

MC 4971: Strategic Persuasion: Influencing Public Opinion and Perceptions

Prof. Catherine Chen, Ph.D.
catherinechen@lsu.edu

Spring 2025

TA: Lina M Tragni otragn1@lsu.edu Web: <https://moodle.lsu.edu/course/view.php?id=50582>
Office Hours: T 4 - 5 pm or by appt Class Hours: T/Th Noon - 1:20 pm
Office: Hodges 255 Classroom: Journalism 111

Course Description

This course explores the art and science of persuasion, focusing on how different communication strategies shape public opinion, influence perceptions, and drive behavior. Students will engage with key theories of persuasion and analyze real-world examples from political campaigns, advertising, social movements, and digital media. Through a blend of academic research and practical applications, the course examines how emotions, group identities, and media narratives impact persuasive effectiveness. Ethical considerations and the role of emerging technologies, including AI, in persuasion will also be discussed. By the end of the semester, students will be equipped to design, implement, and evaluate persuasive communication strategies across diverse contexts.

Materials

Course materials are available on Moodle. All students officially registered for the course can access the course's Moodle page. The Moodle page includes a course syllabus, announcements, readings, assignments, lecture slides, and any other relevant course information. Lecture slides will be posted after each week's lectures.

Course Goals

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Analyze and apply key persuasion theories to real-world scenarios.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of persuasive messages across different media platforms.
- Design evidence-based persuasive campaigns tailored to specific audiences.

- Critically assess the ethical implications of persuasive strategies.

Course Schedule

The schedule is tentative and subject to change. If, as you look over the course schedule, you do not see an issue you would like me to cover, please let me know. I will try my best to incorporate that topic, approach, article, issue, etc. into our class. The goal is to help you uncover interesting ideas and topics in persuasion research and practice. I encourage you to ask questions, bring in outside material, and dive deeply into the course materials.

Week 01, 01/13 - 01/17: Course intro: Attitude and Persuasion

Required Readings:

1. Syllabus
2. Howe, L. C., & Krosnick, J. A. (2017). Attitude strength. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 68(1), 327-351.

Week 02, 01/20 - 01/24: Elaboration Likelihood Model

Required Readings:

1. J. Kitchen, P., Kerr, G., E. Schultz, D., McColl, R., & Pals, H. (2014). The elaboration likelihood model: review, critique and research agenda. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(11/12), 2033-2050.
2. El Hedhli, K., & Zourrig, H. (2023). Dual routes or a one-way to persuasion? The elaboration likelihood model versus the unimodel. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 29(5), 433-454.
3. Segev, S., & Fernandes, J. (2023). The anatomy of viral advertising: A content analysis of viral advertising from the elaboration likelihood model perspective. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 29(1), 125-154.

Week 03, 01/27 - 01/31: Ideology and Moral Reframing

Required Readings:

1. Jost, J. T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A. W., & Sulloway, F. J. (2003). Political conservatism as motivated social cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(3), 339–375. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339>
2. Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96(5), 1029-1046.
3. Feinberg, M., & Willer, R. (2019). Moral reframing: A technique for effective and persuasive communication across political divides. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 13(12), e12501.

Week 04, 02/03 - 02/07: Social Identities & Group Prejudices

Quiz 1 in class on Thursday

Required Readings:

1. Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (2002). Self and social identity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53(1), 161-186.
2. Warnke, G. (2009). *After identity*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3-5

Week 05, 02/10 - 02/14: Party Identification & Polarization

RitW1 due at 11:59 pm on Monday

Required Readings:

1. Abramowitz, A. I., & Saunders, K. L. (2008). Is polarization a myth? *The Journal of Politics*, 70(2), 542-555.
2. Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22, 129-146.
3. Huddy, L. (2001). From social to political identity: A critical examination of social identity theory. *Political Psychology*, 22(1), 127-156.

Week 06, 02/17 - 02/21: Measurement of Opinion: Part 1

Required Readings:

1. Krosnick, J. A. (1999). Survey research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 537-67.
2. Krosnick, J. A., & Presser, S. (2010). Questionnaire design. In J. D. Wright & P. V. Marsden (Eds.), *Handbook of Survey Research*. Emerald Group.

Week 07, 02/24 - 02/28: Measurement of Opinion: Part 2

Required Readings:

1. Cornesse, C., Blom, A. G., Dutwin, D., Krosnick, J. A., De Leeuw, E. D., Legleye, S., ... & Wenz, A. (2020). A review of conceptual approaches and empirical evidence on probability and nonprobability sample survey research. *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology*, 8(1), 4-36.
2. Jha, G. (2017). 6 sampling techniques: How to choose a representative subset of the population? <https://humansofdata.atlan.com/2017/07/6-sampling-techniques-choose-representative-subset/>
3. Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (2024). *Polling Fundamentals*. <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polling-and-public-opinion/polling-fundamentals>

Week 08, 03/03 - 03/07: Deception

Required Readings:

1. Buller, D. B., & Burgoon, J. K. (1996). Interpersonal deception theory. *Communication Theory*, 6(3), 203-242.
2. DePaulo, B. M., Lindsay, J. J., Malone, B. E., Muhlenbruck, L., Charlton, K., & Cooper, H. (2003). Cues to deception. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(1), 74.

Mardi Gras Holiday, no class on Tuesday

Week 09, 03/10 - 03/14: Advertising & Marketing

Required Readings:

1. Gartlan, D. (2025). Emotional advertising: How it works and examples. <https://stevens-tate.com/articles/emotional-advertising/>
2. Kumar, S. & Bansal, M. (2022). *Marketing Management*. Associated Publishing Company. Chapter 8.
3. Berg, H., & Liljedal, K. T. (2023). Why Casting Older Female Models Is Good for Advertising: The Positive Effects of Challenging The Underrepresentation of Older Women in Ads. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 63(1), 61-80.

Quiz 2 in class on Thursday

Week 10, 03/17 - 03/21: Voting & Elections

Required Readings:

1. Harder, J., & Krosnick, J. A. (2008). Why do people vote? A psychological analysis of the causes of voter turnout. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(3), 525-549.
2. Geber, A. S., Green, D. P., & Larimer, C. W. (2008). Social pressure and voter turnout: Evidence from a large-scale field experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 102, 33-48.
3. MacInnis, B., Miller, J. M., Krosnick, J. A., Below, C., & Lindner, M. (2021). Candidate name order effects in New Hampshire: Evidence from primaries and from general elections with party column ballots. *Plos one*, 16(3), e0248049.

RitW2 due at 11:59 pm on Monday

Week 11, 03/24 - 03/28: Persuasion in Political Campaigns

1. Kalla, J. L., & Broockman, D. E. (2018). The minimal persuasive effects of campaign contact in general elections: Evidence from 49 field experiments. *American Political Science Review*, 112(1), 148-166.
2. Stubager, R. (2018). What is issue ownership and how should we measure it? *Political Behavior*, 40(2), 345-370.
3. Nai, A. (2020). Going negative, worldwide: Towards a general understanding of determinants and targets of negative campaigning. *Government and Opposition*, 55(3), 430-455.

Week 12, 03/31 - 04/04: Spring break, no class

Week 13, 04/07 - 04/11: Media Effects

Required Readings:

1. Blumler, J. G. (2015). Core theories of political communication: Foundational and freshly minted. *Communication Theory*, 25(4), 426-438.
2. Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10(1), 103-126.
3. Rubin, A. M. (2009). Uses-and-gratifications perspective on media effects. In J. Bryant & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (3rd ed., pp. 165-182). Routledge.

Week 14, 04/14 - 04/18: COVID-19 and vaccine hesitancy

Required Readings:

1. Bavel, J. J. V., Baicker, K., Boggio, P. S., Capraro, V., Cichocka, A., Cikara, M., ... & Willer, R. (2020). Using social and behavioural science to support COVID-19 pandemic response. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(5), 460-471.
2. Larsen, B. J., Ryan, T. J., Greene, S., Hetherington, M. J., Maxwell, R., & Tadelis, S. (2023). Counter-stereotypical messaging and partisan cues: Moving the needle on vaccines in a polarized United States. *Science Advances*, 9(29), eadg9434.
3. Chen, C., Cui, Z., & Chen, Y. (2023). A randomized controlled trial of an information intervention to bolster COVID-19 vaccination intention among people with purity concerns. *Health Psychology*, 42(9), 686-697.

Week 15, 04/21 - 04/25: The Disinformation Age

Required Readings:

1. Bennett, W. L., & Livingston, S. (2020). *The disinformation age: Politics, technology, and disruptive communication in the United States* (pp. 1-40). Cambridge University Press.
2. Guess, A., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. (2019). Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 5(1), eaau4586.
3. Moore, R. C., Dahlke, R., & Hancock, J. T. (2023). Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2020 US election. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 7(7), 1096-1105.

Quiz 3 in class on Thursday

Week 16, 04/28 - 05/02: AI & Persuasion

Required Readings:

1. Candelon, F., di Carlo, R. C., De Bondt, M., & Evgeniou, T. (2021). *AI Regulation Is Coming*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2021/09/ai-regulation-is-coming>

2. Bogert, E., Schecter, A., & Watson, R. T. (2021). Humans rely more on algorithms than social influence as a task becomes more difficult. *Scientific Reports*, 11(1), 8028. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-87480-9>
3. Logg, J. M., Minson, J. A., & Moore, D. A. (2019). Algorithm appreciation: People prefer algorithmic to human judgment. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 151, 90-103.

RitW3 due at 11:59 pm on Monday

Assessments

RitW Assignments

In this course, you will engage in "Research in the Wild" assignments, where you will apply the concepts and theories we discuss in lectures to analyze real-world phenomena. These assignments are designed to encourage you to observe and critically engage with the world around you, using the academic tools you've acquired. Each essay should be approximately 3-4 pages in length, double-spaced, with 12-point font and 1-inch margins.

Quizzes

There will be three in-class, open-book, all-multiple-choice quizzes. Each quiz will cover only the content introduced between two quizzes, meaning the quizzes are not cumulative. For each question, there will be only one correct answer unless instructed otherwise. Each quiz will consist of approximately 30 multiple-choice questions, and you will have 35 minutes to complete it. Attendance in the classroom during the quiz time is required. If a student needs to attend a quiz remotely, they must make arrangements at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled quiz. Failure to do so may result in Professor Chen denying the request, in which case the quiz will be marked as a zero. In the event of technical difficulties during the quiz, you may request a second attempt at the discretion of Professor Chen.

Final Exam

The final exam will assess your understanding of the key concepts, theories, and discussions covered throughout the course. It will consist of the following components:

- 25 Multiple Choice Questions (2 points each): These questions will test your knowledge of the course material, requiring you to select the most appropriate answer from the given options.
- 2 Short Answer Questions (15 points each): These questions will require you to provide concise, yet thorough, responses that demonstrate your ability to apply and analyze course concepts.
- 1 Long Answer Question (20 points): This question will require a more in-depth response, where you will be expected to synthesize information from multiple topics covered in the course to construct a well-argued and comprehensive answer.

Please note: The final exam is closed-book, meaning you will not be allowed to refer to any textbooks, notes, or other materials during the exam. Be sure to prepare accordingly to ensure you can confidently recall and apply what you have learned.

Participation

It is expected that students finish assigned readings prior to class for the background necessary to participate in discussions and think critically about key concepts. As a rule of thumb, for each hour you are in class, you should plan to spend at least two hours preparing. Class sessions will involve a mixture of lectures, activities, and discussions. Contributing productively 2-3 times per week would max out your participation at 100%.

Please ask questions! There is no such thing as a bad question. I guarantee that if you have a question, at least three of your fellow students do too. So please – just raise your hand!

We will at times be discussing challenging material. Students should be ready to create a classroom climate that is consciously different from the contemporary political and media environment. This means granting each other the assumption of good intentions and being willing to share and receive tentative and provisional ideas, impressions, in class discussions. To create a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry, the following principles will guide our work:

- Bring light, not heat: Treat every member of the class with respect, even if you disagree with their opinion.
- Remember that reasonable minds can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions, and conclusions.
- Expect and celebrate constructive disagreement because it sharpens thinking, deepens understanding, and reveals novel insights.
- Expect and celebrate constructive disagreement because it sharpens thinking, deepens understanding, and reveals novel insights.
- Try to make no assumptions about the views of others in the classroom.
- You will not be graded on your opinions.

Grading Policy

Evaluation in this course is based on a combination of 3 research assignments 3 quizzes, a final exam, plus class participation.

- Research in the Wild Assignments x 3, 10% each = 30%
- Quizzes x 3, 10% each = 30%
- Final Exam 30%
- Class participation 10%

A's are reserved for excellent & exceptional work, B's suggest your work is very good, C's are for satisfactory work.

96.5 and above A+	76.50–79.99 C+
93.50 – 96.49 A	73.50–76.49 C
90.00–93.49 A-	70.00–73.49 C-
86.50–89.99 B+	66.50–69.99 D+
83.50–86.49 B	63.50–66.49 D
80.00–83.49 B-	63.50–66.49 D
	59.99 and below F

Course Policies

During Class

I understand that some of you would like to take notes electronically so computers will be allowed in class. Please refrain from using computers for anything but activities related to the class. Eating and drinking are allowed in class but please refrain from it affecting the course. Don't eat your lunch in class as the classes are typically active.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected in all lectures. Valid excuses for absence will be accepted before class. In extenuating circumstances, valid excuses with proof will be accepted after class.

Late Policy

Timeliness is crucial in this course, as it reflects your ability to manage deadlines effectively. To accommodate unforeseen circumstances, you are allowed one free late day (24 hours) for RitW assignments without penalty. This means you can submit ONE RitW assignment up to 24 hours after the original due date without any impact on your grade.

Beyond the first late day, each additional 24-hour period that the assignment is late will result in a reduction of one letter grade from your final grade for that assignment. For example, if an assignment is due on Monday and you submit it on Wednesday (48 hours late), your grade will drop by two letter grades.

Important Notes:

- The free late day cannot be split across multiple RitW assignments; it applies to a single RitW assignment only.
- If you anticipate any issues that might prevent you from submitting an assignment on time, please communicate with me as soon as possible.
- Assignments submitted more than four days late (96 hours) will receive a grade of zero, unless prior arrangements have been made.

Contact Info

Email is the best way to reach me. If I do not respond to your email after 48 hours, send me a reminder. Please include MC 4971 in the subject line so I can be sure to prioritize your emails.

If you have questions about reading material, lecture content, RitW assignments, or quizzes, I encourage you to talk with other students, come to office hours, and make an appointment with me.

For class-related communication, I will use the mass mail function in Moodle to contact you. Be sure to read Moodle communication.

LSU Student Code of Conduct

The LSU student code of conduct explains student rights and what is expected of student behavior. Students are expected to understand this code as described on the [Code of Conduct page](#). Any violations of the LSU student code will be duly reported to the Dean of Students.

Disabilities

The University is committed to making reasonable efforts to assist individuals with disabilities in their efforts to avail themselves of services and programs offered by the University. To this end, Louisiana State University will provide reasonable accommodations for persons with documented qualifying disabilities. If you have a disability and feel you need accommodations in this course, you must present a letter to me from Disability Services in 124 Johnston Hall, indicating the existence of a disability and the suggested accommodations.

Permissible Use of Generative AI

As a partner in your learning, it is important to both of us that any assignment submission is a pure reflection of your work and understanding. In this course, using AI programs such as ChatGPT is permitted for the purposes of enhancing your understanding of course materials, encouraging creative exploration and supporting academic growth. These programs should not be used to produce work that misrepresents your abilities or deceives as to the conditions under which the work was completed.

If you choose to utilize AI programs to generate content, you must clearly acknowledge the use of AI-generated material. Proper attribution of AI program use should include an explanation of how the program contributed to the assignment and/or your academic growth. Failing to give proper attribution to the use of AI programs in academic work will be reported to Student Advocacy & Accountability for review under the Code of Student Conduct and may result in impacts to your assignment and/or course grades.

Academic Success

The primary ingredients of your academic success are attending class, managing your time efficiently, taking good notes, and developing good critical thinking and communication abilities. LSU has a number of excellent resources that will assist you in developing these skills. The place to begin is the [Center for Academic Success](#) (CAS). The CAS offers guidance on what learning strategies are best suited to your talents, tutoring in the basic subjects, and workshops on a variety

of topics, from note-taking to time management. **Communication Across the Curriculum** assist students in developing the communication skills necessary for academic and professional success. Finally, with respect to professional success, the **LSU Olinde Career Center** can assist you in choosing a major and a profession that best suits your talents and passions and help you develop a four-year career plan to ensure success when you graduate from LSU.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Statement

We believe diversity, equity, and inclusion enrich the educational experience of our students, faculty, and staff, and are necessary to prepare all people to thrive personally and professionally in a global society. Therefore, LSU is firmly committed to an environment that affords respect to all members of our community. We will work to eliminate barriers that any members of our community experience.

To make LSU a place where that can happen, we must recognize and reflect on the inglorious aspects of our history. We now acknowledge the need to confront the ways racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, classism, LGBTQ+ phobia, intolerance based on religion or on national origin, and all forms of bias and exploitation have shaped our everyday lives.

We accept personal and professional responsibility to eliminate bias and oppression wherever they are found. We understand our obligation to speak up when we see bias whether it be in our teaching, study, or daily work. Our community will educate themselves proactively and continuously about how to intervene and bring bias to the attention of others with commitment and compassion.

We will hold ourselves accountable for our actions and inactions, and for maintaining intentional, measurable, and meaningful efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion, including through ongoing evaluation of our policies, practices, and procedures.

Nondiscrimination, Sexual Harassment, & Title IX

LSU provides equal opportunity for all qualified persons in admission to, participation in, or employment in the programs and activities which the university operates without regard to race, creed, color, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, sex, national origin, age, mental or physical disability, or veteran's status. LSU has implemented a procedure to address complaints for those who believe they have been subjected to discrimination and/or harassment in violation of this policy. Please know that your instructors are here to support you and listen to your experience. We also want you to know that we are mandatory reporters and must report what we know to the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX. All LSU employees, with few exceptions, are required to report instances of sex- or gender-based harassment and discrimination, including sexual misconduct and power-based violence (e.g., sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, retaliation, etc.) for which they may not be the victim, but of which they are aware. The Office of Civil Rights & Title IX is the LSU office responsible for investigating complaints regarding any type of discrimination, sexual harassment, or power-based violence. The Office of Civil Rights & Title IX is located in 118 Himes Hall and the phone number is 225-578-9000. If you are aware of an individual who has been victimized, you are encouraged to contact the Office of Civil Rights & Title IX or file an online report by visiting **LSU's Title IX** website and clicking the **Report an Incident** box. If you have been assaulted, harassed, or a victim of violence, we encourage you to contact the Office of

Civil Rights & Title IX. Please reach out for help immediately. Some excellent resources available to Baton Rouge residents include:

- STAR (Sexual Trauma Awareness and Response; 24/7 hotline: 855-435-STAR (7827)
- IRIS Domestic Violence Center; 24/7 hotline: 800-541-9706
- The Lighthouse Program; 225-578-5718
- VIA LINK; 800-273-TALK (8255) [national line but answered from New Orleans]

National resources include:

- RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network); 24/7 hotline: 800-656-4673
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center

For additional information, visit www.lsu.edu/civil-rights the **Office of Civil Rights & Title IX** and review **PM-73** (Prohibiting Power-based Violence, including Sex- and Gender-based Harassment and Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct).

LSU Collegiate Recovery Program

Louisiana State University is committed to being inclusive to students in recovery, and to assisting students who are exploring recovery resources. LSU's Collegiate Recovery Program is geared toward helping students remain in recovery while at LSU and seeks to advocate for students' recovery when applicable. If you have questions about LSU's Collegiate Recovery Program or available resources, please call 225-578-4826 or email asinge6@lsu.edu.

Wellbeing

Your sense of wellbeing is influenced by many parts of your life. The extent to which you feel happy, healthy and otherwise fulfilled matters to us at LSU. Should you need direction to address any number of problems you may have that is directly influencing your sense of wellbeing, please visit lsu.edu/lsucares or complete the **LSU wellbeing resources and support form** to inquire as to specific offices to address your concerns. Please note the form is for non-emergency matters. For those matters requiring immediate attention, call the LSU police at 225-578-3231 or LSU Cares at 225-578-4307. For free, confidential, 24/7 emotional support and crisis management, call or text The Phone at 225-924-5781 (LSU1) or the Lifeline at 988.

Remote Learning

In the event of a campus-wide closure, this course may transition to an alternative form of instruction. I will notify you by Moodle announcement as soon as possible of the format our course will take. For example, the class may be held via Zoom and recorded for those unable to attend, or I will provide a lesson online that you can do asynchronously, or we may cover content at a different pace or schedule. If the emergency closure impacts scheduled tests, I will make alternative arrangements as soon as possible. If alternative formats are not available due to widespread loss of power and/or internet or other extenuating circumstances, the University may schedule makeup days per **Policy Statement 117**.

Grade Review

I am willing to review a written request to review a grade submitted no earlier than one-week following receipt of the grade, and no later than 4 weeks after receipt of the grade. If such a request is made, students must be prepared that a review may result in either a lower or higher grade.