# Branding and International Communication

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***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

The course aims to offer students an immersive experience in the world of the brand. The objective is to explain the contemporary role of the brand as a cultural resource and as the site of a relationship between companies and the consumer in the age of technoculture and social media, in a global context.

To this end, the course takes a multidisciplinary (cultural and managerial) approach to analysing the strategic role of the brand in the current competitive environment, as well as the challenges that stimulate its continuous evolution, enabling companies to gain a differential advantage. In this regard, the course not only analyses the concept of the brand, it functions out over time, brand identity and positioning, but also illustrates the most current and emerging communication strategies – such as those of self-branding implemented in the influencer and creator economy - implemented at the communicative level to establish an effective relationship with an increasingly active and aware consumer.

By the end of the course, students will have acquired the knowledge necessary to understand both the strategic role of the brand within and outside the enterprise with regard to the stakeholder system, and the multiplicity of touch-points and ways in which communication enables the business and consumers to generate value for the market in an international context. Students will also have developed critical knowledge of consumer trends in relation to their impact on people’s lifestyles and communication dynamics and how brands engage in consumer trends in order to become lifestyle brands that inspire cultural change. This knowledge will enable students to assess the effectiveness of brand communication strategies, with particular reference to strategies to engage consumers and develop cultural adherence to their lifestyle. Finally, by participating in a group project to address the demands of a real business brief, students will have developed planning skills for solving the emerging communication and consumer engagement challenges that brands face in today's competitive environment.

***COURSE CONTENT***

General part

*The current communication scenario in which brands operate*

– Linear versus network communication;

– Push, pull and do-it-yourself communication;

– Autoreferential vs. heteroreferential communication.

*The brand. Multidimensionality, identity, positioning and communication experimentation*

– The concept and functions of the brand;

– The size of the brand identity and the brand positioning process;

– Understanding consumption trends and the role of brands;

– Technoculture, liquid companies and new forms of consumer aggregation and brand relationships in a technomediated environment;

– Consumer empowerment and consumer agency for and against the brand;

– Cultural branding: real time marketing, brand purpose and brand activism;

– Influencers and creators as new brands;

– Influencers and the creator ecosystem: a look at all the actors of the influencer and creator economy and their ties;

– The cultural effects of the influencer and creator economy: self-presentation, dramatisation, intensification, commodification, affective and emotional labour, marketing, selfie culture, cancel culture and influencer burnout;

– Ethics and morality of the influencer and creator economy: fake followers, fraudulent influencers, animal/pet influencers and activist influencers;

– Principles of influencer relations and influencer marketing;

– Development trajectories, transformations and technologies:

* influencers and creators as trendsetters and as desire amplifiers;
* synthetic media, AI and virtual influencers;

– Innovation, experimentation and construction of the brand experience:

* Customisation, co-creation, user-generated content, and crowdsourcing
* Engaging the consumer in unexpected places and at unexpected time: street marketing and ambient marketing
* Bringing the experience into store: the point of sale as a communication tool
* How to expand the brand experience: brand collaboration
* New trends in brand communication: sensory marketing
* Technology to support the brand experience (QR code, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality)
* Gaming, NFT and the metaverse, ChatGPT: the new playgrounds
* The ultimate purpose of the brand experience: gain brand equity i.e. the value of the brand in and of itself

Applied part of the course

Students will also participate in a group project on a real-life brand communication case commissioned and evaluated by the partner company for the project.

***READING LIST***

For *attending* students

Materials posted online on Blackboard.

R.V. Kozinets, U. Gretzel, R. Gambetti, *Influencers and creators. Business, culture and practice,* Sage, London, 2023.

For *non-attending* students

Materials posted online on Blackboard.

R. Fiocca, R.C. Gambetti, C. Solerio, *Brand experience,* Franco Angeli, Milan, 2016.

R.V. Kozinets, U. Gretzel, R. Gambetti, *Influencers and creators. Business, culture and practice,* Sage, London, 2023.

Recommended further reading (optional):

R.V. Kozinets, *Netnography 3E. The essential guide to qualitative social media research,* Sage, Thousand Oaks (CA), 2020.

O. Yallop, *Break the internet,* Scribe Publications, London, 2021.

***TEACHING METHOD***

Interactive lectures, with visits from guest speakers (professionals in the field), corporate project work in groups.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

Students will be assessed by means of an individual written final exam and a group corporate project.

The written exam consists of two open questions on both theoretical and applied elements. They cover: explanations given in class, material made available on the course web page and the material on the reading list. The written exam is worth 70% of the final mark. The assessment criteria for the written examination are: the relevance of the answers, the appropriate use of specific terminology, the considered and consistent structure of the discourse, the ability to make conceptual links and demonstration of the ability to apply the concepts learned to the many examples discussed in class. Both open questions will be marked out of 30 and will be worth 50% of the final mark for the written exam.

The group project usually involves the design of a branded communication activation plan on the recommendation of the partner company and is worth 30% of the final mark. The group project will be assessed in terms of: adherence to the brief, richness and depth of the proposal, originality and applicability of the proposed ideas. The four factors will be marked out of 30 and will each be worth 25% of the final mark for the group project.

Students who do not participate in the corporate group projects will sit an individual final written exam. This will consist of three questions covering theoretical and applied elements relating to the material on the reading list. For this written exam, students will be assessed on: the relevance of their answers, the appropriate use of specific terminology, the ability to structure considered and coherent discourse and the ability to identify conceptual links within the content.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

To benefit most from the course, students need basic marketing knowledge.

Students interested in writing a thesis on Branding and International Communication should check noticeboard on the lecturers’ page of the University website regularly for dates of meetings with the thesis candidates.

Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG, or on the Faculty notice board.