Culture: Theory and Research

771A29 Autumn 2019 ECTS 7.5

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Office	Kopparhammaren 2, C2046
Hours	by email appointment
Course period	23 September 2019 to 27 October 2019

Language English

Course overview

This course is about cultural dynamics. First, the course frames cultural markets as valuable testing grounds for theories of socially influenced behavior prone to complex social dynamics and hard-topredict collective outcomes. Second, classical and contemporary theories of peer influence and collective decision-making are employed and evaluated. This includes the application of formal models and statistical techniques from social diffusion research. Third, we focus on state-of-the-art methods to study social dynamics in domains such as collective attention, cultural polarization, and crowd wisdom.

This course is intended to introduce students to the principles guiding human behavior in fast-paced and socially visible (market) settings, the various methods employed to analyze how products, behaviors, and attitudes spread in populations, and sociological theorizing on how social interaction brings about unexpected and often counterintuitive collective outcomes. Students will learn to generate their own research questions, design their own research project, and draft a first manuscript. These skills will help students to plan and implement their master's theses.

Students are strongly encouraged to contribute to a positive and active learning environment. Please ask questions during class, or let the instructor know if something is unclear or confusing. Please show respect to your classmates when they ask questions. This is a diverse group of students from different backgrounds and what is obvious for one student may be completely new for someone else.

Course structure

The course consists of lectures, seminars, and readings as well as several weeks of independent student work. All meetings are mandatory.

- All lectures will be held in week 39 (23–26 September). The lectures establish the theoretical
 understanding to conduct research on social diffusion, cultural dynamics, and collective
 decision-making and address general methodological issues of computational social science
 research. The lectures will also activate students to devise their own research questions,
 discuss research ideas in class, and select appropriate methods to conduct relevant
 computational social science research. Needless to say, students are expected to have
 completed the assigned reading before each lecture.
- Weeks 40 and 41 (30 September–11 October) will be reserved for independent student work during which students spell out a selected research question, design a research plan, search for appropriate data to test their hypotheses, run first statistical or computational analyses on the data, and interpret their preliminary results (see Examination and grading for details). This work can be performed either *individually* or in *groups of two*. If students decide to work in a team, it is recommended to choose a project partner with complementary skills and/or a person you know that collaborating with will be easy, friendly, and fruitful.
- All seminars will be held in week 42 (14–17 October). In the seminars, students will present their research plan and preliminary results. Each student or student group will be assigned a 30-minute slot followed by a discussion that allows for ample feedback from both the audience and the instructor. The feedback will help students to improve their research projects and

prepare the final essay (see Examination and grading for details). The student audience is expected to discuss the presentations as a class and/or in small groups in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the author's work.

Intended learning outcomes

Following completion of the course, students should be able to:

- Dissect and explain human behavior in fast-paced and socially visible (market) settings.
- Apply theories and formal models of peer influence and social diffusion.
- Evaluate the application of statistical, mathematical, and computational methods to research peer influence, social diffusion, and the collective outcomes they bring about.
- Produce a social science research question and identify a research method that is appropriate to the question.
- Interpret empirical findings and simulation results through the lens of social science theories.
- Present and defend their own research in front of a critical audience.

Examination and grading

Grades range from A to F/Fx and are based on how well the student has achieved the intended learning outcomes. Student work can be performed either individually or in groups of two. In the latter case, both students involved in a project will receive the same grades. The learning outcomes are assessed as follows:

Presentation of the research project (1.5 ECTS ASS1, pass/fail)

Students or student groups must give a 30-minute presentation of their research project and defend their work in an open discussion following the presentation. All presentations will be held in week 42 (14–17 October), the exact date and time will be set by the instructor. In the presentation (using, e.g. PowerPoint, beamer, or the like), each student or student group will have to

- (a) motivate the research question theoretically (by reference to existing literature) and---if applicable---practically (by reference to a real-world problem),
- (b) present the hypotheses to be tested, or discuss the goal of data-driven exploratory analyses,
- (c) describe the empirical data and/or simulation testbed used,
- (d) show relevant (preliminary) results that provide answers to the research question,
- (e) interpret the (preliminary) findings in light of the theoretical perspective chosen,
- (f) relate the (preliminary) findings to the existing literature and---if applicable---to the real-world problem set out to solve.

Students or student groups can send their presentation file by email to the instructor well ahead of their presentation slot to receive preparatory feedback. This is not mandatory.

Essay summarizing the research project (6 ECTS ESS1, A-E, or F/Fx)

Students must complete an essay that follows the above structure (a–f) based on their own research and the feedback they received following their presentations. The paper should resemble a journal paper in style and format (see, e.g., *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* or the *American Sociological Review* for orientation) and can be written in Word, LaTeX, or the like. The expected length and analytical depth of the paper depend on whether it is completed by an individual student (approx. 5,000 words, 10 pages) or a group of two students (approx. 8,000 words, 16 pages). Grading will be based on how well the author's work signals the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

The essay must be submitted through Lisam. The deadline for submission is midnight (23:59) Sunday, 27 October 2019. If the deadline has passed, the student will receive a failing grade on the essay.

A note on plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Although students are encouraged to help their peers and ask their peers for help, both the presentation and the essay must be <u>completed separately</u> and must be <u>the original work of the individual student or student group</u>. Copying directly from one another or from written sources is not permitted. Punishments for plagiarism can be severe and may jeopardize your standing as a student in the program.

Course literature

Recommended textbooks

Centola, Damon. 2018. *How Behavior Spreads: The Science of Complex Contagions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Salganik, Matthew. 2018. *Bit by Bit: Social Research for the Digital Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Available online at: <u>https://www.bitbybitbook.com/</u>

Hedström, Peter, and Peter Bearman. 2009. *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Course schedule, reading assignments, and deadlines

* indicates mandatory readings that should be completed prior to the respective lecture!

Lecture 1: Introduction

Monday 23 September: 10:15-12:00 (room: TP40)

*Centola, Damon. 2018. *How Behavior Spreads: The Science of Complex Contagions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. *Chapters* 1+2.

*Keuschnigg, Marc, Niclas Lovsjö, and Peter Hedström 2018. Analytical Sociology and Computational Social Science. *Journal of Computational Social Science* 1(1):3-14.

Lecture 2: Social Diffusion

Monday 23 September: 13:15-15:00 (TP40)

*Mahajan, Vijay and Robert A. Peterson. 1985. Models for Innovation Diffusion. Beverly Hills: Sage.

*Rossman, Gabriel. 2014. The Diffusion of the Legitimate and the Diffusion of Legitimacy. *Sociological Science* 1(5):49-69.

Rossman, Gabriel, Ming M. Chiu, and Joeri M. Mol. 2008. Modeling Diffusion of Multiple Innovations via Multilevel Diffusion Curves: Payola in Pop Music Radio. *Sociological Methodology* 38(1):201-30.

Lecture 3: Conformity Motives

Tuesday 24 September: 13:15-15:00 (TP40)

*Centola, Damon. 2018. *How Behavior Spreads: The Science of Complex Contagions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. *Chapter 3*.

*Watts, Duncan J. and Peter S. Dodds. 2009. Threshold Models of Social Influence. Pp. 475-497 in *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*, edited by in P. Hedström and P. Bearman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lecture 4: Inequality and Unpredictability

Wednesday 25 September: 10:15-12:00 (TP40)

*Salganik, Matthew J., Peter S. Dodds, and Duncan J. Watts. 2006. Experimental Study of Inequality and Unpredictability in an Artificial Cultural Market. *Science* 311(5762):854-6.

*van de Rijt, Arnout. 2019. Self-correcting Dynamics in Social Influence Processes. *American Journal* of Sociology 124(5):1468-95.

Lynn, Freda B., Joel M. Podolny, and Lin Tao. 2009. A Sociological (De)Construction of the Relationship between Status and Quality. *American Journal of Sociology* 115(3):755-804.

Lecture 5: Collective Attention

Wednesday 25 September: 13:15-15:00 (TP40)

*Lorenz-Spreen, Philipp, Bjarke Mørch Mønsted, Philipp Hövel, and Sune Lehmann. 2019. Accelerating Dynamics of Collective Attention. *Nature Communications* 10:1759.

*Michel, Jean-Baptiste et al. 2011. Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books. *Science* 331:176-82.

Berger, Jonah, and Gael Le Mens. 2009. How Adoption Speed Affects the Abandonment of Cultural Tastes. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106:8146-50.

Lecture 6: Cultural Polarization

Thursday 26 September: 13:15-15:00 (TP40)

*DellaPosta, Daniel, Yongren Shi, and Michael Macy. 2015. Why Do Liberals Drink Lattes? *American Journal of Sociology* 120(5):1473-511.

*Goldberg, Amir, and Sarah K. Stein. 2018. Beyond Social Contagion: Associative Diffusion and the Emergence of Cultural Variation. *American Sociological Review* 83(5):897–932.

Shi, Feng, Yongren Shi, Fedor Dokshin, James Evans, and Michael Macy. 2017. Millions of Online Book Co-purchases Reveal Partisan Differences in the Consumption of Science. *Nature Human Behavior* 1:0079.

Lecture 7: Crowd Wisdom

Thursday 26 September: 15:15-17:00 (TP40)

*Hong, Lu and Scott E Page. 2004. Groups of Diverse Problem Solvers Can Outperform Groups of High-Ability Problem Solvers. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 101(46):16385-9.

*Keuschnigg, Marc and Christian Ganser. 2017. Crowd Wisdom Relies on Agents' Ability in Small Groups with a Voting Aggregation Rule. *Management Science* 63(3):818-28.

Page, Scott E. 2007. *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Independent student work (30 September-11 October)

Seminar Presentations

 Monday 14 October:
 13:15-15:00 (KO24) and 15:15-17:00 (KO24) ← different room!

 Tuesday 15 October:
 13:15-15:00 (TP40) and 15:15-17:00 (TP40)

 Wednesday 16 October:
 13:15-15:00 (TP40) and 15:15-17:00 (TP40)

 Thursday 17 October:
 13:15-15:00 (TP40) and 15:15-17:00 (TP40)

Essay Submission Deadline

Sunday 27 October 2019 at midnight (23:59)

Personal Notes