UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Psychology of Social Influences

2526-2-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.

Making judgements
Development of critical analysis skills regarding the forms of social influence, their determinants, and how they operate in different contexts, including digital ones.
Ability to independently assess how different strategies of social influence can shape opinions, attitudes, and behaviors, both at the individual and collective level.
Acquisition of the ability to interpret and integrate theoretical and empirical evidence in order to formulate informed and conscious judgements on complex social cases and phenomena.

Communication skills
Development of the ability to communicate contents, data, and results related to social influence processes in a

clear, effective, and rigorous manner, both to specialist audiences and to a broader public.
Ability to critically argue and discuss the different forms and strategies of social influence through oral, written, and multimedia presentations, including in seminar and group contexts.
Promotion of active listening, dialogue, and interaction skills within collaborative activities, with particular attention to managing interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue.

Learning skills
Development of the ability to learn independently and continuously, including through critical analysis of scientific literature and the in-depth study of applied cases.
Acquisition of the ability to update and expand one's knowledge of models and practices of social influence, with particular attention to emerging dynamics in the digital era.
Strengthening of critical reflection on one's own learning processes and of strategies to enhance theoretical, methodological, and applied competences.

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/articles:

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).
3. Riva, P., Telari, A., & Marinucci, M. (in press). Social influence in digital environments. In D. Giles & J. Johnston (Eds.), Handbook of social psychology and media. Edward Elgar.
4. Riva, P., Marinucci, M., Telari, A., & Pancani, L. (2025). Updating the temporal need-threat model of ostracism: Challenges and future directions. The Journal of Social Psychology.

The exam materials will also include the reading and study of selected scientific articles on social influence, which will be indicated during the course in connection with the organization of group work.

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://archive.org/details/ngv_rm_it_19790601_processo_per_stupro

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