MEJO 710: Psychology of Audiences

Syllabus and Weekly Schedule

Fall 2022

Note: This document is subject to change. Please refer to it regularly for the latest information.

Instructor information:

Rhonda Gibson, Ph.D. (please call me Rhonda)   Carroll Hall Room 376

gibsonr@email.unc.edu (Email is the best way to reach me for non-time-sensitive questions/comments. I usually answer within two hours.)

Cell phone: (919) 699-6567 (Text or call if your questions/comments are time-sensitive. Please don't call or text after 10 p.m. EST unless it is urgent.)

Office Hours: My in-person office hours are Tuesdays/Thursdays 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. in my office on campus. I am also available to meet with you by phone or Zoom at other times; just email or text to make an appointment. Do not hesitate to ask for an evening session if you need one.

Course overview and goals:

An understanding of audiences is important for professional communicators, regardless of what industry they work in or what jobs they hold. This class will introduce you to the field of media psychology, which seeks to understand the connections among digital media use, message content, and effects on users. We will examine the role that audience beliefs, attitudes, emotions, personalities, motivations, and cultural backgrounds play in information processing, decision making, and social interactions. Throughout the semester, we will also address the psychology of oppression and the cultural-psychological roots and effects of racism.

We will consider the differences between online and offline worlds, the influence of digital social networks, and the evolution of audience research methodologies. We will apply this knowledge to situations in consumer behavior; news selection and consumption; political decision-making; and health behavior. The end goal of this course is to more fully understand audience behavior and experience when using digital media so that you, as professional communicators, can better use digital media for socially constructive personal and professional purposes. And so that you can rule the world.

Course objectives:

•Understand how the notion of an "active audience" has been constructed over time and how digital media have altered assumptions
•Understand the complex differences between online and in-person communication and the relationship of each to individual behavior
•Understand how key aspects of media psychology (i.e., emotions, motivations, cultural identity) influence ways that audiences select, perceive, consume, and are affected by mediated messages
•Examine the cultural-psychological causes and effects of oppression and racism and the role played by media/communication
•Learn how to apply media psychology-related insights to specific situations involving consumer, news consumption, political, and health behaviors
•Understand the strengths and limitations of key primary research methodologies used to examine audience media use and the effects of media on audience attitudes and behavior
•Demonstrate the ability to apply what you have learned to a multi-component project
•Lead and participate in thoughtful and respectful class discussions that examine the assigned material as well as other topics related to media psychology, communication, and diverse viewpoints
•Develop specific strategies for creating and deploying socially constructive digital media content and/or technologies

Required readings:
(*Please note that most of these books do not need to be purchased.*)

•Berger, J. (2020). *The catalyst: How to change anyone's mind*. Simon & Schuster. (Available online at no charge through UNC Libraries.)
Cialdini, R. B. (2016). *Pre-suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade*. Simon & Schuster. (You will need to purchase or otherwise access this book.)
•David, E. J. R., & Derthick, A. O. (2018). *The psychology of oppression*. Springer Publishing Co. (Available online at no charge through UNC Libraries.)
•Dill, K. E. (Ed.). (2013). *The Oxford handbook of media psychology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford Handbooks Online. (Available online at no charge through UNC Libraries.)
•Eyal, N. (2014). *Hooked: How to build habit-forming products*. Portfolio/Penguin Books. (You will need to purchase or otherwise access this book.)
•Federer, J. (2020). *The hidden psychology of social networks: How brands create authentic engagement by understanding what motivates us*. McGraw-Hill. (Available online at no charge through UNC Libraries.)
•Meyer, E. (2014). *The culture map: Breaking through the invisible boundaries of global business*. Public Affairs Publishing. (Available online at no charge through UNC Libraries.)
•O'Connor, C., & Weatherall, J. O. (2019). *The misinformation age: How false beliefs spread.* Yale University Press. (Available online at no charge through UNC Libraries.)

These readings will be supplemented by academic and industry research reports, case studies, and videos as appropriate.

Graded assignments:

•Class project topic memo (due Sunday, Sept. 4 by 8 p.m. and worth 5% of the course grade)

Your topic for the class project must focus on some professional communication/media goal and be grounded in some aspect of media/audience psychology. Your topic summary should provide a preliminarily researched, in-depth description of your topic and a blueprint of where you anticipate your work will take you throughout the semester. It should also explain your topic's relevance to your professional goals and provide sufficient context to show that the topic is worthy of consideration and substantial enough to support significant research. (Please go to the Assignment Details heading in the Sakai menu for more details about this assignment.)

•Abbreviated annotated bibliography and revised topic description (due Sunday, Sept. 26 by 8 p.m. EST and worth 15% of the course grade)

This assignment will prepare you to write your academic paper and create your industry-focused deliverable. For this assignment you will provide a detailed annotation for 6-7 key academic and trade sources that are relevant to your selected topic. For each entry in your bibliography, you should explain the study's methodology and findings, a critique of its quality, and its specific relevance to your topic. For articles that are not reports of research studies, you should summarize the content of the article, critique its quality, and explain its relevance to your topic. Items in your bibliography should address the history/context of your topic, the concepts/variables involved in the topic, as well as the findings of research relevant to the topic. In addition to your article summaries, your bibliography should include an opening section that explains the issue that you are focusing on and its relevance to communication professionals. You should use APA style for this assignment. (Please go to the Assignment Details heading in the Sakai menu for more details about this assignment.)

Class library site to help with this assignment: https://guides.lib.unc.edu/c.php?g=1054800&p=7661606

•Academic paper (due Sunday, Oct. 30 by 8 p.m. EST and worth 25% of the course grade)

For this assignment, you are to write a traditional 8-10 page academic paper that applies existing research from academia and industry to your class project topic and draws conclusions to help media/communication professionals better understand and take action on this topic. It will include a brief introduction, a large section that reviews literature relevant to the topic, and a closing section that makes practical recommendations based on the literature. (Please go to the Assignment Details heading in the Sakai menu for more details about this assignment.)

•Industry-focused deliverable (due Sunday, Nov. 27 by 8 p.m. and worth 25% of the course grade)
This item should demonstrate what you have learned about your topic based on your review and synthesis of existing literature. Prepare it as though your boss has asked you to tackle a topic at work, and you are telling or showing them what you have learned. This can take a variety of forms, but it cannot be similar to your academic paper. You could produce a multi-media slide deck using one of the many presentation software options available. You could create a video explaining best practices for addressing the topic. You could produce a media piece that is an example of what you address in your paper. It is expected that the piece you produce will be of professional portfolio quality. (Please go to the Assignment Details heading in the Sakai menu for more details about this assignment.)

•Class presentation (Dec. 2-4 and worth 10% of the course grade. Please have your deliverable posted to Sakai by 8 p.m. on Dec. 1.)

During the final mini-week of class, each of you will post your industry-focused deliverable to the Sakai Discussion Board, along with a few sentences explaining why you chose that topic and the key insights you gained. You'll also be responsible for answering questions classmates may have about your materials. (Please go to the Assignment Details heading in the Sakai menu for more details about this assignment.)

•Discussion Board (due weekly at midnight EST on Sunday and worth 20% of the course grade)

The final 20 percent of the course grade is devoted to the quality of your participation in the weekly discussion forums. As you well know, the success of any graduate seminar depends on the quality of discussion that we engage in, so please SPEAK UP! For most weeks of class, there will be two general threads of discussion: one related to understanding the key concepts and findings of the assigned readings/videos and one related to applying those materials to specific professional communication settings. It is expected that all of you will participate in both of these threads each week with at least one substantive original post for each thread and at least one response post (responding to one of your classmates' posts) for each thread. Your top 11 weekly discussion grades will be used to compute this component of your course grade. (*Please note that you are expected to post at least something to the Discussion Board each week, even if that week will not be one of your top 11. If you must be completely absent from the Discussion Board for an entire week because of some major extenuating circumstance, please notify me in advance*.)

The schedule for the Discussion Board is as follows: Monday and Tuesday are reading/thinking days. Please do both! The Discussion Board opens at 6 a.m. EST on Wednesday and closes at 10 p.m. EST on Sunday. You are required to post on at least two of the five days that the Discussion Board is open. (Please do not take this to mean that it's acceptable to post at 11:55 p.m. on Thursday and 12:05 a.m. on Friday and count that as two

separate days!) It is expected that you will check in with the Discussion Board and read your classmates' posts even on (most) days that you do not post yourself. Early and/or late posts are not counted for grading purposes.

A weekly discussion grade of P can be earned by completing the required four original and response posts, demonstrating an understanding of the assigned material and an ability to apply it to a practical professional setting. A "P" grade for discussion is just fine, and that's what most of you will receive. Remember, there are more "P's" than "H's" in *happy*.

A weekly discussion grade of H can be earned by increasing the quality (more so than the quantity) of your posts. H grades are reserved for those who bring the highest-quality additional information to the discussion, making connections that are not already made by the assigned readings, the instructor, or classmates. These posts help others synthesize and apply the material and/or suggest new ways of examining the issue under consideration.

A weekly discussion grade of L can be earned by completing fewer than the required number of posts and/or by doing overly brief or superficial posts that fail to show an understanding and application of the assigned material. A grade of L will also be given if you do all of your posts in just one day.

A weekly discussion grade of F can be earned by not posting to the Discussion Board in any given week.

General Policies:

Honor Code: I expect that students will conduct themselves within the guidelines of the University honor system (https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Heidi Hennink-Kaminski, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Syllabus Changes: The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

Accessibility Resources: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: https://ars.unc.edu or email ars@unc.edu.

Counseling and Psychological Services: CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: https://caps.unc.edu/ or

visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Title IX: Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Policy on Non-Discrimination: The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office, or online to the EOC at https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/.

Diversity: I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve; I appreciate any suggestions. More broadly, our school has adopted diversity and inclusion mission and vision statements with accompanying goals. These complement the University policy on prohibiting harrassment and discrimination. In summary, UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies.

Online Courses Policies:

1. By enrolling as a student in this course, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the Acceptable Use of online resources. Please consult the Acceptable Use Policy (https://library.law.unc.edu/services/technology/acceptableuse/) on topics such as copyright, net-etiquette and privacy protection.

2. As part of this course you may be asked to participate in online discussions or other online activities that may include personal information about you or other students in the course. Please be respectful of the rights and protection of other participants under the UNC Chapel Hill Information Security Policies (https://its.unc.edu/about-us/how-we-operate-2/) when participating in online classes.

3. When using online resources offered by organizations not affiliated with UNC Chapel Hill, such as Google or YouTube, please note that the Terms and Conditions of these companies and not the University's Terms and Conditions apply. These third parties may offer different degrees of privacy protection and access rights to online content. You should be well aware of this when posting content to sites not managed by UNC Chapel Hill

4. When links to sites outside of the unc.edu domain are inserted in class discussions, please be mindful that clicking on sites not affiliated with UNC-Chapel Hill may pose a risk for your computer due to the possible presence of malware on such sites.

Weekly Topics (subject to change because, well, life is like that)

Week 1, Aug. 15-21: Introduction to the field of media psychology and persuasion research

Week 2, Aug. 22-28: Persuasion research, Part 2

Week 3, Aug. 29-Sept. 4: Social networks and social influence

Week 4, Sept. 5-11: The psychology of oppression, racism, and stereotyping

Week 5, Sept. 12-18: Audience-focused research methodologies; IRB

Week 6, Sept. 19-25: The psychology of misinformation

Week 7, Sept. 26-Oct. 2: Emotions in media selection and processing, decision making, and behavior

Week 8, Oct. 3-9: The role of identity and personality in media selection and processing, decision making, and behavior

Week 9, Oct. 10-16: The role of cultural differences in media selection and processing, decision making, and behavior

Week 10, Oct. 17-23: Academic paper/class project work week (no assigned readings or Discussion Board)

Week 11, Oct. 24-30: The psychology of change

Week 12, Oct. 31-Nov. 6: The psychology of habits

Week 13, Nov. 7-13: The psychology of news consumption and political behavior

Week 14, Nov. 14-20: The psychology of imagery and color

Week 15, Nov. 21-27: Industry deliverable work week/Thanksgiving (no assigned readings or Discussion Board)

Mini Week 16, Dec. 2-4: Final Project "presentations" on the Discussion Board