Political campaigns “micro-target” their messages to individuals according to the issues each cares about. Endorsements of products and brands spread through Facebook. Mobile devices sense physical activity and coach people to meet diet and exercise goals. Using social-scientific research and real-world examples, this course examines the social and psychological processes by which communication technologies are used to change people’s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. By the end of the course, students will understand the psychology of persuasion and social influence, and they will have applied this to the design and criticism of new technologies, interventions, and messages.

The development and widespread adoption of digital communication technologies have enabled flexible and varied forms of persuasive experiences. Understanding, studying, and effectively creating these experiences requires confronting ideas that have often been treated separately, such as mass and interpersonal communication, intended and unintended media effects, and information processing and habit formation. It can also invite combining analysis of psychological processes, social structure, and the affordances of technology. This course focuses on social and psychological issues in how mediated communication is used to change attitudes and behaviors, including particular attention to interactive and networked digital communication technologies.

Readings are selected articles and book chapters, both classic and contemporary, from investigators in communication, psychology, computer science, sociology, economics, and network science. Lectures and discussion will emphasize both critical comparison of the varied theoretical and methodological perspectives employed and application to real-world influence attempts.
EVALUATION

Midterm
There will be a midterm testing the material from readings and lectures in the first half of the course. The emphasis will be on psychological models of attitude and behavior change. Because of the shortened quarter, we will schedule the midterm outside of class time. (25%)

Problem set
There will be a single, short problem set on graph theory, information diffusion, and contagion due on July 27th. (15%)

Term paper
The term paper should systematically review and apply research on persuasion, behavior change, and social influence in the context of online media. The specific topic for each student’s paper — which should be quite focused — will be selected with my guidance. A full draft of the paper must be submitted on August 2nd (10%). This will receive comments to be used in writing the final draft, which is due on August 12th (35%).

Participation
Active participation in discussion in class and through online media. Includes some small assignments to look at services and information online, most of which should be completed. (15%)

Alternative: Final
Instead of writing a term paper, undergraduate students can elect to take a final exam during the final exam period for this class. This final would thus account for 45% of the grade.

READINGS
We will read all of Cialdini [2001]. Any edition of this book from 2001 or later will do. We will also read sections from Easley and Kleinberg [2010], which is available both online at no cost and in print.

All other readings are available to enrolled students via Coursework. Readings listed below are required unless otherwise indicated. Each section corresponds to one meeting of the course. The readings and order of lectures may change with sufficient notice.

1 Overview

Overview of course content. Motivating examples. Psychological and sociological levels of analysis. Administrative issues. Beginning topics from next session.

2 Introduction


3 Attitude and behavior change


4 Dual-process models

Dominant theoretical models of persuasion in social and consumer psychology. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) [Petty et al., 2009], including extensions, criticisms, and defenses [Brinol and Petty, 2009; Petty and Wegener, 1999; Griffin, 2008, ch. 15, all optional]. Comparison with other dual-process models, such as the heuristic–systematic model (HSM) [Chaiken and Chen, 1999, optional].


5 Computers and Persuasion

Prescient views of computers and persuasion [Licklider and Taylor, 1968]: persuasive simulation, actively mediated communication, and computers as social actors. More recent developments of these ideas in human–computer interaction and computer-mediated communication [Bailenson et al., 2004]. The appeal of mobile phones as platforms for attitude and behavior change. Health behavior change [Consolvo et al., 2008, optional]. Mobile communication in political and social action.


6 SOCIAL INFLUENCE, COMPLIANCE, AND CONFORMITY

Social proof and liking [Cialdini, 2001, ch. 4, 6]. Field experiments on social influence [Goldstein et al., 2008, optional]. Social influence in cultural selection and hit-making [Salganik et al., 2006]. Social information and primes embedded in online environments [Sukumaran et al., 2011].


7 HEURISTICS AND AUTOMATIC PROCESSING

Fast, frugal, and simple procedures that are often adaptive, but that are not guaranteed to yield optimal results. The pervasiveness [Cialdini, 2001, ch. 1] and flexibility of automatic cognition. The availability, recognition, and representativeness heuristics [Tversky and Kahneman, 1974].


MIDTERM

Read the rest of Cialdini [2001].
8 Heuristics and media

Problem set posted.


9 Models of influence in networks I


10 Designing for behavior change

Guest lecture and design exercises with B.J. Fogg (Stanford).

Generative uses of taxonomies of influence strategies [Fogg, 2003, Appendix]. Design patterns for persuasive technology [Lockton et al., 2010, read two or more lenses]. Theory-based design of systems [Consolvo et al., 2009]. Prototyping and learning from interactive interventions.


11 Models of influence in networks II


12 Measuring influence


13 Designing for contagion

Designing services to increase contagion [Aral and Walker, 2011]. Identifying and targeting “influentials” and “susceptibles” [Watts, 2011, excerpt]. Affordances and emergent behaviors [Boyd et al., 2010].


14 INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Draft of term paper due.


15 TAILORING AND ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS

Interactive technologies can scalably personalize and tailor interventions to increase the desired attitude or behavior change. Beniger [1987] is an early and provocative description of this. Current practices in online commerce and advertising. Current research includes adaptively determining the design of Web experiences [Urban et al., 2009].


16 REVIEW AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Connections between psychology and sociology of attitude and behavior change. Some emerging social practices and technologies. The value of social science for decision-making. Further reflection on ethical issues.

OTHER INFORMATION

Announcements for this course will be made via Coursework (http://coursework.stanford.edu). Make sure you are signed up for the course there.
Office hours

By appointment, generally in 120–332. We will schedule some continuous slots for discussing term paper topics.

Honor Code

Your participation in this course is covered by the Honor Code (http://honorcode.stanford.edu). Please be sure you understand what the Honor Code requires. In particular, review the definition of plagiarism. Note: students may collaborate on the problem set by discussing the problems, but each student must separately write up their solutions and indicate on the problem set who they have discussed the problems with.

Students with disabilities

Students who have a disability which may necessitate an academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids and services in a class, must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC), located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAD). The SDRC will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend appropriate accommodations, and prepare a verification letter dated in the current academic term in which the request is being made. Please contact the SDRC as soon as possible; timely notice is needed to arrange for appropriate accommodations. The Office of Accessible Education is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066; TDD: 725-1067; http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae).