

CENTERIS 2014 - Conference on ENTERprise Information Systems / PROJMAN 2014 -
International Conference on Project MANagement / HCIST 2014 - International Conference on
Health and Social Care Information Systems and Technologies

E-Commerce Ethics: How Far Can We Go?

Negreiros, J., Santos, R.

University of Saint Joseph, Rua de Londres 16 Macao, China

Abstract: This poster highlights four e-Commerce real cases where ethical issues can be raised in a quite controversial way. To measure this debate, a blog/forum was created in Moodle Learning Management System for fourteen IT/IS students of University of Saint Joseph, Macao, China, to record their opinions to four specific questions. The only conclusion that can be stressed is no consensus was found on the majority of these matters although all these e-Businesses live under the umbrella of the law.

Keywords: Business ethics, E-Commerce, Teaching, Moodle Forum.

1. Preamble

Ethics are our concepts of right and wrong. Ethics are the glue that holds our society together. They're the foundation of our laws, regulations, rules, traditions, manners, conventions and customs. Without ethics, and people's willingness to live by those ethics, there's chaos and anarchy [1]. Online commerce has been growing rapidly since the 1990s and nearly every retail operation of any size has a website for the sale of its goods. With the anonymity of the Internet, however, it's very difficult for a buyer to really know and trust the seller [2]. Striving to earn a reputation of an ethical business, this requires commitment since there is a fine line between making choices for financial gain and making choices that will not adversely affect others [3]. Certainly, this new paradigm has permeated all aspects of how an organization conducts their operations and manages relationships from purchasing to selling. Certainly, with these changes come ethical implications for both buyers and suppliers [4].

Under the e-Business scope, the creation of digital trust becomes key for e-Commerce customers to come back, for satisfied buyers tell their friends, to demonstrate your commitment to be a good e-citizen and, probably, for you be able to look at yourself in the mirror every morning. This means to honor your policies or protect buyer's privacy.

Beyond all these typical e-Business matters, it is possible to find on the Internet strange services and products that although they live under the jurisdiction of the international law, it can raise questions that go far behind the traditional and conventional trading. It goes behind virtual prostitution, for instance.

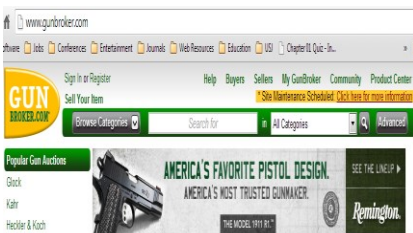
Incorporating business ethics into coursework as early as possible is important so that students may begin to explore their own morality juxtaposed with how an organization might view ethics and ethical behavior. This requires that enterprises understand their own values and ethical principles and how they can use their personal moral compass to assist them in an organization [5].

As a professor of E-Commerce, several activities are accomplished within the semester with students such as quizzes, video cases, eCommerce development sites, usage of Facebook for advertisement purpose's, glossary definitions, team's presentations, teacher lectures ... and an eBusiness Ethic's Forum. The goal of this student's activity concerns the selling of unusual products and services that you may find on the Web although all of them has the same purpose: make money. Before entering into the forum itself, the following message is displayed to the reader: "You may see this as a discussion about Ethics and E-Commerce and its impact in our society and daily lives. As expect, each student should make interesting comments on each below question. Hence, I challenge all of you to answer the next four questions. How you do it? Just reply each discussion topic (red message) by stating your point of view. Keep in mind that your participation will be taken into consideration for your final grade (5%) of this E-Commerce subject. Enjoy it. The Professor".

The qualitative responses analysis of each question becomes, thus, the main purpose of this poster (due to the three poster pages restriction, only a limited comments are presented here). Four Web sites are given with a direct and concise question for each student to answer (see section 2). It is not the aim to criticize or advocate each business but allow readers to stop and think about our ethical values (even all these business transactions respect the official country law) in the name of money, **نقود**, argent, 錢, dinero, 钱, dinheiro, 돈, wang, お金, pera, pecuniam, धन, tiền, געלט, geld...

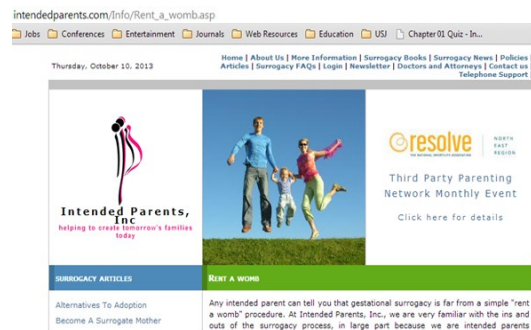
2. In the Name of Money, How Far Can We Go?

2.1. *gunbroker.com*



"Give a description of a gun fire that you may buy here on this e-Business but whose price is below 25,000 USD. How much is the shipping cost to Macao, China?" An emblematic answer from this forum could be "Glock Model 23 Pistol 40 S&W, a multi-purpose 40 caliber weapon that are utilized by law enforcement, FBI, civilians and competitive shooters. The starting price is \$399 USD. Unfortunately, no international shipments can be made." In the name of money, how far can we go?

2.2. *intendedparents.com*



"Let's suppose that your wife/lover/partner/girlfriend cannot have any children and you (both) decide to have a kid by renting a womb of another unknown woman at *intendedparents.com/Info/Rent_a_womb.asp* (as an alternative to adoption or childlessness). Can you tell me what are the main costs of this option?" Believe it or not, the total surrogate mother's fee cost depends on her experience, that is, if it is the first time for the surrogate

mother, the price becomes 20,000 USD. Otherwise, it is over 23,000 USD. If all other items such as medication, background check, life insurance, psychological evaluation invasive procedure such as Caesarean, maternity clothes, bed rest allowance and fund management fee is included, a good estimation for this particular service becomes close to 50,000 USD. Other curious opinions can be found: (A) "I have never thought of renting this service because I don't think I must and need to have children"; (B) "Chinese people are introvert ones which means they don't want the others to know they cannot to have a kid by themselves. They will simply choose not to have them". In the name of money, how far can we go?

2.3. hire-a-killer.com



"Give a real situation where you would like to hire a service such as this one. How much were you willing to pay for it?" Analogous to the previous situation, curious answers could be found such as: (A) "I think this is rare to hire a killer in some country. But in business, this is good if it is legal. You can kill someone and you don't need to do anything although the price is expensive." (B) "If someone killed my family just for nothing, I would definitely hire this service for 50,000 MOPs." (C) "If I really had to kill someone, I would do the dirty job by myself." (D) "I always watch Hollywood movies where the bosses pay a high price for the killer job ... I

always want to kill people but since I am not able to make it, I am willing to pay 100,000 MOPs." (E) "Life is valuable ... leading me to the conclusion that this business is wrong." (F) "I purely do not believe in this site." In the name of money, how far can we go?

2.4. dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2222458/Catarina-Migliorini-Brazilian-student-20-set-sell-virginity-780k-online.html



Bare assets: Catarina Migliorini has auctioned her virginity for \$780,000 to a Japanese bidder

"Read the news from the above Web link. As this young lady mentions, I saw this as a business. I have the opportunity to travel, to be part of a movie and get a bonus with it. What do you think? After all, we are talking about 6.2 million MOPs..." Selling a girl's virginity for 780,000 USD on the Web is, perhaps, not new. After all, money became our God as, if God has the power to redeem ourselves before and after our death. Let it be (or let it bleed). As expected, this question raised two contradictory answers: (A) "It is just a simple market transaction for Catarina because she saw this as a pure business between her sexual performance and the Japanese client" (B) "I can't accept her idea, society can't accept". Still, the majority of the survey students underline the fact that the Brazilian 20 years old only seeks fame and financial stability. In the name of money, how far can we go?

References

- [1] Townes, F., 2014. e-Ethics in e-Commerce. W3Edge (www.w3-edge.com/weblog/2005/12/e-ethics-in-e-commerce/)
- [2] Streissguth, T. (2013). The Ethical Problems In E-Business. Chron Magazine, Demand Media (smallbusiness.chron.com/ethical-problems-ebusiness-62037.html).
- [3] Phillips, C. (2013). Six Characteristics of an Ethical Business. Demand Media (smallbusiness.chron.com/six-characteristics-ethical-business-22401.html)
- [4] Emens, S. (2010). The New Paradigm of Business on the Internet and Its Ethical Implications. In *Ethical Issues in E-Business: Models and Frameworks*, Daniel Palmer, 272 p.
- [5] Ferrell, O., Ferrel, L. (2012). *Integrating Business Ethics in Business Courses*, New Mexico University, 14 p.