005), engineering (Chew, Ng, Mah, and Ng 2023), business communications (Anthony and Garner, 2016), and entrepreneurship (Schumann 2019). This approach remains impactful even in virtual or electronically mediated environments (Pennell, Thakore, and West 2015). Engaging industry professionals with extensive experience and expertise as guest speakers notably enhances students' understanding of ethics (Sexton and Garner 2020), a method similarly effective in diverse fields like health sciences (Sirdesai, Saraf, and Gade 2022). In line with recommendations from business ethics educators (Wood and Hedges 2021), we complemented these guest speeches with assignments designed to prompt reflective learning among our students.

The current research substantiates the effectiveness of utilizing guest speakers in teaching marketing ethics. This was exemplified through the implementation and evaluation of an "Ethics in Marketing Speaker Series", conducted during a 15-week semester for students enrolled in five Principles of Marketing courses at a private university in the Northeastern United States in the first half of 2023. Subsequently, we outline the pedagogical procedure, delineate the methodology employed to gauge its effectiveness, and present the results of a phenomenographic analysis based on student reflections. Finally, we draw conclusions from our key findings, highlight key insights gained, and propose recommendations for future educators contemplating this instructional approach.

2. Utilizing Guest Speeches within the Introductory Marketing Course

In collaboration with the Association for National Advertisers Educational Foundation (AEF)'s Collegiate Partnership Program (ANA Educational Foundation 2023), we organized a series of three speaker sessions during the Spring 2023 semester, each featured monthly in February, March, and April. All

guest speakers generously volunteered their time without compensation and consented to be recorded. This series was offered to students enrolled in five sections of Principles of Marketing, each section consisting of approximately 30 students. The lineup of speakers included an industry expert specializing in digital advertising privacy for the first session, a team of three marketing experts focusing on inclusive marketing for the second, and a lawyer specializing in monitoring unethical advertising aimed at children for the third session. All three sessions were conducted synchronously via Zoom and broadcast to a classroom audience of approximately 30-60 students attending in person each time. Specifically scheduled in-person sections (February: Section A; March: Section G; April: Section A and H) hosted the virtual guest speaker during their regular class periods. Students from other in-person sections and those attending online were invited to participate in real-time Zoom sessions. For those unable to attend synchronously, a recording of the session was provided for viewing within a week. Each speech lasted approximately 45 minutes, followed by a Q&A session, with no session exceeding an hour. To encourage student engagement, an extra credit of 1 point was offered for writing immediate reflections after each guest speech, with a submission deadline of no more than three days after the visit. All submitted reflections received the extra credit point without affecting letter grades. Table 1 details the distribution of student participation and the collected data.

Table 1: Student Enrollment and Collected Data

Section of MK201 Principles of Marketing Spring 2023	Number of enrolled students	Number of students who submitted reflections after attending/watching the speech		
		Speaker #1	Speaker #2	Speaker #3
MK201AO	32	7	11	14
MK201A	31	3	11	22
MK201C	32	0	4	6
MK201G	32	3	17	5
MK201H	32	0	6	17
Total	159	13	49	64

3. Assessing Effectiveness of Guest Speeches on Student Learning of Marketing Ethics

To evaluate the effectiveness of employing guest speakers for advancing ethics education, we opted for a phenomenographic research approach (Hajar, 2021) to discern variations and similarities in how students qualitatively grasped, experienced, and conceptualized marketing ethics. Phenomenographers drive qualitative insights by analyzing interview data or written responses (Tight, 2016). Our methodology stands out as most studies evaluating business ethics