UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Psychology of Social Influences

2324-2-F9201P021

Learning area

2: Social psychology, economic psychology and decision-making

Learning objectives

Knowledge and understanding

- The theoretical and methodological foundations of the psychology of social influences.
- The different forms of social influence (conformity, persuasion, obedience).
- The determinants of social influence.
- The processes of social influence in the digital era.

Applying knowledge and understanding

- Knowing how to identify and deconstruct the different forms of social influence.
- Knowing how to apply forms of social influence to possible contexts of use (e.g., promoting social change in groups and organizations, health and well-being, marketing, digital age).
- Knowing how to promote resistance to unwanted forms of social influence.

Contents

The course is divided into three thematic modules. One module focuses on the fundamentals of social influence, considering indirect forms (conformism) and direct forms (obedience) of social influence. The second module concerns the study of persuasion and the different strategies to implement and to resist to it. Finally, the third

module deals with the study of antecedents (e.g. social isolation), application domains (eg. digital) and forms of resistance of social influence.

Detailed program

The main theoretical models of the psychology of social influences

The different forms of social influence

Direct and indirect forms of social influence

Informational and normative social influence

Influence of the majority and minority

The Robert Cialdini's approach: the six weapons of persuasion

The antecedents of social influence: uncertainty and social exclusion

Reading social change: how to deconstruct the different forms of social influence

Promoting social change: methods and areas of application (e.g., health and marketing) of different forms of social influence

Resisting social influence: how to implement ways of resisting social influence processes

Social influence in the Internet age.

Prerequisites

No one in particular; although a good knowledge of the foundations of social psychology enables a more informed understanding of the course contents. In any case, in order to make the course accessible to everyone, the first lessons will be devoted to reviewing the fundamental concepts of the discipline.

Teaching methods

Teaching methods include the use of lectures, films, classroom discussions, and practical exercises. Smartphone apps (e.g., Socrative) that allow students to respond in real-time to open or closed questions will be used. All course material (e.g., slides, readings) are made available on the e-learning website of the course so that also non-attending students can use it.

Attending students are given the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the course contents through two main practical activities. The first concerns the ability to apply the strategies of persuasion from the perspective of Robert Cialdini. The second gives each group the chance to consider one of the proposed chapters of the "Oxford Handbook of Social Influence" and present it to the class using slides, films, and discussions with the classroom, under the supervision of the teacher.

Although this course is held in Italian, for Erasmus students course material can also be available in English, and students can take the exam in English if they wish to do so.

Assessment methods

The exam consists of an oral test. Questions are aimed at assessing the effective acquisition of both theoretical knowledge and the ability to apply them to social reality. The answers to each question will be evaluated in terms of correctness of the answers, argumentative capacity, synthesis, ability to form links among the different areas, and the ability to critically present the phenomena. Participation in the optional activities proposed during the course (see teaching methods) also contributes to the final evaluation (0-2 points).

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Andrighetto, L. & Riva, P. (Eds.) (2020). Psicologia Sociale: Fondamenti teorici ed evidenze empiriche. Bologna: Il Mulino. ISBN 978-88-15-28794-6 (relativamente ai capitoli 1, 2, 4, e 11).
Cialdini, R. B. (2010). Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion. Collins, 2007.

The following chapters:

1. Hales, A. H., Ren, D., & Williams, K. D. (2017). Protect, Correct, and Eject: Ostracism as a Social Influence Tool. In Harkins, S. G, Williams, K. D., & Burger, J (Eds). The Oxford Handbook of Social Influence. Oxford University Press. (Cap. 11)
2. Sagarin, B. J. & Henningsen, M. L. M. (2017). Resistance to Influence. In The Oxford Handbook of Social Influence. In Harkins, S. G, Williams, K. D., & Burger, J (Eds). Oxford University Press. (Cap. 23).

The following papers:

1. Büttner, C. M., & Rudert, S. C. (2022). Why didn't you tag me?!: Social exclusion from Instagram posts hurts, especially those with a high need to belong. Computers in Human Behavior, 127, 107062.
2. Chotpitayasunondh, V., & Douglas, K. M. (2016). How “phubbing” becomes the norm: The antecedents and consequences of snubbing via smartphone. Computers in Human Behavior, 63, 9-18.
3. Cook, J., Lewandowsky, S., & Ecker, U. K. (2017). Neutralizing misinformation through inoculation: Exposing misleading argumentation techniques reduces their influence. PloS one, 12(5), e0175799.
4. Bertolotti, M., & Catellani, P. (2023). Counterfactual thinking as a prebunking strategy to contrast misinformation on COVID-19. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 104, 104404.
5. Muscanell, N. L., Guadagno, R. E., & Murphy, S. (2014). Weapons of influence misused: A social influence analysis of why people fall prey to internet scams. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 8(7), 388-396.
6. Nijssen, S. R., Müller, B. C., Gallinat, J., & Kühn, S. (2022). Applying persuasive messages to reduce public outdoor smoking: A pseudo?randomized controlled trial. Applied Psychology: Health and Well?Being.
7. Pancani, L., Aureli, N., & Riva, P. (2022). Relationship Dissolution Strategies: Comparing the Psychological Consequences of Ghosting, Orbiting, and Rejection. Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 16(2), article 9.
8. Riva, P., Aureli, N., Silvestrini, F. (2022). Social Influences in the Digital Era: When do people conform more to a Human Being or an Artificial Intelligence? Acta Psychologica, 229, 103681.
9. Timeo, S., Riva, P., & Paladino, M. P. (2020). Being liked or not being liked: A study on social-media exclusion in a preadolescent population. Journal of adolescence, 80, 173-181.
10. Zonca, J., Folsø, A., & Sciutti, A. (2021). The role of reciprocity in human-robot social influence. Iscience, 24(12), 103424.

Listening to a few podcasts (that will indicated later on) will also constitute examination material.

For those who do not participate in group work, the following two chapters will be also required:

1. Martin, Leslie R., and M. Robin DiMatteo. (2017). Social Influence and Health. In The Oxford Handbook of Social Influence. Oxford University Press. (Cap. 20)
2. Kirmani, A., & Ferraro, R. (2017). Social Influence in Marketing: How Other People Influence Consumer Information Processing and Decision Making. In The Oxford Handbook of Social Influence. Oxford University Press. (Cap. 22)

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES