UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Sociology of Culture and Communication (blended)

2223-2-F0101R021

Course title

Sociology of Culture and Communication (*blended learning*)

Topics and course structure

The class addresses the nexus between cultural forms and communication processes, which produce, convey and transform the categories used by the people to make sense of social reality. The power dimension will be systematically considered in order to address its relevance in mass communication, also in the social media era.

The lessons will use a multidisciplinary and multi-level approach, which deals with the big picture, daily routines performed by strategic actors, and linguistic practices, shifting from historical accounts to sociological enquiry and finally to discourse analysis.

Objectives

Knowledge and Understanding: Students will acquire in-depth knowledge about the information system in the old and new media, its functions in the wider social system, the production routines that characterise it and their effects. In particular, emphasis will be placed on media representations and their ideological character, language - understood as a resource for the production and reproduction of reality - and the role of the media and social media in the broader public construction of social problems.

Ability to relate knowledge and models: knowledge will be acquired through a continuous dialogue between theoretical concepts, analytical tools, empirical materials and examples presented by the lecturer.

Ability to apply knowledge and models: conceptual models and analytical categories useful for investigating the social construction of reality, once introduced, will be used by the students themselves who will discuss scholarship provided by the lecturer and critically examine varied journalistic texts of their choosing.

Methodologies

The course is held in blended-learning mode.

Frontal lectures will be used for the presentation and contextualization of the main topics and for the introduction of analytical and theoretical concepts.

Students' assignments will be presented in class, with web conferences, essays, and forums. The assignments have the purpose of promoting learning-by-doing and of developing skills in oral presentation with audio-video support, in group discussion, in academic writing.

Online and offline teaching materials

Lessons are in Italian. Teaching materials for students attending the lessons will be uploaded as soon as they will be needed on the e-learning platform.

Programme and references for attending students

The course is divided into 4 parts, each consisting of lectures in person and online activities:

1) **The idea of “news” and its textual forms. The ritual and techniques of objectivity. The epistemologies of journalism.**

Lectures in person (6 hours)

- Introduction to the course and to the birth of the idea of "news"
- The ritual of objectivity vs. standpoint epistemology.

Online activity (6 hours):

Reading of the lectures and presentation in Powerpoint or similar software with a 15-20 minutes talk

2) The social organization of news production. Sources, PR, news management, informal relations
Lectures in person (6 hours):

- News-making, sources, PR, "primary definers" and consensus ideology
- News as a promotion of events. News as organizational accounts
- Reported speech. Embedding of voices. News-values and filters in the social construction of reality.

Online activity (9 hours):
Online lecture. Reading of the lectures, upload of a text with the analysis of two news stories, participation to a forum online to discuss the work with the other students.

3) The convergence between traditional and new media

Lectures in person (6 hours):

- Changes in the information environment in the age of new media
- Journalists' use of new media: opportunities and problems.
- Debates and trends in the social media

Online activity (6 hours):
Online lecture. Examination - with a focus on hybridisation and re-mediation - of certain news, streams, cross-media content (in the broadest sense, including videos, memes, galleries, etc.), using the analytical categories presented in the course and expanded on the bibliography provided. Preparation of a multimedia presentation to be uploaded to the forum online for the discussion the work with the other students.

4) The construction of social problems and *media-hypes*.

Lectures in person (9 hours):

- A constructionist framework for the study of social problems
- Media-hypes and moral panics
- Media-hypes and moral panics: analysis and discussion.

Study of assigned readings. Writing an in-depth essay on moral panic or media hype through a literature search or identification of a case of moral panic and its analysis and presentation in class, with discussion.

Programme and references for non-attending students

The course will deal with culture as a theoretical, pragmatic and political category that intersects with power. In order to explore this, we will draw on the thought of Stuart Hall and his ideas about the ‘popular’, ‘encoding/decoding’ ideology, and the politics of identity.

These and other concepts will be involved in the examination of one of the most important sites of production and reproduction of culture and ideology, the mass media. In particular, we will deal with the news culture, i.e. the forms, practices, institutions, and audiences of journalism that define the nature of mediatized reality.

Some in depths analysis will be dedicated to sexism and racism in media representations. Particular attention will be given to online news, citizen journalism, war news, infotainment, the construction of social problems and mediatized rituals.

Bibliography:

1. Procter, James, *Stuart Hall e gli studi culturali*, Raffaello Cortina, 2007 (150 pages).

2. Allan, Stuart, *News culture*, Third Edition, Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2010 (270 pages)

available at:
http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.unimib.it/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=466445&site=ehost-live&scope=site

or, as an alternative:

Castells, Manuel *Comunicazione e potere,* Milano: Università Bocconi, 2009, Capp. 2, 3, 4 (320 pages)

3. Handout “Potere, cultura, mass media”, which can be found on the e-learning platform (100 pagine).

Students not attending the class are kindly invited to contact the professor for an introductory meeting about the reading list and the exam format.

Assessment methods

Students attending class
Test type
Students will be assessed in itinere on their analysis of journalistic products, discussion of bibliographical materials, essay writing, and the quality and assiduity of their participation.
Evaluation criteria
Students' presentations, written or oral, will be assessed on the basis of their ability to
relate concepts and empirical material, use concepts accurately, find relevant literature and cite it correctly, present arguments in a clear, balanced and organised manner.

Students not attending class:
Test type
Students will be assessed by means of an oral interview aimed at verifying the knowledge acquired through the critical study of the texts included in the examination programme.
Evaluation criteria:
Students will be assessed on their mastery of the topics in the syllabus, their ability to make connections between the various concepts and themes, and the precision and clarity of the language used to explain the topics.

Office hours

See the class web page.

Programme validity

The course programme is valid for two years.

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals

PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS