



UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA  
Dipartimento di  
Scienze Politiche e Sociali

PhD in

# Communication Sciences and Practices



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## 1. Scenario

The world of professional communication is going through major changes because of three connected processes.

(a) The first concerns the technological transformation of the basic media, and is closely linked to the more general digital transition that is pervasive, in various ways and in different ways, all areas of social, economic and political life. However, the world of communication is historically exposed to the direct consequences of digital technological transformation. The pervasiveness of these transformations can be easily simplified with three key words: *mobile*, *crossplatform*, *disintermediation*. The advent of mobile technology has revolutionized the use of communication content. The media that require a permanent installation (e.g. television) are experiencing a period of relative decline replaced by tools that allow the enjoyment of content anywhere and everywhere. This change feeds a new model of relationship with the communicative content that has been defined OnLife. At the same time, this continuous exposure triggers new risks and new widespread social dysfunctions. Moreover, the fruition of content does not happen with the access to contents through a single channel each time, but lives in a cross-mediality way. Therefore, publics can enjoy the same content through multiple communication perspectives, on different technological media (e.g. smartphones and tablets), creating an increasingly immersive and complex communicative environment. The opportunity of a continuous interaction with the digital world allows the audience to experience two-way processes of reaction to content on those same communication arenas where content is placed (for instance: direct reactions in the world of social networks and blog-vlog).

Finally, the widespread accessibility to the digital network with reduced content feeds an apparently greater democratization of the pluralism of voices, that can easily conquer a right of tribune media. At the same time the accessibility to the digital network allows the end-user to navigate the complexity of the communicative arena, who often do not have specific points of reference and are at the mercy of continuous processes of narration and counter-narration.

(b) Closely linked to the first process, the second one refers to the change - that we could define as genotypic - within the geographical scope of the communication professions. Research promoted by UNA (Italian United Communication Companies), and developed by the Department of Political and Social Sciences, has shown that the professional landscape of communication is increasingly characterized by the demand for high professionalism able to dominate both the field of research and listening to the public of reference (in particular through models of listening through digital channels), and the field of strategic management of all aspects of professional communication; starting with the management of the content construction process according to an integrative perspective between different forms and languages, to their distribution and indexing in the digital arena, to their compatibility with current legislation, to the assessment of their impact. The research has clarified that companies are looking for subjects with high-level skills and qualifications corresponding to those offered by holding a specific doctoral degree in the field.



(c) On the other hand, the third process concerns the new communication needs proposed by the market and institutional stakeholders. Advanced internal strategic communication skills are required, which can be acquired through participation in a coherent doctoral programme. These skills allow you to get in touch with companies and agencies that provide communication services, comprehensively articulate the multi-level planning needs of their communication strategies by providing timely guidance to the service provider, to direct a process that involves more specific service providers in a wider project implementation scenario, and to competently assess the credibility of the proposals and offers that reach the organization at the design stage, monitoring its implementation to establish the effective achievement of the technical objectives pursued.

This research has provided some indications on the morphology and geographical positioning of communication companies. About two thirds of the communication companies are in Lombardy with an undisputed leadership of the hub of Milan where all the larger companies are located. Next, we find the Roman pole (specifically specialized in the processes of public affairs, advocacy and public relations), the Venetian and Turin-based. However, in the face of some concentrations of large companies in the sector around these main poles there is a widespread presence of micro companies that represent almost half of the total turnover of the sector. While, as you can imagine, large businesses are capable of covering all the areas of professional communication (while manifesting specific vocation more developed in some areas) the smaller companies are equally distributed between those with marked vertical specializations and a very strong innovative tension, and companies offering proximity services with a very low level of functional product differentiation. Both large and small enterprises can provide a professional outlet for advanced tertiary-skilled human capital.

## 2. Sustainability of the initiative

Noting that the Lombard context constitutes a field of choice for the possible extra-academic absorption of highly qualified human capital produced by a doctorate in Communication Sciences, it is necessary to define which factors can make this initiative truly sustainable.

First of all, we want to point out that, in recent years, the sector of communication offered by the University of Pavia has developed considerably. There is a three-year degree course with a limited number of 300 students (CIM), a master's degree that following a major renovation has shown great attractiveness with an average of enrolled more than double than its class of degree (LM-59) and also with respect to the numerous direct competitors in the immediate proximity (in particular the Milanese universities) and a higher level master's degree which provides advanced professional training on the themes of business storytelling and marketing of the latest generation. This multi-level training is multidisciplinary and interdepartmental. The establishment of a specific PhD in Communication Sciences would then allow to complete the teaching offer and to gather the best



research talents trained in the first and second level courses of all the disciplinary macro areas by offering them further training and opportunities to do research in the specific field.

The success of the initiatives carried out so far has allowed the development of an increasing number of relations with the industrial and entrepreneurial world of communication, which has resulted in an Advisory Board of leading institutional and private entities that, on the one hand, they host internships starting from these courses of study. On the other, they have developed numerous research collaborations (especially with the Department of Political and Social Sciences). Within these projects, specific research groups have been created. They bring together some of the best graduates of the University of Pavia (through these courses of study) committed today to carry out research through scholarships on the most relevant topics of the current communication landscape.

The aforementioned stakeholders have already expressed a favourable opinion on the birth of a doctoral course and have declared themselves willing to support it with the provision of scholarships. This availability of these two initial scholarships is supported by the contribution of a scholarship made available by the University. In a more advanced phase, the development of the relationships with the external stakeholders will allow to consider the possibility to start, with some of them, an agreement and to ask the recognition of the qualification of "industrial doctorate".

The formula of the courses of study in communication, organized in an interdepartmental form, has allowed to develop expertise in the different fields of the communicative phenomenon and constitutes, therefore, a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of a competent and well-articulated doctoral course faculty college. This doctoral course is composed by 12 members, recruited in majority among the teaching staff of the Departments of the University of Pavia (which are already engaged in the courses of communication sciences), but also with the participation of professors from other Departments and other Universities, supported by experts from the world of business and communication professions. The necessary number of staff dedicated at departmental or interdepartmental level to the administrative management of the course may be accompanied by external support during the start-up phase.

Finally, in addition to the possibility that PhD students may find a professional position in the field of extracurricular studies, it also seems appropriate to underline the need not to lose any research talents to foster the growth of the University of Pavia as a high-level interlocutor in the field of basic and applied research on communication issues.



### 3. The training project

The PhD in question will articulate its training around five main themes.

1. The first is the use of data analysis tools applied to communication with reference to the application of quantum-qualitative data integration models through pattern recognition and machine learning algorithms.
2. The second area concerns the analysis and management of the production processes of communication content, both in the digital world and in the more traditional physical one. In particular, the experience of the University of Pavia in research on business storytelling, on the production of creative audio and video content and in applied linguistics are essential prerequisites for a high-level doctoral offer in the communication sciences.
3. The third area is the analysis of the processes of public reputation representation and public opinion management. In addition to the lessons taught in the courses of study, many of the currently research initiatives relate to this dimension of the communicative phenomenon and well represent the excellence of Pavia recognized by the reference market.
4. The fourth area concerns the technical dimension, which will be divided into two strands, one more strictly engineering technology and one technical-legal. Also, in this case the research demand expressed by the stakeholders and the quality of the first and second level offer now provided allows to position the proposed doctoral offer on standards of excellence. In particular, mention should be made of research and training work on the ergonomics of digital use and on the legal protection of personal data and the right of ingenuity in the digital world. Issues that constitute open challenges, and well recognized in the PNRR, for our country also in function of the ongoing digital transformation.
5. Finally, an important area is represented by the innovative marketing declined both in the construction of multi-channel campaigns, and in the construction of mechanisms for analysis and acquisition of market and institutional positioning of stakeholders.

These five training areas represent necessary articulations for the application of the communicative process in specific fields of intervention, among which we mention as an example: brand and personal narratives, management and reputation, narrative medicine, health marketing and communication, political and institutional communication, sport communication and science communication.