Exploring the links between "social representation" and "feelings" when facing an « everyday life stressor »: the Euro.

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Abstract:
After Moscovici conceptualization, the last decade social psychology theoretical framework on Social Representation (Doise, 1985, 1988) - associated to recent methodological designs based also on evaluative technicals for empirical study on people’s cognitions - has made it possible to go beyond only semantical aspects of individual representations (Buschini & Kalampalikis, 2001). Therefore, such a view allows us to consider the heuristically value of the joint use of the Social Representation theory and of the Stress theoretical framework in our research in order to show that a social representation is an organized body system consisting of two types of elements: socio-cognitive elements and functional elements. This study aims to give a global and integrative overview of the content and of some “processual” aspects relating to social representation by exploring, across selective Ss groups on the basis of their attitudes towards the Euro, the links between conation (i.e. stress episode variables) and cognition (i.e. social representation) in establishing their attitudes towards a relevant social object: the Euro. A questionnaire regarding Euro attitudes, several aspects the stress episode process when facing the change of the economic state of affairs, and several dimensions of social representation of the European currency, surveyed a sample of 340 French students in December 2002. After drawing up the most salient elements of the Euro representations, in terms of criterion of characterization, content and evaluative components of “Euro-free associations” produced by respondent groups, we analysed (by multiple correspondence analysis associated with hierarchical cluster analysis adapted for linguistic applications and, regression analysis) and will discuss the established qualitative and quantitative relationships between some “stress episode variables” and some components of these social representations. Our results point to new research questions about the functional role of some “stress episode variables” – i.e. stakes, event appreciations, “eustress”, “distress”, emotions and feelings - play in the process of establishing social representations and/or attitudes towards a relevant social object.

Keywords: Social Representation –“ Stress episode variables” – Feelings - Attitude

Purpose of this study - Introduction
The current study examined the relationships between social representation, attitude and stress episode process among subjects facing an economic object: the Euro.

The term “attitude” refers to a predisposition to evaluate some object in a favorable or unfavorable manner. Despite the fact that a frequent lack of convergence of these concept definitions is highlighted by the psychosocial literature (Doise, Clémence, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1994; Farr, 1994), there are good theoretical and empirical reasons for predicting a relationship between attitudes and social representations (Meier & Kirchler, 1998), and stress process episode.

Given these considerations, the purpose of the present study was to (1) examine the relations between social representation contents, stress episode variables and feelings and (2) determine if stress episode process, associated with feelings, adds significant incremental validity in the prediction of attitude in general, and towards the Euro in particular.

Theoretical background
Our framework is based on the assumption that the individual’s experience, and the psychosocial influences that shape it, have a bearing on the representation and the attitude when the individual has to face and cope with a new relevant social object.

Transactional process between the individuals and their environment is the core of our model and emotion is included in this process (Battaglia, 2002; Battaglia & Lassarre, 1997; Lassarre, 2002).

An European classical design of developmental psychology (Wallon, 1935) can be the basis of a new approach of change. As Wallon insisted: " Affective life gave the self consciousness as a matrix of the consciousness of
of the currency will generate speeches, information through social interactions, and sociocognitive regulations to

instantaneous. The extension of the event in its temporal dimension must be dealt with, because the introduction

of the currency will generate speeches, information through social interactions, and sociocognitive regulations to

take place at both inter and intra-individual levels.

Theoretical background of cognitive semantics considers an event as a change that people are talking about; the

perception of a change does not occur in a psychological gap, but inside a system that is supposed to protect the

stability of some conceptual representations (Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976). We must take into account the

evaluation of the change the subjects are going to make. At last, this episode limited in (social and individual)
time is an existential event because it occurs in the everyday life environment and it can modify individual well-

being (Goodyer, 1994). This economic life event can be considered as a source of stress. It can be categorized as a « daily hassle » such as: requirements, sources of frustration that involve the individual in transactions with

his/her environment (Kanner, Coyne, Schaeffer, & Lazarus, 1981), or it can be categorized as a challenge

generating positive feelings and sensations of increase of individual’s well-being.

Also, dealing with the introduction of the European currency consists in introducing a conative dimension in the

cognitive universe of our behaviors (Campos & Rouquette, 2000). "The study of the relationships between
cognitive processes - i.e. that concerning the selection and the treatment of information - and those dealing with
the orientation and the control of behavior, is now ahead of the research in psychology" (Reuchlin, 1990).

Moscovici’s theory of social representations as well as the cognitive motivational relational theory of Lazarus
(Lazarus, 1991) are dealing precisely with the links between cognition and conation, between system and

metasystem.

To conceptualise the subsequent changes to the introduction of the European currency, i.e. to have a
representation of them, the individuals should extract the information on the causes and consequences of this event. This knowledge will come out of common discourse and also from the intimate experiences of the individuals in reference to their past. Individuals will not be passive spectators of this change. As economic agents, they will be actors. As their well being is involved in the event, they will evaluate it. Lazarus insists on the fact that without a personal significance the knowledge is “cold “, but when it has an impact on the personal well-being, it becomes “hot” : cognitions take the place of knowledge, they are right or wrong. Appraisal consists of a continuous evaluation of the situations in which the individual is involved. Individuals assess the meaning of what is going on for their well-being. Is it going to decrease, increase or stay unchanged ?

From the theoretical point of view, it is easy to differentiate knowledge and appraisal but from a functional point of view, knowledge and appraisal work in a synchronically and complementary way. They cannot be separated within the mental processes. Knowledge deals with beliefs of the way things are usually going in general or specific situations ; appraisal is a personal perception of the meaning of this knowledge in these situations. This thought process works as a reading grid of the experienced world.

Stress is a fuzzy and polysemous concept. It will be considered here as a transactional process. This conceptualisation refers to Lazarus who classifies the intervening variables in the transactional process in three categories : (primary and secondary) appraisal, tendency to action (emotion) and coping. Primary appraisal indicates if the event is salient for the individual. The secondary appraisal leads to the choice of coping strategies and their consequences. The process of coping modifies the relationships between the individual and the environment as a reality or as a meaning. These two phenomena are both changing the primary emotional state (feedback). There are two kinds of results : short term results such as actions or intentions of actions, physiological changes, and subjective effects and long term results, such as subjective well-being, reinforced feelings, and social patterns of action and attitudes. Primary appraisal makes the individuals determine if they are affected or not by the situation ; it is based on the relevance of what is happening regarding to the individual goals in the context. It is primary because it gives an emotional response to the situation. Secondary appraisal is an evaluation of the personal options and resources to cope with the situation and its consequences. It defines the adaptive meaning of the situation and it influences in return the meaning of the emotional experience, that appearing as a positive, negative or neutral feeling.

This hedonic dimension was missing in the original model of stress. Since 1991, Lazarus indicated he wanted to put the emotion in the core of the theoretical preoccupations about transactional processes between the individual and the experienced environment (Lazarus, 1993, 2000). Therefore people only react when the results are important to them. Emotion comes out of their expectations, their hierarchy of goals, from obtaining the
expected results, from the influence of the event on the relationship they have with the environment. It also has a functional value in the preparation for acting as well.

For all these reasons, it seems interesting to study, in a multi-theoretical context, some aspects of the content of the Euro-representations, their links to attitude and the role of stress-episode variables in shaping it. As identified in the model increasing attention has been paid to the relationship between stress-processing factors and the psychosocial responses - i.e. attitude and social representation- to new objects introduced by a new social situation.

Method

Participants and data collection

A survey was carried out in December 2002 and in order to minimize influence of socio-economic status anchoring, the target participants were 340 students in social sciences interviewed though a questionnaire.

Measures

Three different topics, related to the above aspects of our theoretical background, will be explored through the merely close-ended items of the questionnaire in Likert scales of five points: several aspects of the social representation of the Euro and several aspects of the “stress episode process and feelings” linked to facing the Euro and attitude towards it.

- The Social Representation field

In the beginning of the questionnaire respondents were submitted to an associative task on the stimulus-word “Euro” and to close-ended questions about their preferences between using the expressions “Common Currency”, “Single Currency” or “European Currency” when speaking about the Euro and the meaning they associate to it. This technique, based on De Rosa (De Rosa, 1995) and Rouquette & Guimelli (1995) research methods, permitted us to collect the most salient elements of social representations in terms of criterion of characterization, content and evaluative components.

- The Knowledge, the Certainty of it and the Feeling of being Informed about the Euro were also investigated.

- The Stress Episode Process and the Feelings:

The stakes were measured on the basis of five questions: “The importance of the Euro’s existence”: for Europe, France, French people, yourself and your family.

The evaluation of the Event when the Euro was first included in the daily life: Disagreeable (absolutely to not at all) ; Agreeable (absolutely to not at all)

“Eustress” (i.e. for you the Euro is: challenging, exalting… and “it adds to your well-being”) and “Distress” (i.e. for you the Euro is: constraining, overwhelming, fearsome, very worrisome… and “it is threatening to your well-being) were measured on the basis of 20 questions.

Negative feelings (i.e. for you the Euro is: unfortunate, irritating…), Positive feelings (i.e. for you the Euro is: fun, pleasant…) were measured on the basis of 12 questions.

- The Attitude toward the Euro was assessed through interval scale in five points.

Results and discussion

Some facts can be drawn from the following analysis of the establishing relationships between the “stress episode” variables, the feelings about the Euro, the Euro-representations, and the attitude associated to these representations.

Statistical analyses were conducted in two stages. First, the characterization and the contents associated with the different polarities of Euro free-associations were examined on the basis of their linked attitude values and in relation to their linked “stress episode” variables and feelings. Second, we sought to deeply investigate the incidence of these last variables on Ss’attitudes. Also, after that, a linear regression analysis was conducted to examine these presupposed relationships.
Preliminary analysis

All the items were measured separately and, as a data reduction exercise, were computed on scales on the basis of their reliance significations (Cronbach alpha) in order to recode in single variables each concept used in the stress episode process. But in a first time, principal component analysis was employed mainly to verify the hypothesized dimensions underlying our theoretical background on stress episode process and the above mentioned dimensions will be extracted. After such verifications, Cronbach’s alpha reliability analysis was computed on items for each dimension in order to aggregate and to summarize them by creating new variables for further analysis (additive scale values or mean values):

The stake, comprised of 4 items: \( \alpha = .75 \)

Negative feelings, comprised of 8 items: \( \alpha = .85 \)

Positive feelings, comprised of 4 items: \( \alpha = .83 \)

“Eustress”, comprised of 8 items: \( \alpha = .81 \)

“Distress”, comprised of 13 items: \( \alpha = .89 \)

Then, many quantitative variables were also recoded into nominal variables of 3 modalities (i.e. Attitude: Disagreeable, Neutral, or Favorable to the Euro…), for the exigencies of some qualitative statistical procedures as such multiple correspondence analysis on free-associations.

Social Representation’s analysis

- Preferences between using the expressions “Common Currency”, “Single Currency” or “European Currency” when speaking about the Euro and the meaning Ss associate to it.

As in a previous study (Battaglia & Lassarre, 1997) most respondents (59%) prefer to use “European currency”, whereas 22% prefer to use “Common currency” and 19% prefer to use “Single currency” when speaking about the Euro (chi-square = 98.6; \( p=.00 \)).

There is a six-year gap between the collections of data and as in 1997, we noted the same criterion of characterization of the content associated to the three inductors:

“European currency” is still associated with values of freedom, free exchanges, opening…

“Common currency” is still associated with social values such as equality, sharing, fellowship…

“Single currency” is still associated with the rational logic of economics such as purchasing, banking, business…

In a near future, this new currency will be adopted by other European states. The Euro will produce significant changes in the global economy, and particularly in the everyday life of the citizens of those states. Also we know that new information must always be connected to old information that is already structured in the memory. Then, that which individuals exchange is language. This material is pre-existing and cannot be reduced to knowledge only, it is also intentional. Media as well as individuals might intend to coordinate rational economics and values. The level of information needed to incorporate a new object in a social situation is central to the theory of social representations (Duveen & De Rosa, 1992). Social representations of the new currency appear to be the product of the collective and/or individual thought They will serve as a way for everyone to read the new environment and to be prepared for acting by the mean of attitudes.

Therefore, these results, regarding the way by witch social discourse can shape social representations, and that it suggests at the level of applied psychology, may also contribute to help future state currency candidates to be aware of the incidence of the content of social communication linked to the Euro, and also of its incidences on shaping people representations towards the Euro (Wagner, 1994).

- Synthetic descriptions of the links between the content and the evaluative components of Euro word associations, stress episode variables, feelings and attitude.

Of the existing statistical assessment tools, the Bécrenzi (1980) multiple correspondence analysis method associated with hierarchical cluster analysis, provides a fully validated way to measure the associations between linguistic corpus, it relationships with other dimensions, and a thoroughly reasoned way to organize it into categories. Then, this statistical method was chosen (1) in order to find out if there is some attraction between word-association frequencies and modalities of the attitude, and to appreciate the degree of it and (2) in order to add to our analysis some supplementary points variables - such as stress episode variables, feelings, and socio-
demographics - for which we will now show their contribution in appreciating the nature of links between social representation and attitude.

Following some aspects of the methodological design of De Rosa (De Rosa, 1995), the content of the representation associated to polarity was investigated by analyzing the frequencies of free-associations. We collected 1668 free-associations and 502 of these associations were different (30.1%). Before computing the analysis, we also decided to conserve the words with frequencies up to 8, then 130 associations were analyzed.

Based on the result of the multiple correspondence analysis, only the first axis could be interpreted (chi-square=84.24; ddl=130; p.=.00). On this dimension, the three respective modalities of the attitude variable and the polarity variable are very well represented. (De Rosa, 1988)

Then, based on these results and the associated results of the cluster analysis we can better describe how the word-associations are organized by considering the frequencies with maximal contributions. We found that the corpus is organized in three different clusters such as: negative words, neutral words and positive words. Also, the results of the cluster analysis, on the basis of test-values, showed that only two classes of word-associations must be considered, the “negative one” and the “positive one” characterize these 2 clusters by active variables of the analysis (attitude and polarity). Cluster 1 is characterized at the same time by a positive attitude towards the Euro and by a positive valence polarity, whereas cluster 3 is characterised by a respectively negative attitude and negative association polarity. The neutral values of these dimensions are not significantly relevant to any cluster notice the nature of the links of the supplementary variables with these 2 clusters. We list the modalities linked with the two clusters according to the order of their statistical contributions:


Therefore, this associative multiple correspondence and cluster analysis permitted us to organize the observed word-associations, their relationships with our predicted variables and to figure them graphically.

Figure 1: Results of the multiple correspondence analysis and of the associated hierarchical cluster analysis on “Euro-free associations”
Here, the essential is the idea that in multiple correspondence analysis, like the meaning of a word revealed by its context - and for us its psychological context - the meaning of a social representation content or a psychological factor will appear through its associations as shown by this analysis. However we only have a description about these relationships. Also in an attempt to investigate the role of the variables individualized here as plausible predictors of student’s related attitude towards the Euro, and in order to find how well they predict attitude, a linear statistical regression analysis was performed.

- Feelings and "stress-process variables" as predictors of psychological attitudes to the Euro

The backward method was employed in search of the best model among the predictors individualized by the above descriptive procedure. Decisions on inclusion or exclusion of these predictors were based on the significance of the F-values; variables had to fulfill criteria of p=.01 to be included in the regression equation. The following variables were included in the initial regression model: Stakes, Positive Emotions, “Eustress”, Agreeable Event, Winning, “Felling Informed”, Lost, Disagreeable Event, “Distress” and Negative Emotions. The results of this regression model are given in the table 1. The best set of predictors of the Ss attitude towards Euro produced by this analysis included altogether 6 of the above 10 predicted variables and the adjusted coefficient of determination for the final regression model is .444.

Table 1. Results of backward statistical regression analysis on predictors of Attitude towards the Euro.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t-value</th>
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<th>r</th>
<th>Partial correlation</th>
<th>T</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>(2.619)</td>
<td>8.026</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stakes</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>4.180</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.410</td>
<td>.230</td>
<td>.835</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disagreeable Event</td>
<td>-.140</td>
<td>-2.450</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>-.512</td>
<td>-.137</td>
<td>.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeable Event</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>3.473</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.523</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotions</td>
<td>-.141</td>
<td>-2.662</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>-.470</td>
<td>-.149</td>
<td>.622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>2.966</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress</td>
<td>-.189</td>
<td>3.921</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.392</td>
<td>-.222</td>
<td>.796</td>
</tr>
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Model statistics

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-square</td>
<td>.444</td>
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<tr>
<td>F-test and significance</td>
<td>43.543</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inspection of the Beta-coefficients and of the partial correlations in table 1 show that some stress-processing factors and feeling contributed significantly to the prediction of attitude and could explain 45% of its variance. The remaining 55% of variance would be an effect of unconsidered factors, but influential factors linked to Ss’ experiences, for example.

These results suggest that Ss attitudes towards the Euro are shaped by the perceived stakes in the situation (i.e. something to gain or to lose), by the evaluations of the event in terms of changing the state of economic affairs and/or the way to behave or to cope with this change (i.e. the change of currency was agreeable or disagreeable…) and its repercussion on the individual well-being that can be seen by the Ss as a threat (and in this case, they experience some distress) and also, by the general feelings they still experience and/or they had experienced when they faced and formed their representations of the change of currency. These finding show that both the changes associated with events and the valence of the event (positive or negative) are predictive of people’s attitudes.A transactional model states that adaptation following stress is a function of the cognitive appraisals and coping strategies employed. This model has been used as a theoretical basis for examining the importance of the some episode stress variables in predicting attitude, but also in predicting the adaptation of people when they have to cope with a change.

Conclusion

The whirl of transaction processes has been chosen as a theoretical background to study the links between social representation and attitude. Theories that separate conation, cognition, context of realizations and emotion seem to be non-adapted in understanding the relationships between representations of an individual and his/her attitude (Banchs, 1996). Some aspects of the transactional process have been operationalized in this study.

Also, in the literature, a number of interesting relationships among appraisals, feelings, representations, attitudes and behaviours were found (Muller-Peters, 1998), but what is a typical sequence of this process: appraisal-representation-attitude or some other sequences?
Event representation and emotional feelings may play a key role in the process through which exposure to a relevant social object results in shaping attitudes towards it. Emotional expression may arise from cognitive processes, related to an appraisal of the significance of an event for one's well-being. Therefore, emotional behaviors are described as the result of a serial process, involving successively the perception of the situation, the cognitive appraisal, an internal subjective affective state and the expression of the emotion at a behavioural/physiological level. This problem is complex, and we do not yet know the sequence of the transactional process between representation and attitude. That we do know is that social representation and attitude formation is a dynamic process with strong synergistic components (Rouquette, 1995), and this study has shown that among the candidates in the role of components, some of them would have been conatives.

What is certain is the need for articulating the intra- and the inter-individual dynamics when investigating the way people are going to cope with a new relevant social object. For this reason, this transactional and pluritheoretical conception illustrates the kind of problems that social psychology could study within social changes, in its fundamental aspect and/or in its application to concrete problems such as setting the European currency in people’s thoughts and actions.

References