UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Qualitative Methods for Digital Research

2627-1-F8804N003

Learning objectives

The course pursues the following goals:

1. knowledge and comprehension skills: a) about the multimodal nature of the digital data produced in the online environments and in the interrelations between the online and offline environments; b. the social and cultural dimensions of digital contents, interactions and practices in the interweaving of online and offline environments;
2. practical application of knowledge and comprehension skills: the student should show to be able to interpret and decode phenomena created (even) in the digital environments by following the more suitable sociological approach and by combining different research methods and techniques;
3. Autonomy of judgment: the student should be able to understand the advancements and limits during his/her learning process;
4. Communicative capabilities: the student should be able a) to argue the contents of the course by using a sociological appropriate language; b) to autonomously structure research project; and c) to present them both in written and oral form, eventually with the implementation of digital tools
5. Ability to learn: the students will acquire theoretical, methodological and practical knowledge suitable for carrying out in the future complex empirical investigation on digital phenomena by identifying its social, cultural, political and economic aspects

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, students will work in class to design and develop research projects that will ultimately lead to research articles.

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 on three levels of analysis (macro, meso, and micro), focusing especially on the following aspects: materialita and corporeality; emotional codes; space-time-constellations; power dynamics.
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;
8. (social and interpretative) conflicts present in the social platforms, especially around the IA

In this regard, particular attention will be paid to the interdependence between theoretical approaches and specific methodologies adopted in the analysis of empirical case studies, by focusing especially on: the action network theory and the STS (Science and Technology Studies); the field theory of Bourdieu; the concepts of subcultures and coding/decoding in the tradition of the cultural studies; the relationship power/knowledge in the work of Foucault; the principles and order of interaction within the symbolic interaction

In order to investigate the aspects mentioned above the following traditional and digital research techniques and methods and techniques and methods of analysis will be progressively 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 digital story-telling and digital stories within participative research project;
- (visual) digital ethnography, divided into virtual ethnography, connective ethnography and ethnography of internet in the everyday life according to the research object;
- database ethnography and discourse analysis;
- ethnography of the interfaces and walkthrough method;
- qualitative online survey

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;
- positioning own research project within the broader research area;
- 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

To fill any gaps supplementary readings will be suggested during the course

Teaching methods

The course will be taught in Italian.

About 40% of frontal lessons, discussing on research and analysis methods and theoir epistemic and theoretical assumptions

About 60% of Interactive lessons, including seminars; group works; tutorials; written and discussedresearch reports about research work progress.

All the lessons will be in presence

Assessment methods

Written exam with three open-ended questions (90 minutes). 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.

Erasmus or foreign students may ask to do the exam in English language

Criteria of evaluation of the written exam: the student should be able to argue the contents required by the answers, to use the sociological language appropriately, and to apply the theoretical and methodological knowledge required to empirical case studies.
Criteria of evaluation of the research article: 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 e-learning website of the teaching course

Sustainable Development Goals

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