

# Alberto Acerbi

Associate Professor

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## Current position

*Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento (Italy)*

Associate professor 2025-current

## Previous positions

*Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento (Italy)*

Assistant professor 2022-2025

*Centre for Culture and Evolution, Division of Psychology, Brunel University London (UK)*

Lecturer 2019-2023

*School of Innovation Science, Eindhoven University of Technology (The Netherlands)*

Researcher 2015-2019

*Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, Bristol University (UK)*

Newton Research Fellow 2013-2104

*Centre for the study of cultural evolution, Stockholm University (Sweden) & Università di Bologna (Italy)*

Post-doctoral researcher 2008-2012

*Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig (Germany)*

Post-doctoral researcher 2007-2008

*Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies, CNR, Roma (Italy)*

Research assistant 2004-2007

## Education

PhD, Anthropology, Università di Siena (Italy) 2007

MA, Philosophy (cum laude), Università di Siena (Italy) 2002

## Publications

### BOOKS

1. **Acerbi A** (2025), *Tecnopanico*, Bologna: Il Mulino (in Italian).
2. **Acerbi A**, Mesoudi A, Smolla M (2022), *Individual-based models of cultural evolution. A step-by-step guide using R*, New York: Routledge. Online free version available at: <https://acerbialberto.com/IBM-cultevo>
3. **Acerbi A** (2020), *Cultural Evolution in the Digital Age*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
Arabic translation (2021), Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc.

### PREPRINTS

1. Fattorini E, **Acerbi A**, Bucchi M, Loner E (2025), Weapon and Poison: Framing Disinformation in European Commission Speeches, 2016–2024, available at: [https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/bevts\\_v1/](https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/bevts_v1/)
2. Fischer K, **Acerbi A** (2025), Negative, group-oriented, and dominance-oriented sentiment are the primary content determinants of engagement with reliable news, available at: [https://osf.io/jvxen\\_v1](https://osf.io/jvxen_v1)
3. Fischer K, **Acerbi A** (2025), Digital Media, available at: <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/6zhcy/>

### JOURNAL ARTICLES

1. **Acerbi A**, De Courson B (2025), Weak individual preferences stabilize culture, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 122 (8), e2412380122
2. Bonacchi C, Krzyzanska M, **Acerbi A** (2025), Positive sentiment and expertise predict the diffusion of archaeological content on social media, *Scientific Reports*, 15, 2031
3. Altay S, **Acerbi A** (2024), People Believe Misinformation Is a Threat Because They Assume Others Are Gullible, *New Media and Society*, 26, 11, 6440-6461
4. Brinkmann L, Baumann F, Bonnefon J-F, Derex M, Müller TF, Nussberger A-M, Czaplicka A, **Acerbi A**, Griffiths TL, Henrich J, Leibo JZ, McElreath R, Oudeyer P-Y, Stray J, Rahwan I (2023), Machine Culture, *Nature Human Behaviour*, 7, 11
5. **Acerbi A**, Stubbersfield JM (2023), Large language models show human-like content biases in transmission chain experiments, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 120 (44), e2313790120
6. Youngblood M, Stubbersfield JM, Morin O, Glassman R, **Acerbi A** (2023), Cultural transmission bias in the spread of voter fraud conspiracy theories on Twitter during the 2020 US election, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10, 573
7. **Acerbi A**, Sacco PL (2023), Self-interest, prosociality, and the moral cognition of markets: A comparative analysis of The Theory of Moral Sentiments and The Wealth of Nations, *Rationality and Society*, 35, 4
8. **Acerbi A**, Burns J, Cabuk U, Kryczka J, Trapp B, Valletta JJ, Mesoudi A (2023), Sentiment analysis of the Twitter in response to Netflix's *Our Planet* documentary, *Conservation Biology*, e14060

9. Altay S, Berriche M, **Acerbi A** (2023), Misinformation on Misinformation: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges, *Social Media + Society*, 9, 1
10. **Acerbi A**, Snyder WD, Tennie C (2022), The method of exclusion (still) cannot identify specific mechanisms of cultural inheritance, *Scientific Reports*, 12, 21680
11. **Acerbi A**, Sacco PL (2022), The self-control vs. self-indulgence dilemma: A culturomic analysis of 20th century trends, *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics*, 101, 101946
12. **Acerbi A** (2022), From storytelling to Facebook. Content biases when retelling or sharing a story, *Human Nature*, 33, 2
13. **Acerbi A\***, Altay S\*, Mercier H (2022), Research note: Fighting misinformation or fighting for information?, *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, 3, 1 (\*equal contribution)
14. **Acerbi A**, Charbonneau M, Miton H, Scott-Phillips T (2021), Culture without copying or selection, *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 3, e50
15. Manvir S, **Acerbi A**, Caldwell C, Danchin E, Isabel G, Molleman L, Scott-Phillips T, Tamariz M, van den Berg P, van Leeuwen E, Derex M (2021), Beyond social learning, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 376, 20200050
16. Morin O, Jacquet P, Vaesen K, **Acerbi A** (2021), Social information use and social information waste, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 376, 20200052
17. Jansson F, Aguilar E, **Acerbi A**, Enquist M (2021), Modelling Cultural Systems and Selective Filters, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 376, 20200045
18. **Acerbi A\***, Kerhoas D\*, Webber A, McCabe G, Mittermeier R, Schwitzer C (2020), The impact of the “World’s 25 Most Endangered Primates” list on scientific publications and media. *Journal for Nature Conservation*, 54, 125794 (\*equal contribution)
19. Brand CO, **Acerbi A**, Mesoudi A (2019), Cultural evolution of emotional expression in 50 years of song lyrics, *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 1, e11
20. Morin O, Sobchuk O, **Acerbi A** (2019), Why people die in novels: Testing the Ordeal Simulation Hypothesis, *Palgrave Communications*, 5, 2  
     Italian translation (2023), in: *La narrazione come incontro* (Ciotti F, Morabito C, Eds.)  
     Firenze: Firenze University Press: 59-80.
21. **Acerbi A** (2019), Cognitive attraction and online misinformation, *Palgrave Communications*, 5, 15
22. Morgan TJH, **Acerbi A**, van Leeuwen EJC (2019), Copy-the-majority of instances or individuals? Two approaches to the majority and their consequences for conformist decision-making, *PLoS ONE*, 14(1), e0210748
23. **Acerbi A**, Tehrani J (2018), Did Einstein really say that? Testing content versus context in the cultural selection of quotations, *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 18 (3-4), 293-311
24. Ruck D, Bentley RA, **Acerbi A**, Garnett P, Hruschka DJ (2017), Role of Neutral evolution in word turnover during centuries of English word popularity, *Advances in Complex Systems*, 20 (6-7), 1750012

25. **Acerbi A**, Kendal J, Tehrani J (2017), Cultural complexity and demography: the case of folktales, *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, 38 (4), 474-480
26. Morin O\*, **Acerbi A\*** (2017), Birth of the cool. A two-centuries decline in emotional expression in Anglophone fiction, *Cognition and Emotion*, 31 (8), 1663-1675 (\*equal contribution)
27. **Acerbi A** (2016), A cultural evolution approach to digital media, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 10, 636
28. **Acerbi A\***, van Leeuwen EJC\*, Haun DBM, Tennie C (2016), Conformity cannot be identified based on population-level signatures, *Scientific Reports*, 6, 36068 (\*equal contribution)
29. van Leeuwen EJC, **Acerbi A**, Kendal RL, Tennie C, Haun DBM (2016), A re-appreciation of “conformity”, *Animal Behaviour*, 122, e5-e10
30. **Acerbi A**, Tennie C, Mesoudi A (2016), Social learning solves the problem of narrow-peaked search landscapes: experimental evidence in humans, *Royal Society Open Science*, 3(9): 160215
31. **Acerbi A**, Tennie C (2016), The role of redundant information in cultural transmission and cultural stabilization, *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 130(1): 62-70
32. Pugliese F, **Acerbi A**, Marocco D (2015), Emergence of Leadership in a Group of Autonomous Robots, *PLoS ONE*, 10(9): e0137234
33. **Acerbi A**, Mesoudi A (2015), If we are all cultural Darwinians what’s the fuss about? Clarifying recent disagreements in the field of cultural evolution, *Biology & Philosophy*, 30(4): 481-503
34. Ghirlanda S, **Acerbi A**, Herzog H (2014), Dog movie stars and dog breed popularity: A case study in media influence on choice, *PLoS ONE*, 9(9): e106565
35. **Acerbi A**, Bentley RA (2014), Biases in cultural transmission shape the turnover of popular traits, *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, 35(3): 228-236
36. Bentley RA, **Acerbi A**, Ormerod P, Lamos V (2014), Books Average Previous Decade of Economic Misery, *PLoS ONE*, 9(1): e83147
37. Ghirlanda S, **Acerbi A**, Herzog H, Serpell JA (2013), Fashion vs. Function in Cultural Evolution: The case of Dog Breed Popularity, *PLoS ONE*, 8(9): e74770
38. **Acerbi A**, Lamos V, Garnett P, Bentley RA (2013), The expression of emotions in 20th century books, *PLoS ONE*, 8(3): e59030
39. **Acerbi A**, Ghirlanda S, Enquist M (2012), Old and Young Individuals’ Role in Cultural Change, *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulations*, 15(4): 1
40. **Acerbi A**, Ghirlanda S, Enquist M (2012), The logic of fashion cycles, *PLoS ONE*, 7(3): e32541
41. **Acerbi A**, Jacquet P, Tennie C (2012), Behavioral constraints and the evolution of faithful social learning, *Current Zoology*, 58(2): 307-318
42. **Acerbi A**, Tennie C, Nunn CL (2011), Modeling imitation and emulation in constrained search spaces, *Learning & Behavior*, 39(2): 104-114
43. **Acerbi A**, Nunn CL (2011), Predation and the phasing of sleep: an evolutionary individual-based model, *Animal Behaviour*, 81(4): 801-811

44. **Acerbi A**, Enquist M, Ghirlanda S (2009), Cultural evolution and individual development of openness and conservatism, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 106(45): 18931-18935
45. **Acerbi A**, McNamara P, Nunn CL (2008), To Sleep or not to Sleep: The Ecology of Sleep in Artificial Organisms, *BMC Ecology*, 8(10): 1-12
46. **Acerbi A**, Parisi D (2006), Cultural Transmission Between and Within Generations, *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulations*, 9(1): 1

#### BOOK CHAPTERS / CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

1. **Acerbi A** (2023), Digital Culture, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Evolution* (Tehrani J et al., Eds), Oxford, Oxford University Press, C41S1-C41S10
2. Pianzola F, **Acerbi A**, Rebora S (2020), Cultural Accumulation and Improvement in Online Fan Fiction, in: *Proceedings of the Workshop on Computational Humanities Research* (Karsdorp F et al., Eds.), CEUR: 2-11
3. **Acerbi A**, Ghirlanda S, Enquist M (2014), Regulatory traits: cultural influences on cultural evolution, in: *Evolution, Complexity, and Artificial Life* (Cagnoni S et al., Eds.), Berlin, Springer: 135-147
4. **Acerbi A**, Lampos V, Bentley RA (2013), Robustness of emotions extraction from 20th century English books, in: *IEEE BigData 2013 Proceedings*: 1-8
5. **Acerbi A**, Ghirlanda S, Enquist M (2012), Regulatory Traits in Cultural Evolution, in: *Proceedings of the Italian Workshop on Artificial Life and Evolutionary Computation* (Cagnoni S et al., Eds.), University of Parma: 1-9
6. Pugliese S, **Acerbi A**, Miglino O, Marocco D (2012), Emergence of Leadership in a Group of Autonomous Robots, in: *Proceedings of the Post-Graduate Conference on Robotics and Development of Cognition*: 36-39
7. **Acerbi A**, Marocco D (2009), Orienting learning by exploiting sociality: an evolutionary robotics simulation, in: *IJCNN 2009 Conference Proceedings*, Piscataway, NJ, IEEE Press: 20-27
8. Marocco D, **Acerbi A** (2007), Adaptation and Social Facilitation in a Population of Autonomous Robots, in: *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Epigenetic Robotics* (Berthouze L et al., Eds.), Lund, Lund University Cognitive Science Series: 85-91
9. Cecconi F, Zappacosta S, Marocco D, **Acerbi A** (2007), Social and individual learning in a microeconomic framework, in: *Proceedings of the Econophysics Colloquium and Beyond*, University of Ancona
10. **Acerbi A**, Marocco D, Nolfi S (2007), Social Facilitation on the Development of Foraging Behaviors in a Population of Autonomous Robots, in: *Advances in Artificial Life. Proceedings of ECAL 2007* (Almeida e Costa F et al., Eds.), Berlin, Springer: 625-634
11. **Acerbi A**, Parisi D (2007), The Evolution of Pain, in: *Advances in Artificial Life. Proceedings of ECAL 2007* (Almeida e Costa F et al., Eds.), Berlin, Springer: 816-824
12. **Acerbi A**, Nolfi S (2007), Social Learning and Cultural Evolution in Embodied and Situated Agents, in: *Proceedings of the First IEEE Symposium on Artificial Life* (Abbass HA et al., Eds.), Piscataway, NJ, IEEE Press: 333-340

## OTHERS

1. **Acerbi A** (2021), Review of Joseph Henrich, *The Weirdest People in the World*, *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture*, 5 (1): 91-96
2. **Acerbi A**, Brand C (2020), Why are pop songs getting sadder than they used to be?, *aeon*, available at: <https://aeon.co/ideas/why-are-pop-songs-getting-sadder-than-they-used-to-be>
3. **Acerbi A\***, van Leeuwen EJC\*, Haun DBM, Tennie C (2018), Sigmoidal acquisition curves do not necessarily indicate conformity. Reply to Smaldino et al. (2018), *Scientific Reports*, 8, 14016 (\*equal contribution)
4. **Acerbi A**, Sacco PL (2018), Folk-economic beliefs as “evidential fiction”: Putting the economic public discourse back on track (Commentary on Boyer & Petersen), *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 41, e159
5. **Acerbi A** (2017), Review of Tim Lewens, *Cultural Evolution: Conceptual Challenges*, *Philosophy of Science*, 84(1)
6. **Acerbi A** (2013), The History of Our Emotions in Millions of Books, *Huffington Post* (USA Edition), available at: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/human-emotion-books-history\\_b\\_3084869](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/human-emotion-books-history_b_3084869)
7. Ghirlanda S, **Acerbi A**, Enquist M, Nakamaru M (2010), The Sometimes Evitable Route to Conservatism and Persuasiveness. A Replay to Xue and Costopoulos, *Current Anthropology*, 51(2): 271-272
8. **Acerbi A**, Marocco D, Vogt P (2008), Social Learning in Embodied Agents, special double issue of *Connection Science*, 20(2-3)

## Recent/forthcoming conference presentations, invited talks and workshops

*Social influence and information spreading online*, Culture Lab Inaugural Event, Paris, France, September 22, 2025 (invited)

*Large language models show human-like content biases in transmission chain experiments*, ISA Forum of Sociology, Rabat, Morocco, July 6-11, 2025

*Negative, group-oriented, and dominance-oriented sentiment are the primary content determinants of engagement with reliable news*, Explaining culture - an interdisciplinary approach, Paris, France, May 26-28, 2025 (invited)

*Exploring long-term cultural dynamics through text mining: trends, challenges, and future directions*, Department of Anthropology, Durham University, UK, February 26, 2025 (invited)

*The social media debate: Do social media really represent a threat to our society?*, Symposium at the 20th Annual Conference of the Italian Association for Cognitive Sciences, Roma, Italy, September 20, 2024 (organiser)

*Misinformed on misinformation*, International Scientific Workshop on Challenges of Sustainable Education, School of Innovation, University of Trento, Italy, June 11, 2024 (invited)

*Social influence and misinformation online*, EU Digital Citizenship Working Group, March 27, 2024 (invited)

*Large language models show human-like content biases in transmission chain experiments*, Computational Humanities seminar, King's College, London, UK, March 20, 2024 (invited)

## **Recent Teaching**

University of Trento, module leader - Costruire un disegno di analisi dei fenomeni sociali (BSc Sociology) - from 2026 to *current*

University of Trento, module leader - Cultural analytics (MSc Sociology and Social Research) - from 2023 to *current*

University of Trento, module co-leader - Current issues in digital media and politics (MSc Data science) - from 2024 to *current*

University of Trento, module co-leader - Costruire un disegno di analisi dei fenomeni sociali (BSc Sociology) - from 2024 to 2025

University of Trento, team taught module - Foundations of Social and Psychological Science (MSc Data science) - from 2023 to 2024

COSMOS 2023 (The Computational Summer school on Modeling Social and collective behavior), Konstanz, instructor - 2023

Brunel University London, module co-leader - Psychology of social media (BSc Psychology) - from 2021 to 2023

Brunel University London, module leader - Statistics (BSc Psychology) - from 2020 to 2023

Brunel University London, team taught modules - Evolutionary perspective on culture, Special topics in culture and evolution, Cross-cultural and evolutionary research methods (MSc Culture and Evolution) - from 2020 to 2023

## **Postdoc Supervision**

From 2025: John-Paul Martindale (with Chiara Bonacchi)

From 2023: Kyle Fischer

## **Advisory board Member**

GOLEM (Graphs and Ontologies for Literary Evolution Models) ERC project (2023-2027)

## **Editorial board member**

Culture and Evolution (AKJournals)

## **PhD Panels Member**

Filippo Andrei: Unveiling The Shadows: A Cognitive Approach To Understanding Social Influence Strategies For Establishing Social Order In Darknet Markets, Università degli Studi di Trento - 2024

Francesco Lomonaco: Raising Teenagers' Awareness of Social Media Threats: A Theoretical and Empirical Study, Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca - 2023

Niels Lettinga: Environmental adversity and prosocial preferences, and a new methodology to increase the external validity of economic games, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris - 2021

Bradley Peter Walker: Evidence that Cultural Transmission Biases Differentially Influence Human Communication, The University of Western Australia - 2021

Jose Segovia Martin: Social and cognitive constraints on the evolution of culturally transmitted variants: Models, experiments and theory, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona - 2020

Simon Carrignon: Content-Dependent Biases in Social Learning Strategies: a multiscale approach, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona - 2019

## **Grants and awards**

Leverhulme Trust (2025, co-I): 295,318.77 GBP ("Weaponised Pasts: The Evolution of Heritage-based Hostility on Social Media")

John Templeton Foundation (2022): ~ 186,000 EUR ("Changing the perspective on social media interventions: improving engagement with true news")

BRIEF award (2020): ~ 9,000 GBP ("From storytelling to Facebook. Does the medium of transmission change which content is successful?")

Newton International Fellowship (2013-2014): ~ 187,000 GBP ("Cultural Evolution Online. New models for a new era")

Wenner-Gren foundation (2010-2012): ~ 30,000 EUR