**Project Title: Propaganda for Change: Applications and Crowd-sourcing of Content Creation in the Psychology of Persuasion and Influence**

Project Lead: Thomas Hills

**Activities:**

The principal aims of the Propaganda for Change project were as follows:

1. To facilitate students' learning of psychology via the construction of positive, real-world messages with the potential for real impact,
2. To help student's learn practical skills for communicating compelling, scientifically-based ideas in the modern world of viral media,
3. To demonstrate student's abilities in the application of module content in a creative medium.

Approximately 100 3$^{rd}$ year students in Psychology took this module in 2013, with additional students from other departments (e.g., it was posted as an optional course at WBS).

Formally, the course involved one two-hour lecture per week, with an additional one hour devoted to a seminar. The time in the seminar was mainly directed at answering lingering student questions and giving students time to organize themselves for their final project.

To achieve these aims, as part of the module in Persuasion and Influence, students created a short persuasive film on a positive social issue of their choosing. For example, films targeted issues in personal health (e.g., body image and depression), the environment (e.g., energy use and vegetarianism), or making sustainable economic decisions (e.g., financial awareness). The film project asked students—in groups of three to four—to actively apply theoretical and empirical principles of persuasive psychology in the creation of their films.

Films are available at: http://persuasion-and-influence.blogspot.co.uk/

As part of the project, students received instruction in film creation and the necessary technical resources to create such films. The Learning Grid was especially helpful in this area and gave two presentations during seminars for the class, providing support in film making and storyboarding films. IATL and the Learning Grid provided cameras for students and additional support in film editing.

Student films involved researching the persuasive principles underlying existing media and incorporating these into their own short films. This research was highly applied and required students to move from passive consumers of academic content towards active users of research findings who produce meaningful messages. Further, as students explored the construction of their own persuasive messages, this experience touched on many aspects of how psychology can be applied to create real change in the world.

Students also gained practical skills, including developing a project idea and seeing it through to completion, organizing and working with a team, time-management, beta-testing ideas, learning how to apply what they know to important problems in the real world, and developing confidence and responsibility for their creative ideas.

Additional project aims included creating an online archive (blog) for students to actively link and critique existing persuasive messages in the media, as well as creating an online archive of their

own films (i.e., crowd-sourcing content creation).  Students were assessed on this (see below).  Additionally, the project ended with a public presentation of student films. In addition, I also provided awards for the best 3 student short films (£30 gift certificates to Amazon for each student involved in these films).

The online archive is a 'blog' and is available at the above url.  Students populated the blog with posts at approximately 1 blog every two weeks per student, which led to over 500 posts by students (students could do more than 5 if they wanted).  These posts are of exceptionally high quality and involved students identifying persuasive media or environments from their personal experience and then writing about how these persuasive messages embodied research they were learning about in the course.  Students also provided references in the blog.

An example can be found here:  http://persuasion-and-influence.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/obama-for-america-tv-ad-troubled.html

Students received course credit for their blogs, but were informed that this would be on a pass/fail basis.  Each two weeks the 'topic' for the blogs was changed, so students focused on different kinds of persuasive media--e.g., ads that fail, ads that succeed, persuasive arguments in films, etc.  I provided the first two blog posts as examples and provided a template for posts that was available on the blog posting page, which looked like this:

(put the ad/mesage here) (state the effect here, in your own words. For example, "This advertisement provides an example of ... because ... ") (explain research supporting the effect here in three plus or minus one sentences) (cite the research here, using APA style, which is identical to the references in the Pratkanis book.)

I commented individually on blogs and let students know if they needed to change their post or provide additional material. Students consistently exceeded my expectations in their posts; they wrote more than I expected them too, referenced more literature than I anticipated, and paid attention to grammar and spelling at a level I have not seen in previous student work.  I think the fact that students' names were associated with their posts may have contributed to this, as they knew that other students would read the blog.

Indeed, they knew that other students would read the blog because they were informed that the final exam would come directly from the blog.  For the exam, I provided students with images taken from the blog and students had to explain and provide the research that supported persuasive information in the image.

Moreover, I talked about the blog and particular posts often during the course, because they often highlighted critical areas of content.  This allowed students to indirectly guide lectures and to play an active part in the overall construction of content.

The blog currently has 65,000 pageviews, with approximately 200 new pageviews each day from around the world.

The project also involved students in the classroom using 'clickers' to create an active learning approach.  Psychology is ideal for this, because (in addition to assessment) students can participate in experiments in the classroom, and produce content anonymously. I was able to check out clickers from the library for several sessions.  Students felt this was interesting and learned a lot about one another and their feelings about different ads.  Unfortunately, I could only check out 30 clickers at a time from the library, so not all students were able to use them.

**Outcomes:**

The principal outcomes from the above activities were pedagogical in nature, with students generally providing overwhelming positive support and response to a course that required them to go outside the classroom for assessments and learning. In addition, students were overwhelming positive about the production of the video and the blog posts. Many students were thankful (both in person and in evaluations) that the course dealt with real world content and they felt prepared them for job interviews.

In addition, the course created films (approximately 30 films were made) and the blog (currently there are 529 posts). The blog is currently still active and I occasionally post new material to the blog. It will also be used in the coming year to help students continue to learn and contribute to our understanding of persuasion and influence in the world.

I am prepared to give lectures on the success of this course and provided a proposal to the Teaching and Learning Showcase for Warwick. I plan to give this presentation at future meetings of this Showcase. I have also discussed the success of this module within the department and anticipate that other lecturers will pick up the blog idea in future years.

In sum, the pedagogical outcomes included the following: 1) Providing students with skills in project development and completion, 2) providing students with practical work skills including problem-solving, critical and creative thinking, time-management, and applying evidence-based ideas to real-world problems, 3) helping students understand the power of their own positive voice and values in the global marketplace of ideas, and 4) students began the creation of an archive of short films and found content that demonstrate the power of persuasive media, particularly with respect to positive change.

**Implications:**

The primary implication of this approach is that it raises the bar for student-teacher interaction and student-led content production. Most courses are guided by instructors beliefs about content validity and relevance with little or no interest in students' prior knowledge or personal aims. This course actively sought feedback on student interests and allowed students to steer the lectures by providing blog material around issues about which they were concerned. I think this can be improved even further in the future by framing blog questions in ways that give students more freedom in leading/directly class content.

The course also gave students the opportunity to create a learning-legacy around the material and content they produced (videos and blogs). These can be used for future courses in this area and will hopefully improve the level of student productions in the future. Already the bar is set fairly high, and future students will be able to see and appreciate this.

**Resources:**

The primary resources for this course are available on the blog:

Assessments:
http://persuasion-and-influence.blogspot.co.uk/2012/11/assessments.html

Course outline and readings:
http://persuasion-and-influence.blogspot.co.uk/2012/11/course-outline.html

Videos can be found here:
http://persuasion-and-influence.blogspot.co.uk/

**Legacy:**

The course will be taught in subsequent years. I am extremely appreciative of the funding provided during the first year, as it provided the time to create the infrastructure (e.g., online platform for film presentations and students with film-making skills) to continue the project in future years. The project also provided a body of working films that demonstrate both the creativity and skill of students at Warwick, as well as providing students with a model for creating future work of this kind.

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