



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA | DEPARTMENT
OF PHILOSOPHY

**SeRiC
FILO**

Seminari delle
Ricerche in Corso

SeRiC - Seminari delle Ricerche in Corso 2025/2026

MORAL DESENSITIZATION IN DIGITAL CONTEXTS

Instagram exposure alters moral perception and emotional reactivity

11/05/2026 h 15:00-17:00
Sala Mondolfo, via Zamboni 38

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Social media are hinged on virality: they amplify content that evokes strong moral and emotional reactions, populating users' feeds with affect-laden suggestions that might shape users' moral norms and online judgments. Their role as active mediators rather than neutral conduits heightens the need for thorough studies of how they influence moral judgments embedded in social media. In this work, we explore whether presenting and replying to moral dilemmas on Instagram impacts the users' outputs, specifically concerning their perceived moral acceptability, arousal and valence ratings. Our results indicate that presenting moral dilemmas on Instagram (vs Qualtrics) increases their moral acceptability, dampening arousal and valence-related ratings. Furthermore, the Instagram group is slower in completing the task. Our findings suggest that simply being on social media platforms like Instagram can induce a moral desensitization. A troubling prospect for our society, given that billions engage with these platforms daily, risking a gradual erosion of sensitivity to moral issues.

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