UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Qualitative Methods for Digital Research

2425-1-F8802N052

Learning objectives

The course aims to provide the students with epsitemic, conceptual and methodological tools in order to: 1. pinpoint the multimodal nature of the digital data that are produced in the online environments and in the interrelations between the online and offline environments; 2. understand the social and cultural dimensions of the digital contents produced online and of the digital interactions and practices actualized by social actors both in the interweaving of online and offline environments; 3. identify the processes of coding and decoding of digital contents, by taking into account the affordances of the online environment; communciate the research outputs also by developing digital tools and platforms according to the audiences.

Contents

The course is divided into two parts.
In the first part, traditional and digital research and analysis methods and techniques aimed at studying digital (sub)cultures and environments and sociocultural phenomena emerging from the interrelation of the offline and online environments will be illustrated also through specific case studies.
In the second part, the students will work in class to design and develop research projects.

Detailed program

The course is divided into two parts.

a) In the first part the students will explore the methods and techniques of research and analysis to investigate digital contents and practices produced in the interrelations between online and offline environments, focusing especially on the following aspects: materialita and corporeality; emotionality; Space-time-constellations; frames.

The course will first deal with some pivotal questions and phenomena concerning the digital environment such as:

1. The building of narrative identity (in particular those identity related to chronical mental and physical illness) through unsolicited narratives whose content, meanings, order of relevance, narrative and temporal structure are shaped by the affordances of the used platform design;
2. forms of social interactions which occur between the online and the offline environments, through which it is possible to detect social networks and networks of meaning, idocultures and subcultures, symbolic boundaries and social norms;
3. practices of representation of self and impression management;
4. digital practices between offline and online environments within the everyday life contexts;
5. processes of production, dissemination, reception and legitimation of forms of knowledge, cultural and cognitives schemes and models, social representations, discursive structures;
6. uses of internet in professional environments;
7. processes of production, dissemination and consumption of media and cultural products, especially those related to the music field and the popular culture.

In order to investigate these aspects the following traditional and digital research techniques and methods and techniques and methods of analysis will be illustrated:

- narrative interviews and focuses interviewed (especially to explore the use of internets and the digital practices by different social groups in their contexts of life);
- processes of decoding of digital data through the methods of grounded theory and techniques of visual analysis such as: compositional interpretation; content-analysis; discourse analysis; media semiotic analysis;
- co-costruction of timeline-drawing and online scrapbook;
- co-costruction of digital story-telling and digital stories;
- (visual) digital ethnography, divided into virtual ethnography, connective ethnography and ethnography of internet in the everyday life according to the research object;
- database ethnography.

Finally, some ethical questions will be discussed concerning: the building of relationships between the investigator and the subjects involved in the research; the way of participating in the online and offline environments during the digital ethnography; the processing of personal data.

b) The development of a project design in class will regard the following aspects:

- identifying the boundaries of the research field, departing from the research questions and objects and considering the macro- meso and micro-dimension of social phenomena;
- identifying the samplying techniques;
- identifying the research techniques more suitable for the research field and questions
- analisyis of the empirical material and presentation of the research outputs, also in multimodal form, according to the audiences (public ethnography and/or policy-oriented research)

Prerequisites

A good knowledge of sociological theories and concepts, and of the main tools of the social science research

Teaching methods

About 30% of frontal lessons, discussing on research and analysis methods and theoir epistemic and theoretical assumptions

About 70% of Interactive lessons, including seminars; group works; tutorials; research reports by the students regarding their research work progress.

Assessment methods

Written exam with three open-ended questions. The students should demonstrate to be able to apply the research techniques and methods to specific research fields and objects.

Students attending the working groups during the lessons may choose between the written exam and writing a research report or scientific article (individually or in group) departing from the project developed during the course. The research report should be sent up to five days before the exam.

Criteria of evaluation: capability of developing research questions and applying suitable research methods and methods of analysis to specific research questions; accuracy of sociological terminology; clarity of exposition.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Grüning, B. (2024), *Un altro sentire. L'esperienza dell'anoressia tra corpo e mente*, Napoli Orthotes.

Further texts will be available in the website of the teaching course

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY | DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | REDUCED INEQUALITIES