UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Social Psychology of Communication

2627-2-E2006P011

Learning area

2: Psychosocial aspects underlying communication.

Learning objectives

Knowledge and understanding

By the end of the course, students are expected to have acquired:

- fundamental theories of persuasion, social influence, and social information processing;
- the main psychological and social processes involved in the formation, dissemination, and persistence of beliefs, information, and misinformation;
- processes of social and political polarization and the role of communication in their amplification or mitigation;
- the main challenges and strategies of science communication in contexts characterized by uncertainty, disagreement, and value conflicts.

Applying knowledge and understanding

By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to apply their knowledge. Specifically, they will be able to:

- critically analyze contemporary communication phenomena through the lens of major psychological and social theories;
- apply key theoretical models of communication to socially relevant issues;
- critically evaluate empirical evidence concerning phenomena such as misinformation, polarization,

conspiracy theories, and science communication;
- identify potential communication and intervention strategies aimed at countering the spread of misinformation and promoting effective communication.

Making judgements

The course is designed to foster independent thinking and critical judgment. Students will enhance their ability to collect and interpret relevant data in order to form reasoned opinions on social and scientific matters. This will be supported through:

- critical analysis of real-world communication cases, informed by theoretical models;
- classroom debates;
- collaborative group exercises.

Communication Skills

The course seeks to enhance students' communication skills through:

- the acquisition of appropriate specialist terminology for describing and discussing the psychological and social processes underlying communication;
- the ability to construct clear, evidence-based arguments on controversial issues and topics of public relevance;
- participation in discussions and group activities that foster active listening, engagement with diverse viewpoints, and the collaborative construction of knowledge;
- the ability to communicate scientific content to different audiences by adapting language and communication strategies to the specific context.

Learning Skills

The course promotes the development of autonomous learning skills through:

- the introduction of active learning strategies, emphasizing critical engagement with theories, models, and research;
- activities that require students to apply theoretical concepts (e.g., persuasion) to real or simulated communication contexts (e.g., advertising, everyday social interactions), thereby enhancing their ability to connect theory with practice.

Contents

The course provides an overview of major psychological and social theories of communication, with a particular focus on persuasion, social influence, and information processing. It examines how beliefs, attitudes, and judgments are formed and shaped through communication, addressing contemporary phenomena such as misinformation, fake news, conspiracy theories, and social and political polarization. The course also explores the challenges of science communication in contexts characterized by uncertainty, controversy, and value conflicts. Through the discussion of empirical research and real-world examples, students will develop the theoretical and analytical tools needed to critically understand communication processes and their societal implications.

Detailed program

The course programme comprises:
• theories and models of persuasion, social influence, and information processing;
• psychological and social processes underlying the formation, dissemination, and persistence of beliefs;
• misinformation, fake news, and strategies to counter the spread of false information;
• "dinner table effect" and the oral transmission of beliefs within social groups;
• conspiracy theories and the psychological factors associated with their emergence and diffusion;
• social and political polarization in both online and offline contexts;
• emotions, social identities, and contagion dynamics in communication;
• science communication and the communication of uncertainty;
• critical analysis of real-world cases and empirical research on contemporary communication phenomena.

Prerequisites

No specific preliminary requirements are necessary. However, a solid understanding of the basics of Social Psychology will enhance comprehension of the course content.

Teaching methods

a) The course will integrate lecture-based teaching (75%) and interactive teaching (25%).
The course combines traditional lectures aimed at providing theoretical knowledge with interactive methods that seek to actively engage students. These include the analysis of key empirical studies in the field and group-based discussion. This approach encourages both critical reflection and the practical application of concepts learned in class.

b) Type of teaching activities: lectures.
The course consists of 28 lessons, each lasting 2 hours.

c) The course will be conducted entirely in person.

Assessment methods

The exam, lasting 90 minutes, will be conducted in written form and will include both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Specifically, it will consist of 14 multiple-choice questions (1 point each) and 3 open-ended questions (max 6 points each). Final scores exceeding 30 will be converted to 30 cum laude.

The questions will be aimed at ascertaining the effective acquisition of both theoretical knowledge and the ability to apply it. The evaluation criteria are: the correctness of the answers, the ability to argue, summarize, create links, and critically interpret social phenomena.

Student performance will be evaluated according to the following scale:

30 with honors (cum laude): Outstanding performance, demonstrating excellent mastery of content along with exceptional critical thinking and expressive clarity.
30: Excellent performance, with comprehensive knowledge, well-structured reasoning, and clear, accurate expression.
27–29: Very good performance, showing thorough and satisfactory understanding, with generally accurate and

appropriate expression.
24–26: Good performance, with adequate knowledge of key topics, though not fully comprehensive or consistently well-articulated.
21–23: Sufficient performance, reflecting a basic and sometimes superficial understanding; expression and structure may be lacking or imprecise.
18–20: Marginally sufficient performance, with limited and superficial knowledge; expression and argumentation may present significant gaps.
< 18: Insufficient performance, with inadequate or seriously flawed understanding and a lack of orientation within the area

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Detailed information about the material and the bibliography will be published before the start of the course on the e-learning page. The reading materials will consist of a collection of texts covering the main topics of the course.
In addition, the course slides will serve as supplementary material. The slides will be uploaded to the e-learning platform.

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.

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS