

Short Note

**Mapping European social psychology:
Co-word analysis of the
communications at the 10th
General Meeting of the EAESP**

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Abstract

This study aims to provide a picture of the present European research topics in Social Psychology, using the 339 papers presented at the 1993 General Meeting of the EAESP. The most frequent themes of research are analysed and the structure of the association of those themes are described in a two-factor structure. The first factor differentiates research in terms of level of analysis and the second factor contrasts types of applied research.

INTRODUCTION

Bibliometric studies examining the quantifiable contributions that underlie the development of European social psychology are rare, but they have provided important guidelines to research. We refer specifically to the work of Doise (1982) on the levels of analysis in social psychology, to the work of Fisch and Daniel (1982)

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continued by Jaspars (1986), and to the work of Scherer (1992). In this paper, we aim at describing the present trends of social psychological research in Europe, using bibliometric methodologies. The material used in this analysis will be the keywords of the papers presented at the 10th General Meeting of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology (EAESP), which took place in Lisbon, in 1993.

In bibliometric analysis, authors usually distinguish between one-dimensional and two-dimensional techniques (e.g. van Raan & Tijssen, 1993). The first one is based on direct counts of specific bibliographic items (such as keywords, authors, or journals). Two-dimensional techniques focus on the co-occurrence of specific information elements, such as the keywords used to describe a set of articles.

All the referred bibliometric works in European social psychology can be classified as using one-dimensional techniques. For instance, Jaspars (1986), using the results of Fisch and Daniel (1982), stressed the differences between European and American research interests in social psychology, showing that, during the '70s, the articles appearing in the *JEESP* focused more often on social influence and intergroup relations than the articles published by *JESP*. These two topics of research were not new in social psychology, and specifically in American social psychology. However, according to Jaspars (1986), the new European interest in those themes showed a new theoretical and meta-theoretical emphasis on the study of social behaviour within a broader social context, and an interest in articulating the research problems with studying social problems. As a matter of fact, the work by Moscovici (1976) on social influence and the work started by Tajfel (Tajfel, Flament, Billig & Bundy, 1971) on intergroup relations represent an important effort to combine an image of person as embodied in interpersonal and collective processes with a social approach to social change. These two contributions still remain as a distinctive and innovative European contribution to social psychology.

Ten years after Jaspars' analysis, Scherer (1992) used the same methodology to analyse the popularity of topics in social psychology in the '80s. His results show that European and American social psychology converged in research topics: the four topics in common in the '70s (risky-shift, aggression, attitude change, group perception) were increased to six in the '80s (social cognition, attribution, social influence, group perception, emotion, motivation). Social cognition seems to be the most important common theme in the two journals, and it represents a change in the European research, following the American mainstream. The American research is still more concerned with attitude change and attitude-behaviour relations, self and interpersonal attraction. In Europe research is still characterized by the studies on intergroup relations. But this decade is also marked in Europe by a new approach on aggression and an interest in communication studies. While intergroup relations remained a European topic of research, social influence also becomes a popular theme in the United States.

Scherer's results can give us an image of the European research from 1980 to 1989. What has happened since then? What are the trends for the nineties?

In 1993, EAESP organized its 10th General Meeting in Lisbon. The purpose of this study is to provide a picture of the present European research topics, using the papers presented at that conference. It is aimed at characterizing (i) the most frequent themes of research in European social psychology, and (ii) the structure of

the association of those themes, to describe the most paradigmatic orientations in our discipline.

METHOD

The 10th General Meeting of the EAESP had the most participants in the history of the Association: 364 social psychologists were attendant (90.7 per cent of those from European countries) and 339 papers were presented. These figures represent an important increase in participation from the 1978 General Meeting in Weimar (85 participants and 70 papers) or even from 1990s General Meeting, in Budapest (244 papers). This means that the papers presented in this meeting can be viewed as an acceptable sample of the research topics developed in Europe.

All 339 papers were analysed, and the keywords presented by the authors were used to identify research topics (1049 total keywords, 504 different ones). In order to analyse these data, and to overcome the variance introduced by having more than 300 authors defining keywords, the original words were grouped according to the following criteria: (i) singular and plural forms of the same keyword (for example 'stereo' = 'stereotypes') and lexical variations of the same word (for example 'adolescence' = 'adolescents') were grouped together; (ii) similar keywords where the same meaning was implied (for example, 'attitude behaviour relations' = 'attitude-behaviour') were grouped together; (iii) keywords standing for a part of a larger concept were classified within that concept (for example, 'self-aspects', 'self-change' = 'self'); (iv) some keywords theoretically related to a specific research area were grouped in the broader concept (for example: 'minority influence', 'polarization' = 'social influence'); (v) keywords were extracted from the title of the paper when the authors did not provide any.

Using those criteria, the initial 504 different keywords were reduced to the 249 different keywords utilized in this analysis. Even after that classification, 156 distinct keywords were only used in one paper, referring mainly to very specific areas of application of social psychology, methodological details or idiosyncratic keywords (e.g. biography, couples, volunteers).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the keywords with a frequency superior to five, corresponding to the most popular research topics in European social psychology. These keywords correspond to 64.7 per cent of the total words.

Three of the first four keywords (*social identity*, *stereotypes* and *intergroup relations*) relate to intergroup processes, the characteristic European research topic in both Jaspars' and Scherer's works. In addition, the high frequencies of keywords like *cognition*, *attribution*, *social cognition*, *language* and *information processing* (and *stereotypes*) show that the social cognition paradigm is still an important orientation in European social psychology, as the results of Scherer (1992) already indicated. 'Social influence', a typical research area in Europe during the '70s, seems now to have lost its centrality. Traditional research areas in social psychology, such as 'attitudes', also seem to hold the attention of researchers in Europe. Moreover, *intragroup* processes and *social norms* reappeared as important areas of study.

These results also show some new trends in European social psychology. Research on 'self', 'emotion' or 'affect' was not present in Jaspars' review. It appeared as an

Table 1. Popularity of topics in the 10th General Meeting of the EAESP, 1993

Keywords	Frequency	%
Social identity	45	4.91
Stereotypes	38	4.15
Emotion	36	3.93
Intergroup relations	33	3.60
Self	31	3.38
Groups	25	2.73
Social representations	23	2.51
Political processes	22	2.40
Gender	21	2.29
Attribution	20	2.18
Cognition	20	2.18
Attitudes	20	2.18
Language	19	2.07
Social influence	16	1.75
Affect	16	1.75
Culture	15	1.64
Social cognition	14	1.53
Social categorization	14	1.53
Norms	13	1.42
Information processing	13	1.42
Decision	11	1.20
Health	11	1.20
Communication	11	1.20
Methods	11	1.20
Justice	10	1.09
Attitude-behaviour	9	0.98
Social interaction	9	0.98
Attitude change	9	0.98
Aggression	9	0.98
Memory	8	0.87
Discourse analysis	8	0.87
Power	7	0.76
Social structure	7	0.76
Prejudice	7	0.76
Stress	6	0.66
Child	6	0.66
Total	593	64.74

important research area during the 80s, and it was definitely popular during this meeting. The topic 'social representations' made its first appearance in our data, corresponding to an important development of this line of research in Europe. The keywords *political processes* and *gender* stand for the most popular applications of social psychology to social issues. The other applied themes ('health' or 'justice') were much less frequent. Organizations, environments or education do not seem to constitute consistent areas of research in Europe at the present time.

To clarify our second question, the *structure* of research areas in European social psychology, a two-dimensional bibliometric technique (co-word analysis) was used. In order to produce the co-occurrence matrix and the final map, we used multiple

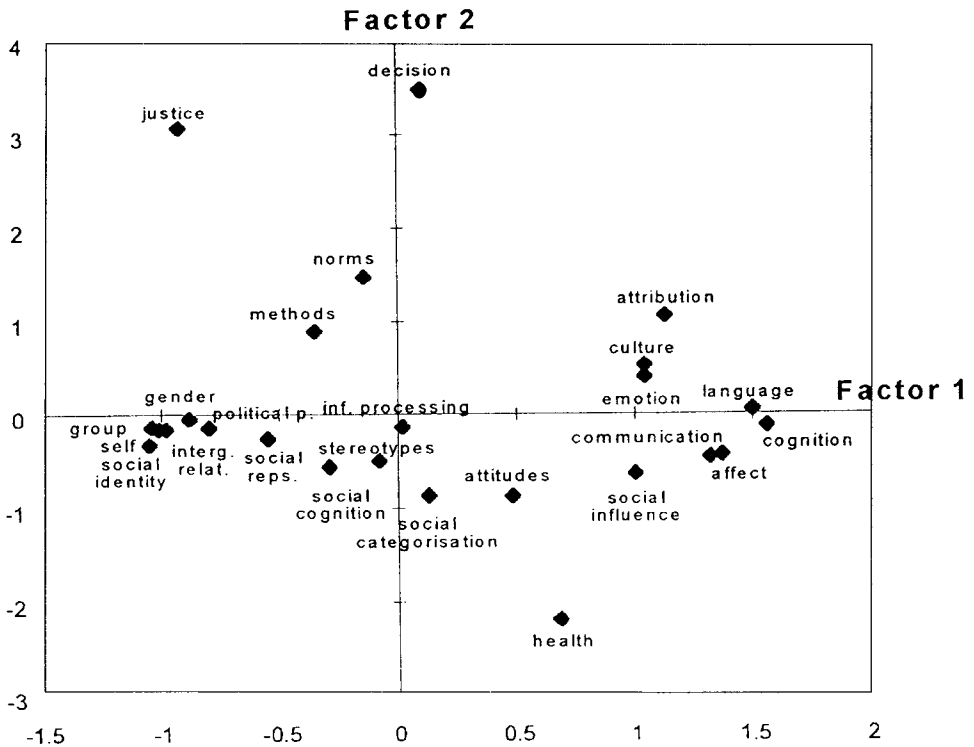


Figure 1. Graphic representation of factors 1 and 2 of the multiple correspondence factor analysis

correspondence analysis on textual data (SPAD-T). Papers were entered into the analysis as rows and each different keyword as a column. Only 25 different keywords/categories (49 per cent of the initial 1047 keywords) were analysed, corresponding to those with a frequency of 10 or above (see Table 1).

According to a combined examination of the coordinate and the absolute and relative contributions matrices, we can state that the first factor (Figure 1) opposes *Cognition*, *Language* and *Emotion* (also with *Affect* and *Attribution*) to *Social identity*, *Self* and *Intergroup relations* (with *Groups*). It differentiates research in terms of level of analysis (Doise, 1982): intra-individual processes on the right from positional and ideological processes on the left side of the graph. The second factor seems to distinguish two kinds of applied research: one oriented towards social problem solving (*Health*) and the other concerned with the underlying social psychological mechanisms (*Decision-making* and *Justice*).

These results allow us a better understanding of the structural location of the five most frequent keywords: *emotion*, *self*, *intergroup relations*, *stereotypes* and *social identity*. The keyword *emotion* appears in connection with traditional themes in social cognition, such as attribution. In our view and according to these results, this area of investigation emphasizes emotion by itself, and not its function within social psychological processes and contexts. However, the proximity to culture, communication and language may also mean the rise of a more social approach in this field.

The study of 'self', a traditional topic in information processing approaches, appears in our results within the cluster of 'social identity', 'intergroup relations' and 'social representations'. This result suggests that a cognitive representation of self is now framed in a more social perspective.

The type of associations between *stereotypes* and the other keywords locate this concept in an undifferentiated position in the correspondence analysis structure. In our view, this means that the study of stereotypes (and in some extent social categorization and social cognition) is developed simultaneously in two theoretical orientations: a cognitive approach and a more traditionally European approach, emphasizing *intergroup relations* and *social identity*. These last two topics appear in the same factor space as social representations, indicating an emerging association of three classic domains of research in Europe.

Our results are somehow limited because they do not allow a diachronic comparison, they used only one source of data, and they do not include any contextual variable of the researchers (country, age or institution). More bibliometric studies are necessary in order to fully understand the internal logic of the research in European social psychology and the diachronic orientation of this discipline.

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