

Methodological techniques for studying social representations

التقنيات المنهجية لدراسة التمثيلات الاجتماعية

¹ Linda Boualleg, Nassira Brahma²¹ PhD student, University of Jijel 18000 Jijel, Laboratory of psychology, education and societal issues, linda.boualleg@univ-jijel.dz² Professor Lecturer-A-, University of Jijel 18000 Jijel, nassirabrahma@univ-jijel.dz

Received: 06-07-2024

Accepted: 01-10-2024

Abstract:

Through this article, we discuss the methodological methods used in studying the structural approach to social representations. Since the initial formulation of the theory of social representations, researchers in this field have focused on how individuals perceive their social environment and everything related to it, and the way in which individuals share a set of attitudes and beliefs that have been produced. From the social construction of reality in light of the values, ideologies, social characteristics and lived experiences that lead to building a common perception of the world, and to knowing the systems of opinions, knowledge and beliefs of a sect, social group or group in relation to social life, researchers have developed a set of special methodological tools that reveal the structure and content Social representations.

Keywords: methodological techniques, social representations, structure of representations, interrogative methods, advocacy roads.

ملخص:

نتناول من خلال هذه المقال الأساليب المنهجية المستخدمة في دراسة النهج الهيكلي للتمثيلات الاجتماعية، فمنذ الصياغة الأولية لنظرية التمثيلات الاجتماعية ركز الباحثون في هذا المجال على كيفية إدراك الأفراد لبيئتهم الاجتماعية وكل ما يتعلق بها، والطريقة التي يتشارك بها الأفراد مجموعة من المواقف والمعتقدات التي تم إنتاجها انطلاق من البناء الاجتماعي للواقع في ضوء القيم

والأيدولوجيات والخصائص الاجتماعية والتجارب المعاشة التي تؤدي إلى بناء تصور مشترك للعالم، ولمعرفة نظم الآراء والمعارف والمعتقدات الخاصة بطائفة أو فئة اجتماعية فيما يتعلق بالحياة الاجتماعية، فقد طور الباحثون مجموعة من الأدوات المنهجية الخاصة التي تكشف على بنية ومضمون التمثيلات الاجتماعية، بما في ذلك أساليب الاستفهام مثل المقابلة و الاستمارة التمييزية، والأساليب التداوية مثل الاستحضار التسلسلي، الشبكة الترابطية، وغيرها من الأدوات الأخرى المستخدمة في الكشف عن مضمون التمثيلات الاجتماعية.

كلمات مفتاحية: التقنيات المنهجية، التمثيلات الاجتماعية، بنية التمثيلات، الطرق الاستفهامية، الطرق التداوية.

Corresponding author: Linda Boualleg, lindaboualleg66@gmail.com

1. Introduction:

The study of social representations is considered an essential key to understanding the mental activities through which reality is reconstructed, understood, and given a special meaning, by focusing on different forms of behavior, social interactions, and different cultures within society. The importance of studying representations lies in the fact that they are a psychological and social product that works to embody attitudes and tendencies. Individuals and their tendencies towards the matters and issues that a person faces in his life, and this is clearly shown through their interaction with their social reality, as it is the juice of the individual's experiences and experiences in society, and a means of revealing the form, history, quality and nature of the positions that have been formed within society over time towards various topics, and therefore they developed this The approach to research on the topic of social representations is a set of special methodological tools and techniques that allow to reveal the structure, content and content of these representations.

Through this research, we will attempt to give a general picture of this concept and address the most important methodological techniques used in studying social representation.

2. Social representations :

The concept of social representations is one of the concepts that has gained importance in the field of social psychology in particular, in which social representations are defined as forms of practical thought directed towards communication, understanding and controlling the environment. Representation is a mental activity based on storing and organizing various knowledge and experiences derived from the social environment. , to reproduce them in the form of behaviors completely different from the form in which they were stored, which makes it a complex reaction mechanism or a simple retrieval process, as it combines the cognitive and social aspects, that is, an expression at the intersection between the cognitive structures that organize and produce behavior and the social background of behavior (Hadidi, 2021, p. 28)

Social representation is an organized set of information, positions, beliefs and trends about a subject, which is produced and crystallized socially, carrying all the values of the social and ideological system, and the history of the group that it adopts and which represents an essential part of its vision of the world. (Charbli & dharif, 2021)

Many researchers and scientists touched on the concept of social representations, each according to their orientations and backgrounds. Emile Durkheim considered them to be phenomena that have their causes and are causes of other phenomena in his saying, "They are phenomena that are distinguished from the rest of the natural phenomena by having special characteristics. They have causes and are in turn causes, and the production of representations does not It is due to some ideas that occupy the attention of individuals, but they are remnants of our past lives. They are acquired habits and prejudices, inclinations that move us without our awareness. They are everything that shaped our moral traits. (Durkheim E. , 1967)

Durkheim also distinguished between two types of representations: Collective representations and individual representations, as he believes that individual representations are based on feelings resulting from the interaction of brain cells, where these feelings combine to form individual representations, while collective representations are produced by mixing and unifying individual consciences, and emphasizing the role of social consciousness in shaping individual consciousness. Concluding with the fact that the vast majority of our opinions and inclinations are not of our own making, but rather come to us from outside. (Durkheim E. , 1977)

Methodological techniques for studying social representations

Social representation is also understood by Denise Jodelet as “a form of knowledge that is developed and shared socially, and has a practical goal that contributes to building a common reality among social groups. However, it is knowledge that differs from scientific knowledge and is called naive knowledge.” (Jodelet.D, 2003)

In his study of representations, Serge Moscovici (1925-2014) tried to achieve integration between the psychological and the social, considering that social representations are “a system of values, principles, and practices associated with certain things, whether aspects or dimensions of the social milieu that allow for the stability of the lives of individuals and groups, and also constitute a tool for guiding Our perception and construction of our responses”. (Moscovici, 1961, pp. 42-43)), Jean-Claude Abric (1941-2012) is considered one of the most prominent researchers in the field of social representations. His interest was focused on the structure and content of representations, and he believed that representation is a set of elements that have a relationship with each other, and these elements vary in their importance and strength. Some of them are considered fundamental and important in the formation of representation, and they serve as the basic elements in its management and organization, and work to stabilize it and give it meaning, while others are superficial and refer to secondary characteristics and qualities that appear in daily practices (Boujlal, 2001)) According to Abric, social representation “is a product or process of a particular mental activity, through which the individual reconstructs the reality he faces and gives it a special meaning.” (Abric, 1994, p. 23) .

To search for the structure and content of these representations, those interested in this field have proposed a set of special methodological techniques to reveal the meanings of the latter.

3. Methodological techniques for studying social representations:

The methods and techniques that have helped researchers study various social problems through social representations are many and varied, but they fall within two comprehensive models, according to Abric, which are the interrogative methods and the invocative or collegial methods.

3.1 Interrogative methods:

These methods are based on collecting expressions collected from the study population, and these expressions may be verbal or pictorial, and verbal expressions were among the most common techniques.

Verbal method: It includes both the interview and the questionnaire, and both of them embody the first methodological techniques.

3.1.1 The interview:

The interview is one of the qualitative research methods that is based on establishing a dialogue between the researcher and the researched. It includes asking respondents a set of questions and collecting data on the topic. It is one of the techniques used in studying social representations, especially the semi-directed interview, in which the respondent is invited to explain what is inside him spontaneously. Within the framework of the research content, by answering a set of verbal questions posed by the researcher, where the representations appear through the existing conversation between the researcher and the researched, and this allows access to the content of the representations. But the interview reflects an aspect of the researcher's subjectivity in the individual's orientations, so the researcher must use other techniques in order to control and compare the information collected, deepen it, and become familiar with all the research data. (Abric J, 2003)

3.1.2 The questionnaire:

The questionnaire is a quantitative research method that helps explore problems and solutions in a direct, descriptive way. It consists of a set of written questions that the researcher prepares in advance, and then distributes them to the respondents to answer them. It is one of the most common techniques in studying representations in order to collect quantitative information, and despite Criticisms include cognitive limitations. This technique allows collecting the content of representations, by referring to their context and their relationship to the social practices used by the group. The organization of answers is also used to clarify the factors that organize the representations. Accordingly, in the process of studying representations, we try to develop a number of questions that serve the content of the representations. The questionnaire was used to study social representations in a special form and in a different format (the discriminatory questionnaire).

1.2.1 Discriminatory form (characteristics form):

The characteristics form was introduced into the study of social representations by Flament (1987). It is a set of items revolving around the subject of the study. It is applied by proposing a list of items whose number is a multiple of 3, ranging from 6-9 up to 15 items. We ask The respondent chooses three items that are considered to him to be more specific or

distinctive to the topic under study, by putting a (+) sign, and then chooses from among the remaining items that are considered less distinctive to the topic by putting a (-) sign. Then each item is marked with a number (-). 1) In front of the item that was chosen as the least discriminating, number (2) for the item that was not chosen, and number (3) for the most discriminating item. By distributing the sample members' answers to each item, we have the possibility of three forms of curves appearing:

1. J-shaped curve: It represents the profile of the central items, and indicates the items that were largely selected as the most distinctive.

2. A bell-shaped curve (Gauss curve shape) that expresses the peripheral elements that have an average expression in relation to the subject's distinction.

3. A curve that takes the shape of the letter (U): It concerns the elements that were not chosen, and it expresses that this element that was not chosen expresses very contradictory opinions among the research sample. In this type of curve, attention is drawn to the possibility of the existence of two groups that specifically conflict. On the centrality of this element. (Abric J, 2003)

3.2 Pictures and drawings method: It is based on individuals' verbal expression based on pictures or drawings. It is used in the event that individuals are unable to express themselves spontaneously and verbally. It organizes:

3.2.1 Induction cards (inductive plates and plates): This technique is inspired by projective approaches and methods in psychology (TAT), which are drawings that the researcher draws and presents to the respondents, asking them to freely express what they see, and explain what they see? What is their comment on that topic...?, and this process represents a kind In semi-directed interviews, respondents are not stimulated verbally but through graphic stimulation. (Noura, 2007, p. 58)

3.2.2 Graphics and graphic supports (linear supports):

This method relies on the production of drawings and data by respondents on a specific topic. These drawings reflect their representations about the subject studied, and this technique goes through three stages:

1. The respondents are asked to produce a drawing or a series of drawings on the topic studied.

2. The respondents' verbal expression about these drawings.

3. Quantitative analysis of the elements that make up the graph.

The benefit of this analysis is to contribute to conveying easily the organizing elements of production with a meaning to the central meaning of

the productive representation, in addition to allowing the clarification of the components that make up the representation. In reality, these drawings are not a collection of elements, but rather a clear and organized group around the central elements or meanings, as they allow the content to be revealed. And forming hypotheses about the central elements of representation. (Nasira, 2011-2012, p. 64)

3.2.3 Monographic entrance:

A method derived from anthropological methods, which is a long and complex method compared to previous methods, as it allows collecting the content of social representation by referring to its context and studying its relationships with social practice. This method relies on several techniques that allow several levels of analysis to be performed:

1. **Anthographic techniques:** by gradually penetrating the environment to be studied, through participant observation.

2. **Sociological studies:** provide statistical knowledge of the study communities and their distribution according to studied parameters.

3. **Historical analysis:** By analyzing the contents, stories, narratives about the history of a country, analyzing local folk customs and traditions.

4. **Psychosocial techniques:** These include in-depth interviews and direct observations of behaviors and interactions. (Nasira, 2011-2012, p. 65)

3.3 Associative methods:

3.3.1 Free association:

This technique is based on oral presentation. It is based on a request from the individual through a prompt or a series of words, and for the individual to present all the words and phrases that come to his mind. The projective dimension of this method allows for greater ease and speed in addressing the elements of the subject of study, better than an interview.

Abric believes that this technique has previously been used by researchers in the field of psychoanalysis as a means of accessing the subconscious world, as they consider that the group of collapsing words is the core of the individual's subconscious, and the method of free association in social representations depends on a collapsing word and starting from it, the individual is asked to produce Another word or group of words or expressions that comes to mind. It is characterized by spontaneity and speed. This feature allows the researcher to identify the implicit or hidden factors surrounding the representation of the subject of the study. In this way, the researcher is able to access the content of the representations, and this technique is considered a base for the rest of the other techniques. (Abric, 1994).

3.3.2 Association Cards (Association Map):

This method is inspired by the mind map technique developed by H. Jaoui (1976), and comes as a second stage of free association, as it goes through two stages:

- An initial stage during which free associations are produced from the prompt.
- A second stage in which the respondent is asked to form a series of associations in the form of pairs of words, starting from the first stimulus word. (Maach Y & Kouira, 2002)

After the individual is asked to produce a series of associations through a pair of vocabulary words (the association word and the productive word), the individual thus produces binary associations. Example: Nurse's job. Suppose the individual is given the following words: treatment, relationship, task, then we ask him to link each pair once. Other, we take the example of "the nurse's job - the therapist", "the nurse's job - the task". Then, in each trilogy, a new word is added until we obtain a chain consisting of four elements. This method can develop until we obtain chains with five or six elements. Studies have shown that the process rarely exceeds three series. (Khrof, Soleiman, & Ismail, 2007).

3.3.3 Serial evocation method:

It is a modern technique in studying social representations, inspired by the work of researcher Vergès in 1992, who proposed the beginning of the free association method, taking into account two points: word repetition and the order of its appearance. It is applied in two stages:

1. **Free association:** At this stage, it penetrates into the core structure of social representations of a subject, and reliance is placed on a word that serves as a starting point for the association of ideas. Through this word, we ask the subject to produce all the words and phrases that come to his mind in an automatic and less controlled manner.
2. **The sequential or ordinal stage:** After the respondent creates the association and presents the ideas in the form of vocabulary, he is asked to arrange the vocabulary according to importance, and after collecting the association vocabulary, we obtain two elements: the number of recurrence of appearance, and the strength of the order of importance that the respondent gave to the vocabulary or phrases, and based on that The central elements can be determined by the strength of frequency of appearance and the strength of the order of importance, and

through the intersection between them we can initially judge the central elements that make up the representation. (Abric J, 2003, pp. 63-64).

3. **Analysis:** This stage relies on tabulating the words and phrases obtained through the previous two stages. The data and answers of the respondents are collected under common words and phrases that carry the same meaning. After obtaining a set of vocabulary and phrases, we calculate the frequency of items and the importance given to each item. Then we cross-reference the collected information into simple tables, which are as follows:

Table1: The table represents how to analyze the serial evocation technique.

	Strong importance	Weak importance
Strong repetition	Box1 Core area (Central eus) The basic presentation of the topic	Box2 Peripheral area1(First peripheral elements)
Poor repeatabili	Box3 Contrasting elements	Box4 Peripheral area2(Second peripheral elements)

The first box: It includes the most frequent or most important elements. This area is considered the central core area, and these elements carry all the important meanings of the representations, but the central elements in this box are not necessarily central, rather the central core is present within it.

The second box: We find in it the most important peripheral elements, which we call the primary peripheral elements, which are the group of elements that surround the central core.

The third box: This is the area of contradictory elements, where we find some words that are related only by some cases, that is, they have low frequency, but they give them high values or degrees of importance, that is,

they consider them extremely important, and this formation can reveal the presence of a minority subgroup with Different representation, the central core may consist of the elements in this cell (we can call it secondary or semi-central cores), in addition to the central core specified in the first cell, and we can also find primary peripheral elements.

The fourth box: This is the second peripheral elements area and includes the elements of least importance and least frequency in the field of social representations. (Abric J, 2003, p. 64)

3.3.4 Interconnected network techno:

It is one of the techniques adopted in the study of social representations. It was developed and designed by researcher Rosa de Silvana Maria Anna in 1995, and aims primarily to determine the structure and content, indicators of polarity, neutrality, and stereotyping in the field of meanings associated with social representation. This technique works to identify some concepts and estimates associated with a specific representation or group of representations of related topics with a specific form.

This technique is applied starting from an exciting word in the middle of the paper, then the subject is asked to write the words and phrases that come to his mind when reading the word in the middle of the paper (the word association), then he is asked to arrange the words he mentioned from important to least important, and then... The positive, negative and neutral in these words are determined by putting (+.-.0) in order. Connections can be made with arrows between words that have the same meaning.

The network data is corrected by dividing the individuals' responses into categories according to the common meaning between them. Then we find the importance of each category according to what was presented by the cases participating in the study, and we also calculate the ranking of each category, all of this according to the laws known to users of the free association network .(Tashma & Amin Oqba, 2018, p. 88).

4. Conclusion:

The concept of social representations has become very important in the field of social and psychological research. Despite its novelty, today we see increasing interest in it day after day in various research fields, because this has become helpful in knowing the cultural and social backgrounds prevailing in any society and in any context, and this is thanks to... Its constructive nature of the topics, the characteristics it carries, and the features and accuracy it enjoys in its content and construction, is a broad field of research and a means of revealing various social interactions.

Through it, many topics that were difficult to study were addressed. Thanks to its flexible methodological tools and techniques, researchers were able to reveal Many social topics are understood and controlled.

5.List of references:

Abric J, C. (2003). *Méthodes d'études des représentations sociales*. Ramon: ERES.

Abric, J. C. (1994). *Pratiques sociales et représentations*. paris: puf.

Boujlal, K. (2001). The nature of first and second stage teachers' perception of the phenomenon of mistreatment(Master Thesis). College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Constantine: Mentouri University.

Charbli, E., & dharif, A. (2021). Social representations of digital identity across new communication media. *Al-Resala Journa for Humanitarian Studies and Research, Volume6, Issue4*, 171-180.

Durkheim, E. (1967). *Sociologie et philosophie*. paris: presses universitaire de francs.

Durkheim, E. (1977). Rules of method in sociology. Alexandria, Egypt: University Knowledge House.

Hadidi, M. (2021). From social perceptions to the theory of the central nucleus by Jean-Claude Abric. *Ldeas and Horizons Magazine Volume9, Issue1.*, 27- 42.

Jodelet.D. (2003). *les représentation sociales, un domaine en expansion*. paris: presses Universitaires de france.

Khrof, H., Soleiman, B., & Ismail, Q. (2007). *Value system and social perceptions*. Constantine: Dar Al Anis.

Moscovici, S. (1961). *La psychanalyse son image et son public*. paris: puf.

Nasira, K. (2011-2012). Social parceptions of the role of school among juvenile delinquents(Doctoral thesis). College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Constantine: Mentori Fraternity University.

Noura, A. (2007). Social representations of symbolic violence through graffiti (Master Thesis). College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Constantine: Mentori Fraternity University.

Tashma, R., & Amin Oqba, H. (2018). Social representations of motor disability among parents. *Journal of Social Studies and Research, Issue26*, 82-94.