Ph.D. Positions Opening in Management/Corporate Social Responsibility

(Open) online education poses a variety of challenges for higher education, one of which is how to foster social interactions and induce beneficial socio-cognitive conflicts (i.e. differences in point of view that are socially experienced and cognitively resolved) to promote learning in an environment where interactions are primarily written and asynchronous. MOOCs are a unique environment where people from all over the world – with different professional experience, first language, cultural background, etc. - are invited to discuss disciplinary concepts and/or society issues that can potentially induce socio-cognitive conflicts.

To address this challenge, this multidisciplinary project, that builds on theories from several disciplines from the humanities and social sciences (linguistics, communication, education, and management), will analyze social interactions and investigate the presence and unfolding of socio-cognitive conflicts in massive open online courses (MOOCs).

(See description here: https://tinyurl.com/MOOCresearch2-0)

This doctoral project will be part of this multidisciplinary project that aims to investigate socio-cognitive conflicts in online educational platforms (MOOCS). In particular, the Ph.D. student will conduct research focusing on how to foster and regulate socio-cognitive conflicts about essentially contested concepts – ECC (i.e., concepts which by their very nature engender perpetual disputes about their meaning and application), in the particular case of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This research aims to provide a better understanding of how individuals perceive and process an ECC (i.e., CSR), while taking into account some important sources of individual variation (e.g., different cultural and individual variables).

CSR broadly refers to the expectation that business is responsible to society, in the sense of accountability, and for society, in the sense of compensating for negative externalities and contributing to social welfare; and more specifically, the management by business of the corporation-society interface through the enhancement of stakeholder relationships. CSR is widely accepted, but it is still perceived as a fuzzy, unclear and contested concept. The concept of CSR is in a permanent debate or one in a continuing state of emergence that is a concept academics agree to disagree on. In addition, the terminology of CSR is quite varied, due in part to the fact that CSR is a cluster concept, which overlaps with such concepts as business ethics, corporate philanthropy, corporate citizenship, sustainability and created shared values.

CSR, as an ECC, create tensions as individuals are faced with ambiguity and complexity. This makes CSR fertile ground for sensemaking, the interpretive process by which people place equivocal and ambiguous environmental stimuli into defined cognitive schemas, or mental frames, enabling them to make sense of the stimuli. In general, knowledge is lacking about how stakeholders (i.e., citizens, consumers, employees, students) make sense of or gain knowledge about CSR. Basu and Palazzo (2008) propose a process model of organizational sensemaking explaining how managers think, discuss, and act with respect to their key stakeholders and the world at large. However, their conceptualization focuses exclusively on managers, without considering how CSR-related sensemaking processes are initiated and take place among and between various internal and external stakeholders. Moreover, the ways in which firms and their stakeholders approach CSR differs according to their context, culture, and values.
In this project, we will examine the interactions between learners in two MOOCs on the topic of CSR to address the following research questions:

- What are the different learners’ preconceptions or everyday understandings of CSR? How do they frame their perceptions about CSR? What valence and types of associations do they form with this concept? How do the different preconceptions vary with learners’ individual profiles (e.g., socio-demographics, values, experience), and geographical origins?
- How do learners react to these multiple understandings? How do these different everyday understandings influence learners’ understandings of CSR? How do individuals’ perceptions about CSR evolve based on online interactions with other participants?
- What types of pedagogical and communication mechanisms can stimulate content-related debate more than ideological debate, and facilitate learning about the scientific concept of CSR? How can explicit instruction help direct learning toward scientific understanding?

In terms of methodology, the project will rely on corpus linguistic techniques (e.g. keyword in context, collocations) to analyze participants’ posts in the discussion forums and to compare the productions of different participants, specifically in terms of what they write about and how. More qualitative approaches, including conversation analysis, will also be used to zoom in on specific content-related interactions and the progression of socio-cognitive conflicts. We will also rely on quasi-experimental research designs to foster rich interactions and debate between MOOC participants about socio-cognitive conflicts and debates. Moreover, in order to understand the potential sources of variation in CSR pre-conceptions and in their evolution due to online interaction, participants will be invited to answer surveys.

We welcome applications from strong candidates with interest in interdisciplinary research, and experience in mixed-method research (collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative material).

Key outcomes and responsibilities
- Literature search and review, hypothesis-driven development and execution of quantitative and qualitative research leading to a PhD
- Communication at conferences and in international peer-reviewed journals
- Supervision of master thesis projects
- Interdisciplinary collaboration (with education science, communication and linguistics)

Selection criteria
- Master degree in Management, Business Engineering, or Communication sciences (obtained or to be obtained at the latest in September 2019)
- Training and experience in quantitative and qualitative research
- Statistical skills; knowledge of at least one statistical program (SPSS, Stata, R or Amos)
- Knowledge about NVivo (or any other equivalent software) is an asset
- Broad scientific interest beyond own field (e.g., education, linguistics, communication, etc.).
- Strong intrinsic motivation, perseverance in the face of adversity
- Ability to work both in autonomy and in team
- As data are both in French and English, a very good level of both languages is a strong additional asset.
- Excellent writing skills and strong motivation to learn English so as to be able to write scientific articles in English from the first year
Terms and conditions
The appointment will initially be for 24 months and if evaluated positively extended with 2 additional years. It must lead to the completion of a PhD thesis. The net monthly salary is around 2000 euros. The starting date is the 1st of October 2019.

Information
Enquiries and applications must be sent to Prof. Valérie Swaen (email valerie.swaen@uclouvain.be). Application files must be sent no later than June 3, 2019 and should include:

- a cover letter in French, in which you specify why you are interested in this position and how you meet the job requirements outlined above;
- a curriculum vitae in French or English;
- an outline of previous work or research experience in English;
- a copy of your BA and MA degrees;
- a copy of your master thesis and any academic publication (published or in preparation);
- the names and full contact details of two academic referees.

Shortlisted candidates will be invited for an interview (in situ or via video conferencing) on 24 or 26 June 2019. Please save the dates!