

**COMM 502:  
Theoretical Approaches to Multidisciplinary Design Projects**

Time and Day: Thursday, 3:30 – 6:20  
ANN115

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**Course description**

The purpose of this course is to teach theories and present research in Communication and the Social Sciences to individuals interesting in bridging disciplines in order to produce a proposal, business plan, publication, or a research project. Our emphasis is on the intersection of theory, important daily and work contexts, and digital settings / digital applications. See the Daily Schedule below for more specific details.

We will begin with several interpersonal topics, including the presentation of self in everyday life and important functions served by nonverbal communication, and then proceed through “compliance” techniques commonly used in face-to-face sales, promotional encounters, and to create brand loyalty. We will then discuss the nature of friendships, maintaining partnerships and research on relationships. This will be followed by an overview of theories of persuasion used in media campaigns, how these campaigns use emotions in influencing receivers and the importance of emotions in creating effective viral messages.

We will then discuss the nature, uses and effectiveness of “Influencer Campaigns” (consumers influence one another), and “reputational web sites, the uses of “Social Media,” Twitter and the growing literature on the nature of Millennial and Ingeneration youth (also referred to as “Gen Z,” Generation Swipe, IGEN). Finally, we discuss the nature of social support in face to face and online contexts and discuss games designed to engage consumers in for-profit settings and in serious games for social change and health.

**Learning Objectives**

Expected learning outcomes for students are listed below.

*I. Knowledge and Application of Theories of Interpersonal, Psychological and Persuasion:*

- Explain the elements and theories of communication processes at the individual, interpersonal and in social settings, and understand how these theories impact on communication outcomes.
- Apply theories using a variety of channels (language, nonverbal systems) and contexts (digital and face to face).
- Evaluate the success and failure of applying theories in designing strategies of influence.

*II. Analytical Thinking:*

- Design effective messages that impact on beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral responses of receivers.
- Evaluate the reasons some messages succeed while others fail;
- How to use theories to modify or correct failing or inadequate campaigns or projects
- How to justify theoretically a campaign or design project.

*III. Information Literacy:*

- Conduct academic research using a variety of library resources.
- How to communicate effectively between disciplines and achieve team goals and deadlines.
- To understand the requirements and objectives of customers, how these vary, and how one must tailor a solution to the expectations of a customer.\*\*
- To understand communication challenges in new domains, both traditional and digital; and how solutions and approaches will differ in various fields.\*\*
- To understand how to work with individuals from diverse domain (engineering, media, business, etc.) to accomplish a common goal.\*\*

\*\*These goals parallel outcomes also pursued in Professor Scherer's class, INF 571: Communication Informatics Professional Practicum

**Course work, Assignments and Grading**

The instructor will (1) provide a broad-based exposure to research and theory in the area of communication and social science research, providing examples along the way; (2) advise and assist students in their paper projects and proposals (described below); and (3) provide feedback on papers and proposals that so there is an integration between theory, current research trends and applications.

The professor's role:

The professor will lecture on Weeks 1 through 14 on theories, research and current trends in applied communications.

The student's role:

Other than keeping up with the readings, each student enrolled in this class will make a decision to specialize in a content area, one discussed in class from interpersonal, business or online contexts or one proposed by the student and meeting the professors' approval.

Students with similar interests, and hopefully from different interests, with work in small groups on a major paper (proposing a new product, a new approach, an integration of ideas or a major review paper for publication); students will present their progress and ideas to the class on Day 11, securing feedback from classmates, the professor (and possibly guests).

After receiving feedback, the students will later make a Final Presentation or Sales Pitch to the class (and possibly guests) on the last class day.

There are four graded assignments, designed to advance the student toward a publication, a research project or a proposal (or business plan).

### **Grading: Three papers, one presentation**

Paper 1. Library and Research Summary	25% of
grade*	
Paper 2. Review of Past Research (theory and critique of outcomes)	25% of
grade*	
Paper 3. Proposal for a New Product or Research	25% of

grade\*

Oral Presentation – Student Mini-lecture

25% of

grade\*

Given our changes in the content, I think we can keep Paper 3 to be a paper that is a “Business Plan, Proposal for a campaign, Proposal for a new campaign for a product.”

The first two papers can be a review of literature on relevant aspects of business –

Topics can include Receivers: The Nature of Millennials, A cultural comparison (China vs. USA, etc.), Targeting Female consumers, Targeting Male consumers, Targeting investors, Targeting luxury consumers, etc.

And, topics can focus on processes in persuasion; Viral Marketing, Word of Mouth, Diffusion of Innovations, The nature of humor, Values, and more.

\*all assignments are due at 11 PM on Friday nights, **first week of each month**

The instructor will assume that Paper 1 and Paper 2 will be written by an individual student, who may join with others to write paper 3 together. However, students may collaborate on Papers 1, 2 and 3 if the students form a working work early in the semester and obtain the professor’s approval. Otherwise, a working group should be collaborating by week 10 of the semester, and present as a group on Week 11 and Week 15.

## **Textbooks and materials**

Cialdini, R.B. (2009). **Influence: Science and practice**. Boston, MA: Pearson Press.

## **The COMM 502 Drop Box**

Each student enrolled will be invited to share a Drop box. The Drop box contains Folders of articles and book chapters on Big Data, Diffusion of Innovations, Millennials/ Gen Z, Viral Marketing, YouTube Influencers, Snapchat campaigns, Compliance principles, Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Functions of Humor, Health Belief Model.

Websites:

The Ad Council is responsible for a number of exceptional campaigns, including Smokey Bear, Give a Hoot, Friends Don't let Friends Drive Drunk, Buzzed Drinking is Drunk Driving, and the Crash Test Dummies. We will be discussing their report on PSAs that made a difference, and citing some of their campaigns throughout the semester.

<http://www.adcouncil.org/>

You will want to explore Effie's "Winners' Showcase" to see which campaigns have won awards for "effective advertising." We will refer to award-winning campaigns throughout the course, and will feature a number of these when we talk about effective campaigns.

<http://www.effie.org/>

The Viral Factory was launched in London in 2001 and is credited with some of the viral ads used by Axe and other companies, with some success. They are very creative, and also sexy and potentially offensive to some – they never air on TV.

<http://www.theviralfactory.com/>

<http://www.warc.com/>

WARC is a database providing resources for a number of topics in advertising around the world and you can search the terms "social media," "games," "storytelling," "Twitter," "mobile," etc. WARC also lists award-winning campaigns. "WARC" stands for "World Advertising Resource Center."

You can access the WARC database through USC Libraries at

<http://www.usc.edu/libraries/#eresources>

In the field "Find a research database," type in "Warc" and the appropriate link will show up.

Note that WARC switched from a totally free service to a more restricted service, but many reports are still available and free if you log on through the USC Library site.

Other awards:

CLIO Healthcare Awards:

<http://www.cliohealthcare.com/>

PR News, home for more Case Studies and "anvil" awards for significant PR

campaign projects:

<http://www.prnewsonline.com/>

Cannes Film Festival, “Lyons Awards” – award winners are also announced in the WARC data bank, and some case studies are included.

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### **Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:

[http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html), (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX)  
[ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, ([www.usc.edu/scampus](http://www.usc.edu/scampus) or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

### **Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

## Schedule

### **Day 1. August 25. Introduction to the class.....**

### **Day 2. September 1. Compliance Principles used in Daily Life**

Class Goals: (1) To discuss cognitive heuristics in compliance settings; Cialdini's (2009) rules of liking, reciprocity, commitment, scarcity, authority and social proof, and how compliance principles are used to gain compliance in sales, solicitations / donations and in-store, point of sale; and (2) Applying compliance principles in soliciting donations and help; building brand images and shaping consumer decisions (including conserving energy and recycling).

\*Cialdini, R.B. (2009). **Influence: Science and practice**. Boston, MA: Pearson Press.

\* Professor's Commentary: Compliance Principles and Heuristic Processing

Using Compliance Principles to promote energy conservation:

<http://opower.com/>

[http://www.ted.com/talks/alex\\_laskey\\_how\\_behavioral\\_science\\_can\\_lower\\_your\\_energy\\_bill.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/alex_laskey_how_behavioral_science_can_lower_your_energy_bill.html)

### **Day 3. September 8. Overview of Campaigns and Diffusion of Innovation**

Please consult Drop box on campaign projects using the Diffusion of Innovation model.

### **Day 4. September 15. How Consumers Process Messages; Strong and weak arguments, the power of associating products to universal values (equality, freedom, inspiration).**

We discussion of the ELM model of persuasion has been studies and expanded on in recent years; and how "native ads" appeal to more ennobling values of freedom, equality, justice, nature. Compliance principles of "social proof" encourage others join in on activities ("Ice bucket challenge," "Kill 22"), and FOMA (fear of missing out) motivates younger consumers to tune in and participate/comply.

### **Day 5. September 22. Emotional Appeals – When to use Fear; the value of using**

## **Humor**

Past campaigns have relied extensively on “fear” to motivate consumers to change behaviors. Since consumers avoid “advertisements” and avoid fear-inducing messages, messages today attempt to influence consumers by changing beliefs and encouraging making intelligent decisions for health and safety and overall “wellness” (also see lecture on The Theory of Planned Behavior, Kaiser Permanente’s “Thrive” campaign).

### **Day 6. September 29. Speaker Credibility Expertise, Trust, Charisma**

Coverage of classic material on expertise, authority, power, trust, dynamism, energy and charisma. A document containing a summary of Source Characteristics will be distributed before class.

### **Day 7. October 6. YouTube Influencers**

Please consult drop box for materials – YouTube Influencers is an ever changing dynamic area. A brief history of “influencer campaigns” will be circulated, followed by a set of Case Studies of using YouTube influencers effectively to affect fans and members of their communities.

### **Day 8. October 13. Know your audience: Millennials and the younger IGen, or also called Gen Z or Generation Swipe.**

Please consult drop box for materials – this topic is an ever changing dynamic area.

### **Day 9. October 20. The Nature of Viral Messages; and their effectiveness (short-term and long-term).**

Class Goals: (1) To discuss the special case of “effective Viral ads” – who spreads them and why, and how they are organized – humor and surprised, repeated; (2) To discuss why KONY2012 proved so successful, yet can it be repeated?; (3) what motivates individuals to forward a viral ad, to whom, for what benefit?

\*Dobele, A., Lindgreen, A., Beverland, M., Vanhamme, J., & van Wijk, R. (2007). Why pass on viral messages? Because they connect emotionally. *Business Horizons*, 50, 291-304.

\*Eckler, P. & Bolls, P. (2011). Spreading the virus: Emotional tone of viral advertising and its effect on forwarding intentions and attitudes. *The Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 11, 2. Reprinted by WARC (World Advertising Research Centre).

\*Golan, G.J. & Zaidne, L. (2008). Creative strategies in viral advertising: An application of Taylor's six-segment message strategy wheel. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 959-972.

Ho, J.Y.C. & Dempsey, M. (2010). Viral marketing: Motivations to forward online content. *Journal of Business Research*, 63, 1000-1006.

Why do some messages go viral?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpxVIwCbBK0>

And this one is more "academic:"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZVTwMUrGEA>

Some key elements: (a) Capture attention, surprise, humor; (b) sustained joy or interest (surprise, and take it away), Share (1) content is good, humor, surprising, but not shocking (to all) – perhaps to certain people; (2) sharing gives you social capital – friends are impressed by your access to unique or new viral messages.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgX\\_IJPOifs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgX_IJPOifs)

<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20631042,00.html>

Other than humor, viral ads can be inspirational, or "warm," nostalgic and uplifting: Embrace Life:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-8PBx7isoM>

More birthdays:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7xBIUtWZ9E>

And novelty also captures the attention of the consumer today, creating a cultural event or "phenomena:"

<http://www.adforum.com/creative-work/ad/player/34477321>

Interested students should consult publications in the Drop box folder labeled "Viral Messages."

**Day 10. October 27. Word of Mouth and Reputational Web Sites**

**Day 11. November 3. Product Placement and Entertainment Education (embedding health and social issues into a dramatic serial).**

A summary of “Entertainment Education” will be circulated before class.

**Day 12. November 10. The Theory of Planned Behavior and decision making.**

**Day 13. November 17. The Health Belief Model and campaigns on health and safety. Online social support for changes in health (i.e., smoking cessation sites, etc.).**

**Day 14. December 1. Student presentations.**