

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://albertoacerbi.github.io/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. Acerbi A (2025), The Cultural Ecology of Social Media, available at: https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/mu84x_v1
2. 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/
3. 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
4. Fischer K, Acerbi A (2025), Digital Media, available at: <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/6zhcy/>

JOURNAL ARTICLES

1. Costello W, Acerbi A (2026), Why Incels Capture Attention: A Cultural Attraction Theory Perspective, *Evolutionary Psychological Science*, 12 (1)
2. Acerbi A, De Courson B (2025), Weak individual preferences stabilize culture, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 122 (8), e2412380122
3. Bonacchi C, Krzyzanska M, Acerbi A (2025), Positive sentiment and expertise predict the diffusion of archaeological content on social media, *Scientific Reports*, 15, 2031
4. 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
5. 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
6. 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
7. 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
8. 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

9. 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
10. Altay S, Berriche M, Acerbi A (2023), Misinformation on Misinformation: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges, *Social Media + Society*, 9, 1
11. Acerbi A, Snyder WD, Tennie C (2022), The method of exclusion (still) cannot identify specific mechanisms of cultural inheritance, *Scientific Reports*, 12, 21680
12. 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
13. Acerbi A (2022), From storytelling to Facebook. Content biases when retelling or sharing a story, *Human Nature*, 33, 2
14. Acerbi A*, Altay S*, Mercier H (2022), Research note: Fighting misinformation or fighting for information?, *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, 3, 1 (*equal contribution)
15. Acerbi A, Charbonneau M, Miton H, Scott-Phillips T (2021), Culture without copying or selection, *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 3, e50
16. 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
17. 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
18. Jansson F, Aguilar E, Acerbi A, Enquist M (2021), Modelling Cultural Systems and Selective Filters, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 376, 20200045
19. 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)
20. Brand CO, Acerbi A, Mesoudi A (2019), Cultural evolution of emotional expression in 50 years of song lyrics, *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 1, e11
21. 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.
22. Acerbi A (2019), Cognitive attraction and online misinformation, *Palgrave Communications*, 5, 15
23. 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
24. 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

25. 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
26. Acerbi A, Kendal J, Tehrani J (2017), Cultural complexity and demography: the case of folktales, *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, 38 (4), 474-480
27. 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)
28. Acerbi A (2016), A cultural evolution approach to digital media, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 10, 636
29. 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)
30. van Leeuwen EJC, Acerbi A, Kendal RL, Tennie C, Haun DBM (2016), A re-appreciation of "conformity", *Animal Behaviour*, 122, e5-e10
31. 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
32. Acerbi A, Tennie C (2016), The role of redundant information in cultural transmission and cultural stabilization, *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 130(1): 62-70
33. Pugliese F, Acerbi A, Marocco D (2015), Emergence of Leadership in a Group of Autonomous Robots, *PLoS ONE*, 10(9): e0137234
34. 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
35. 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
36. Acerbi A, Bentley RA (2014), Biases in cultural transmission shape the turnover of popular traits, *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, 35(3): 228-236
37. Bentley RA, Acerbi A, Ormerod P, Lampos V (2014), Books Average Previous Decade of Economic Misery, *PLoS ONE*, 9(1): e83147
38. 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
39. Acerbi A, Lampos V, Garnett P, Bentley RA (2013), The expression of emotions in 20th century books, *PLoS ONE*, 8(3): e59030
40. 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
41. Acerbi A, Ghirlanda S, Enquist M (2012), The logic of fashion cycles, *PLoS ONE*, 7(3): e32541
42. Acerbi A, Jacquet P, Tennie C (2012), Behavioral constraints and the evolution of faithful social learning, *Current Zoology*, 58(2): 307-318

43. Acerbi A, Tennie C, Nunn CL (2011), Modeling imitation and emulation in constrained search spaces, *Learning & Behavior*, 39(2): 104-114
44. Acerbi A, Nunn CL (2011), Predation and the phasing of sleep: an evolutionary individual-based model, *Animal Behaviour*, 81(4): 801-811
45. 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
46. 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
47. 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, Lampis 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
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

Oltre i falsi allarmismi sul digitale: valutare le paure ingiustificate, verso un uso consapevole, LearningMore Festival, Modena, Italy, February 20, 2026 (invited)

Tecnopanico, Emozioni, Scienza e Tecnologia seminar series, University of Trento, Italy, November 19, 2025 (invited)

Misconceptions on online misinformation, Methods and Misconceptions: Refining Methods and Narratives in the Behavioral Sciences, University of Padova, Italy, October 15, 2025 (invited)

Digital Age: the long view, Language, Mind and Society Centre, University of Hradec Králové, Czech Republic, October 8, 2025 (invited)

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)

Current 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*

Postdoc/PhD Supervision

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

From 2025: Pablo Ignacio Schiappacasse Valenzuela (with Mario Quaranta) - PhD

2023–2025: Kyle Fischer - postdoc

PhD Panels Member

Pietro Nickl: The Social dynamics of cultural evolution online, Max Planck School of Cognition, Berlin - 2025

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")