UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Psychology of Social Influences

2425-2-F5106P015

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

Type of didactic activity: 21 lectures (equivalent to 42 hours and 6 ECTS credits) and 7 practical sessions (equivalent to 14 hours and 2 ECTS credits) held in-person in the classroom. The lecture part of the course is primarily based on a didactic method (frontal lectures). During the lectures, the instructor encourages active participation from students through classroom discussions and interactive activities, such as brief group reflections, film analysis, case studies, and applications of theories to practice. This approach aims to stimulate critical thinking and foster direct engagement with the topics discussed, allowing students to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired to real-world situations.

The practical sessions part of the course is primarily based on an interactive teaching method. Attending students who wish to do so have the opportunity to delve deeper into certain course topics through two main practical

activities. The first activity involves applying persuasion strategies from Robert Cialdini's perspective. The second allows each group to consider one scientific article among those proposed in the "Textbooks and Reading Materials" section and present it to the class through the use of slides, films, and discussions with the classroom, under the supervision of the instructor.

Whenever possible, materials (lecture handouts and, when available, videos) are made accessible on the course's e-learning site, so they are also available to non-attending students. The course is delivered in Italian.
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 reading and study of the following scientific articles related to the field of social influence:

1. Murrar, S., Campbell, M. R., & Brauer, M. (2020). Exposure to peers' pro-diversity attitudes increases inclusion and reduces the achievement gap. Nature Human Behaviour, 4(9), 889–897. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0899-5
2. Nijssen, S. R., Müller, B. C., Gallinat, J., & Kühn, S. (2023). Applying persuasive messages to reduce public outdoor smoking: A pseudo?randomized controlled trial. Applied Psychology: Health and Well?Being, 15(1), 337-353.
3. Pfundmair, M., Aydin, N., & Frey, D. (2016). Whatever? The effect of social exclusion on adopting persuasive messages. The Journal of Social Psychology, 157(2), 181–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2016.1192098
4. Dwyer, R. J., Zhuo, A. X., & Dunn, E. W. (2023). Why do people turn to smartphones during social interactions?. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 109, 104506.
5. Genschow et al. (2021). A direct replication of Cialdini et al.'s (1975) classic door-in-the-face technique. Journal of personality and social psychology, 120(2), e1.

Listening to the following podcast also constitutes examination material:

Io ero il milanese - RaiPlay Sound (https://www.raiplaysound.it/programmi/ioeroilmilanese)

And watching the following videos:

a - Comizi d'amore (documentario del 1965 di Pier Paolo Pasolini - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKGvqxBZWS0&t=2741s&ab_channel=Film%26Clips
b - Processo per strupro (documentario del 1979 di Maria Grazia Belmonti, Anna Carini, Rony Daopulo, Paola De Martis, Annabella Miscuglio e Loredana Rotondo)- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaTmbLzyWmk&list=PL8CECAD6B8604F5A5&ab_channel=matergea

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