

Exploring Twitter as a Pedagogical Tool in Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability Education

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Abstract. In recent years, considerable discussion has taken place regarding how to ensure business students are acquiring effectively the appropriate competencies related to Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability (ECSRS). Instructors in business education are encouraged to explore new methods for teaching ECSRS to strengthen this vital part of the curriculum and technology could play an important role. In this paper, we discuss why Twitter could be an effective teaching method in ECSRS education. The study provides a conceptual framework for the use of Twitter taking into account its major characteristics, main benefits, drawbacks, and key factors designing strategies. Some practical activities are also provided to encourage instructors to take more initiatives using Twitter and contribute to improving ECSRS education.

Keywords: business ethics, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, social media, twitter, effective learning.

1. Introduction

During the last decade, many studies have been conducted on Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability (ECSRS) in business education, demonstrating the growing interest and importance of this topic (Carroll 2015; Matten & Moon 2004; Plumlee, Barrett, & Pearson 2014; Setó-Pamies & Papaikonomou 2016). There is continuing concern that university graduates are acquiring the appropriate competencies, skills and knowledge related to ECSRS and know how to ensure their effective acquisition (Carson 2012; Chavan & Carter 2018; Dzurainin, Shortridge, & Smith 2015; Hunt & Radford 2018; Marquardt 2016; Swanson 2014; Waller, Freeman, Hambusch, Waite, Neil, & Wray-Bliss 2014). As Godemann, Herzig, Moon, and Powell (2014) point out the expectation that management educational institutions should be leading the thought and action on issues related to ethics, social responsibility and

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sustainability has been reinforced in light of the institution's association with business leaders' failings.

Concretely, the corporate scandals of the early 2000s (Melé 2008) have generated more discussion about the change towards more ethical business cultures and how this could directly involve educational institutions. As Melé (2008) suggests, the crisis in business ethics should be seen as a challenge for companies but also an opportunity to strengthen management education. Along these lines, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB 2004, p.7) points out, "management education needs to ponder more deeply and creatively on how to advance the awareness, reasoning skills, and core principles of ethical behavior that will help to guide business leaders as they deal with a changing legal and compliance environment as well as complex, conflicting, and sometimes highly problematic interests and opportunities. While many schools have initiated new ethics instruction, we must not fall into the trap of assuming the majority of students are adequately prepared to meet the ethical challenges of the modern workplace." So, administrators and faculty in business education are encouraged to contemplate their current approaches to ECSRS education and to explore new methods to strengthen this vital part of the curriculum (AACSB 2004)—either in stand-alone ECSRS subjects or embedded ECSRS subjects—in order to provide the skills and knowledge necessary to analyze the social, ethical and environmental effects of business activities.

Although, over time, a wide set of teaching methods have been used in business ethics education—such as formal lectures, philosophical discussions about ethics using the principles approach (Hasnas 2013), the Socratic dialogue approach and research papers on ethics (Morrell 2004; McWilliams & Nahavandi 2006); telling stories and moral anecdotes (Watson 2003); newspaper articles and guest lectures (McWilliams & Nahavandi 2006); full length films (Biktimirov & Cyr 2012; Goebel & Athavale 2016; Skorin-Kapov & Benson 2018); videos, music (McAdams & Duclos, 1999); analyzing case studies, and giving group and individual presentations (Carroll 2005)—a recent survey carried out by Aragon-Correa, Marcus, Rivera, and Kenworthy (2017) shows instructors are only moderately satisfied with most of them; suggesting that innovative teaching methods are necessary.

In this regard, as Salemi (2002) points out, students have a better understanding of business concepts when innovative teaching methods are used and technology plays an important role. Technology contributes to making it easier for instructors to introduce new ways to engage students (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken 2011) using resources such as popular media, blogs (Cameron 2012; Hazari, Brown, & Rutledge 2013), podcasts (Moryl 2016), and most recently, social media. Current students are very different from students of 20 or even 10 years ago. We are facing a new generation of millennials and Generation Z students who interact with screens more frequently than with people (Hill 2016). Nowadays, students socialize, access information, and perform their daily

activities using social media and they are more likely to also search for educational content on their electronic devices. So, according to Montiel, Delgado-Ceballos, Ortiz-de-Mandojana, and Antolin-Lopez (2020) we need to adapt our teaching methods to new generations of students to effectively engage them in the educational experience. In this regard, social media is becoming one of the most current, popular, and dynamic developments in education (Al-Bahrani & Patel 2015).

In the particular case of Twitter, academics and instructors are already highlighting the value, impact and acceptance that this social media can have in an educational context (Malik, Heyman-Schrum, & Johri 2019). According to Malik *et al.* (2019), implementing Twitter improves not only students' learning, motivation, engagement, and communication but teaching as well, all of which leads towards creating a more resourceful classroom environment.

Despite a growing interest in Twitter's use in education (Dunlap & Lowenthal 2009), to date no research exists on Twitter's use in ECSRS courses, while some research exists on the use of Twitter in marketing classrooms (Lowe & Laffey 2011; Rinaldo, Tapp, & Laverie 2011), economic classrooms (Al-Bahrani & Patel 2015; Kassens 2014) or in management classrooms (Menkhoff, Chay, Bengtsson, Woodard, & Gan 2015; Wankel 2009). In this paper, we discuss how Twitter could be an effective teaching method in ECSRS education.

Using Twitter in ESCSR courses not only allow instructors to adapt teaching methods to new generations of students but also can help students to understand the magnitude and scope of the world's most pressing challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, poverty, social inequality, etc. All these challenges—listed in the 2020 Agenda for Sustainable Development—are massive global, ethical, social and environmental issues that transcend national borders and have negative effects on large number of people, communities, and the planet as a whole (Aragon-Correa *et al.* 2017; George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi & Tihanyi 2016; Whiteman, Walker, & Perego 2013). Thus, as Montiel *et al.* (2020) suggest, the intrinsic characteristics of these societal grand challenges, which are complex, uncertain, and evaluative, could benefit from technology as an effective translator of multi-layered concepts into more digestible action items. That is, new technologies can help students to learn about the complexity of sustainability issues, their roots in multiple and different fields, their inter-temporal characteristics, and the difficulties of finding a balance between the triple bottom line (Gallo, Antolin-Lopez, & Montiel 2019). New technologies might also foster shared learning experiences that bring students together to reach solutions.

So, in this search for more effective ways of teaching ECSRS, we propose Twitter as an innovative teaching method which can be easily integrated in ECSRS courses and, if done appropriately, offers new ways of seeing to our students and pushes students to be active participants in the learning process. But the successful use of Twitter in ECSRS educational context requires a deep

comprehension about: what Twitter is, how it works, what are its major characteristics, what are its benefits and drawbacks, and what issues should be considered in teaching strategies. Thus, this paper highlights the necessity to develop a conceptual framework to guide the incorporation of Twitter in ECSRS courses in order that effective learning takes place (Sims 2002).

Therefore, following this Introduction, the paper is structured as follows. First, a conceptual framework for the integration of Twitter in ECSRS education is presented. Second, we focus on the key potential benefits of the use of Twitter in the classroom and also some adverse aspects. And then we identify the main issues that should be considered in designing strategies for incorporating Twitter in ECSRS courses. Within the text, some practical activities using Twitter in the context of ECSRS courses are also offered in order to make instructors more comfortable with this new tool and encourage them to use it to enhance student learning.

2. Proposal of a Conceptual Framework for the Integration of Twitter in ECSRS Education

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework that guides the integration of Twitter in ECSRS education, including three blocks of analysis: characteristics and functions of Twitter, key benefits of using Twitter and some drawbacks that we need to consider when designing learning strategies.