
The social representation of catering: A study comparing French professionals who have or have not undergone retraining

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ejht.2013/vol11n1116>

Published March 19 2023

Citation: Gaymarda S. and Hattona C. (2023) The social representation of catering: A study comparing French professionals who have or have not undergone retraining, *European Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol.11, No.1, pp., 1-16

ABSTRACT: *The catering industry sector has been strongly affected by the health crisis, explaining an important turnover since the first lockdown. We have used the Theory of Social Representations (TSR) in order to illustrate the meaning given to the "catering" object, and to understand the position of professionals. Two groups of 30 professionals from the catering sector were compared with the particularity of having or not having undergone retraining. The protocol is based on face-to-face interviews and the use of a mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative). Results show both with qualitative and quantitative methodology that it is not the same social representation. This illustrates the impact of practices on the meaning given to the object and the impact of the health crisis.*

KEYWORDS: Social representations; catering industry; retraining; COVID-19; free associations; characterization questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION

The problem in France

At a time when many sectors of activity are experiencing significant labor and recruitment shortages in connection with the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, many questions arise concerning their future, particularly for the sector of the hotel and catering industry. As of December 31, 2016, according to statistics from the employment center (Pôle Emploi, 2017), 1,003,300 employees worked in this sector in France, which represented approximately 5.6% of salaried employment. Due to the global pandemic and numerous successive lockdowns, today this sector is experiencing multiple difficulties in recruiting staff, which is becoming a national or even global problem in terms of jobs.

In 2020, during the first lockdown¹, mass catering was particularly affected by the COVID-19 health crisis. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, “turnover was down by –40% in May compared with January” and “The reopening of the school catering

¹ In France, the first lockdown took place from March 16 to May 10, 2020.

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development -UK market was not enough to boost overall business (−24% in September)². These difficulties resulted in many constraints, which subsequently led to closures, retraining, and recruitment difficulties. The study of Barry et al. (2021) highlights the difficulty of recruitment concerning the hiring of new employees with half the number of applicants compared to previous years (436,000 applicants in 2019 compared to 213,000 applicants in 2020 and 2021).

Occupational mobility is described as professional development that leads to a change of position for the employee (Arnoult-Nicolas, 2016). Occupational mobility can be upward or downward, depending on whether the individual moves to a promotion, a higher-status occupation, or vice versa³. There are two types of mobility: internal and external. Internal mobility is characterized by a change of position within the same company to which the employee belongs, while external mobility involves changing employers. This can result in training, a change of sector of activity, a grade, etc. For Maillot (2012, p.2, our translation), occupational mobility is "an experience of change involving making adjustments between what one knows and what one encounters, taking risks in relation to a goal." According to Haumont et al. (2015), occupational mobility can be considered a life event. This event has an evolving and mobile character over time, which depends on the various life events encountered by the individual (Bernaud et al., 2015, p.9). The engagement on the part of the individual in activity can modify and thus disturb the construction of the life of the individual in its entirety; for example, on employment, his domiciliation, etc. According to a study by Swaen et al. (2002), occupational mobility would produce positive effects on job satisfaction and commitment. However, a study by Brett (1982) contradicts this study because it shows that employees who are said to be "mobile" in terms of work would find their work less interesting compared to individuals who have a job that is considered "stable". In addition, some authors distinguish between so-called "physical" mobility and so-called "psychological" mobility. Sullivan and Arthur (2006) describe physical mobility as a transition between different jobs and different sectors of activity. Psychological mobility translates more to the individual's ability to make this transition. Finally, the last forms of mobility are voluntary mobility, which is chosen by the individual, and non-voluntary mobility, which is suffered and constrained by the individual. In its original design, retraining concerns "those who permanently lose their jobs as a result of structural transformations and regional shifts in the economy"³. This definition suggests that retraining is necessarily undergone but it can also be chosen.

The Theory of Social Representations (TSR)

The Theory of Social Representations (TSR) was developed by Moscovici (1961) and led to a multitude of research, above all in Europe (e.g., Abric, 1984; Allansdottir et al., 1993; Di Giacomo, 1980; Doise et al, 1993; Guimelli, 1998 ; Harré, 1984 ; Jahoda, 1988 ; Jaspars, 1986; Marková, 2000 ; Moscovici, 1981, 1984, 1988). A social representation (SR) brings together beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and feelings conveyed by a group toward a social object. In his seminal work, Moscovici (1961) demonstrated that the development of social representation

² <https://www.insee.fr/en/statistiques/5402747> (our translation)

³ <https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/Mor-Off/Occupational-Mobility-and-Retraining.html>

was based on two processes: anchoring and objectification. The anchoring process aims to "integrate the representation and its object into the pre-existing system of thought" (Moscovici, 1961, p., our translation). This process thus makes it possible to attach the representation to something familiar. Objectification is a process that makes it possible to make concrete what is not; this process will therefore transform a concept into an image and lead to the development of a new social representation : "This will promote the social identity of the group while integrating the world of social objects." (Gaymard, 2021, p. 72, our translation).

This form of specific knowledge is analyzed through discourse, and from the beginning, it was associated with practices. This explains why Moscovici (1961) defined the SR as "a preparation for action" in its function as a guide to behavior, but also "insofar as it remodels and reconstitutes the elements of the environment in which the behavior is to take place" (p. 47, our translation). The question of practices explains that the study of an SR object requires taking into account the "experience" of the group being studied; the SR does indeed express a particular relationship with the object. According to Jodelet (2003), social representations have a practical aim through environmental organizations. Then, they allow the orientation of the exchanges and behaviors of individuals within the same social group. Finally, they allow the establishment of a common reality for the same group of individuals. This "common sense knowledge" is distinguishable from scientific knowledge.

This theory paved the way for other currents, such as the central core theory (CCT) or structural approach, initiated by Abric (1976,1993) and Flament (1987). According to this approach, SR is organized around two entities: a central core (CC) and a periphery (P). The central core represents the consensus with non-negotiable éléments, while the periphery is conditional and linked to individual practices. While the central core generates meaning, the periphery protects it by absorbing contradictions. What happens in the periphery also makes it possible to identify subgroups or potential zones of change. Flament and Rouquette (2003) mention two minimum conditions for an object to be an object of SR. It must circulate in a recurring way in exchanges and conversations (what the authors call "sociocognitive salience"), and it must be linked to practices. According to the structural approach (CCT), to demonstrate that an object is indeed an SR object, it is necessary to highlight its structure: central core and periphery. The literature has thus revealed the existence of SR objects in domains as different as "work" or "unemployment" (Flament, 1994, 1996, 2003), "AIDS" (Joffe, 1995), "Human Rights" (Doise, 2002), or more recently, "suntanning" (Gaymard et al., 2019) or "COVID-19" (Páez & Pérez, 2020). For studying the objects, this approach advocates, as much as possible, a mixed methodology crossing qualitative and quantitative tools (e.g. Abric, 2003 ; Flament & Rouquette, 2003 ; Gaymard, 2021).

If the field of the catering industry has not yet given rise to a publication with this theoretical approach, research by Flament (1994) on the social representation of work has brought out elements that define professional activity. In a meta-analysis, he showed that this representation is organized around two elements that are quantitatively comparable: pay (or salary) and pleasure. But at a qualitative level, the difference appears since the "pay" aspect is essential, whereas the "pleasure" aspect is secondary.

Problem and hypotheses

The catering industry, already known for difficult working conditions, a lack of vocation, and a significant shortage of labor (Forté & Monchartre, 2013), has particularly suffered from the health crisis ; It appears that this crisis has raised awareness of the importance of change in the working conditions of catering professionals (Guivarch, 2021). According to a study by Barry et al. (2021), this crisis caused the loss of 237,000 employees in the hotel and restaurant industry. The reduction in these numbers is explained by the successive lockdowns which led the restaurants to close temporarily, even for some permanently. According to the statistical service of the Ministry of Labor, in one year, the workforce has gone from 1.309 million employees to 1.072 million⁴. These figures raise questions about what has become of these employees. Some of the employees in this sector have not changed their professional orientation, but another part has undergone professional mobility. The main reconversions are in the sales sector, trade, or as delivery drivers.

How does this situation translate into the field of social thinking? Because social representations are linked to practices and stances, this framework is used to understand the meaning of the “catering“ object according to the choices of professionals. Those who have not undergone retraining (group A) will be compared to those who have undergone retraining (group B).

H1 : It is hypothesized that social representation is different within groups.

H1.1 : There will be content reflecting a positive affect in the CC⁵ of group A.

H1.2 : The CC of group B will have a negative connotation.

H2 : The element “COVID-19“ will be a central element for the two groups.

H3 : The characterization questionnaire will show significant differences between the two groups.

H.3.1. Catering will be characterized positively among group A.

H.3.2. The item “unemployment“ will be part of the less characteristic items for the two groups.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Population

The survey was conducted among catering professionals who have or have not undergone retraining following the health crisis. Regarding the population of professionals who continue to work in the catering industry (group A), it is made up of 30 people (17 men and 13 women).

⁴<https://www.lesechos.fr/industrie-services/tourisme-transport/covid-1hotellerie-restauration-a-perdu-237000-employes-pendant-la-crise-sanitaire-1350230>

⁵ Central core

The average age is 32 years (SD=10.9). The population of professionals who have undergone retraining (group B) is also constituted of 30 people (19 men and 11 women). The average age is 33.4 (SD=7.9). The reconversion sectors are : construction (30%), industry (33.3%), medico-social (26.7%), and transport (10%).

Passation

Participants were recruited through social networks or a temp agency. The handover took place individually, face-to-face, in a public space determined beforehand with the participants so as not to disturb the subject in his activities and in his schedule.

Tools

The general structure of the questionnaire is composed of informed consent, social representation tools, and sociodemographic parts. After an exploratory phase, a mixed-method questionnaire was developed. This consists of a hierarchical free association test and a characterization questionnaire. For methodological reasons, the free associations' test must always be proposed at the beginning of the study because it appeals to spontaneous representation.

The free associations' test is a tool largely used in the field of study of SRs (e.g., Grize et al., 1987; Kay & Gaymard, 2020 ; Sarrica & Contarello, 2004). It enables accession to the semantic universe associated with each inductor (the object of SR). For this test, there are two methodologies : prototypical and hierarchical. We used the second, which is based on two steps: the production of associations and their classification. This classification can be obtained via different instructions; for example, Gaymard and Bordarie (2015) working on the neighborhood, asked to classify the words by rank of importance ; Nzaramba (2019) working on the risks, asked to classify the words by rank of worry.

In the first step, the instruction is the following: “ When you hear the word “catering”, what are the five words or expressions that come to mind?”

In the second step, the instruction is : “Rank these words depending on how important they are to you” (1 being the most important and 5 being the least important).

To have the connotation of the words quoted, we added a third step where respondents had to indicate if the words were for them positive (+), neutral (=), or negative (-).

The characterization questionnaire, which is another typical tool in the study of social representations (e.g., Castro et al., 2020 ; Gaymard et al., 2015), permits locating the themes by their greater or lesser proximity to the object studied (Vergès, 2001). This questionnaire is based on a system of blocked choice. It is composed of 9 items (Table 1) describing either a positive conception of catering (items 3, 6, 7, 9), either a negative conception (items 1, 2, 4, 8), or a positive and negative conception (item 5), since retraining can be considered negative or positive. The use of the characterization questionnaire requires the following stages to be respected: the professionals must first choose the 3 most characteristic items of the catering and then the 3 least characteristic items of the catering.

Table 1. The 9 items of the characterization questionnaire.

Item 1 : The catering industry is experiencing closures.

Item 2 : The catering industry has a tiring pace.

Item 3 : The catering industry is a passion.

Item 4 : The catering industry is experiencing unemployment.

Item 5 : The catering industry has prompted retraining

Item 6 : The catering industry requires flexibility

Item 7 : The catering industry allows you to have a good time.

Item 8 : The catering industry has experienced difficulties related to COVID-19.

Item 9 : The catering industry requires professionalism and know-how

Analytical strategies

The hierarchical method of analysis of social representations (free associations) cross-checks the frequency (high or low) and the average rank of importance in order to determine the central and peripheral contents of the representation (Vergès, 1992, 2001). According to this method, the central elements and the first periphery will be prioritized in the interpretation. The elements of the second periphery, because they are infrequent and in the last ranks of importance, have a limited weight (although they can provide arguments when studying a transformation of social representation).

Concerning the characterization questionnaire, the 3 items most characteristic of catering are coded +1; the 3 least characteristic items are coded -1. Those items not chosen are coded "0". The data has been re-coded according to a usual procedure: 1 (-1) ; 2 (0) ; 3 (+1) (e.g., Gaymard & Lucet, 2017). We used Mann-Whitney's U test to bring to light the differences in rank between the two groups. For samples greater than 20, the sampling distribution of the U statistics tends to a normal distribution (Siegel, 1956) and, as a result, the U statistics are accompanied by a z value (value of the standard distribution), and its respective p-value. We will rely on the item average for interpretation.

RESULTS

Free association test

Professionals who have not undergone retraining (group A)

In this group, 148 words were collected, an average of 4.93 per person; the average rank is just below 2.5. High frequency was considered for a word cited more than 10 times ; the choice of thresholds depends on several criteria, such as the size of the groups and the number of words quoted (see for more details, Gaymard & Bordarie, 2015).

The results show (table 2) that SR is structured around a central core with 3 elements, including 2 evaluated positively: passion, COVID-19, and share. For this group, we can say that the first periphery is more negative, with the exception of the term “social link”. Of the 148 words collected, 76 (51.4%) were rated positively and 72 (48.6%) negatively.

Table 2. The social representation of catering among professional who have not undergone retraining (group A)

| | | First rank <2.5 | | Last rank ≥2.5 | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------------------|------|-------------------------|----|------|
| | | Central words | | First periphery | | |
| High Frequency ≥10 | Passion | 24* | 2.48 | Schedules | 16 | 4.06 |
| | COVID-19 | 23 | 1.91 | Social link | 12 | 3.75 |
| | Share | 14 | 2.43 | | | |
| | | First periphery | | Second periphery | | |
| Low Frequency <10 | Constraints | 9 | 2.48 | Salary | 8 | 3.75 |
| | Closures | 5 | 2.49 | Weekend | 7 | 3.9 |
| | | | | Fatigue | 7 | 3.4 |
| | | | | Know how | 5 | 3.6 |
| | | | | Gluttony | 5 | 3.2 |
| | | | | Staff shortage | 4 | 4.25 |
| | | | | Rhythm | 2 | 4 |
| | | | | Family | 2 | 2.50 |

* Absolute value

Professionals who have undergone retraining (group B)

In this group, 145 words were collected, an average of 4.83 per person; we kept the same thresholds as for group A.

The results show (table 3) that SR is structured around a central core with 2 elements: COVID-19 and retraining. These two elements have always been evaluated negatively, so the central core of this group is more negative. By observing the content of the periphery, we see that it is also negative. Of the 145 words collected, 30 (20.7%) were rated positively and 115 (79.3%) negatively.

Table 2. The social representation of catering among professional who have not undergone retraining (group A)

| | | First rank <2.5 | | Last rank ≥2.5 | |
|-----------|-------------|------------------------|------|-------------------------|----|
| | | Central words | | First periphery | |
| High | Passion | 24 | 2.48 | Schedules | 16 |
| Frequency | COVID-19 | 23 | 1.91 | Social link | 12 |
| ≥10 | Share | 14 | 2.43 | | |
| | | First periphery | | Second periphery | |
| | Constraints | 9 | 2.48 | Salary | 8 |
| | Closures | 5 | 2.49 | Weekend | 7 |
| Low | | | | Fatigue | 7 |
| Frequency | | | | Know how | 5 |
| <10 | | | | Gluttony | 5 |
| | | | | Staff shortage | 4 |
| | | | | Rhythm | 2 |
| | | | | Family | 2 |

The characterization questionnaire

The results show that for group A, the 3 most characteristic items of catering (the 3 highest averages) are "passion" (item 3), "difficulties linked to COVID-19" (item 8), and "a tiring pace" (item 2). For group B, the items "difficulties linked to COVID-19", "retraining" (item 5), "a tiring pace" and "closures" (item 1) are the most characteristic. The 3 least characteristic items for group A are "unemployment" (item 4), "closures" and "retraining", while those for group B are "unemployment", "professionalism and know-how" (9), and "to have a good time" (item 7) (Table 4). The results of the Mann-Whitney's U test highlight five significant differences between the groups: "closures", "passion", "retraining", "to have a good time", "professionalism and know-how".

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the characterization questionnaire.

| Items (see Table 1) | Sample average | | Standard deviation | | Median | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|--------|---|
| | A ^a | B | A | B | A | B |
| 1 | 1,367 ^b | 2,533 | 0.556 | 0.681 | 1 | 3 |
| 2 | 2,533 | 2,533 | 0.628 | 0.571 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | 2.800 | 1.70 | 0.484 | 0.595 | 3 | 2 |
| 4 | 1.033 | 1.033 | 0.182 | 0.182 | 1 | 1 |
| 5 | 1.733 | 2.766 | 0.583 | 0.430 | 2 | 3 |
| 6 | 1.966 | 2 | 0.614 | 0.262 | 2 | 2 |
| 7 | 1.966 | 1.333 | 0.718 | 0.479 | 2 | 1 |
| 8 | 2.566 | 2.833 | 0.773 | 0.461 | 3 | 3 |
| 9 | 1.833 | 1.266 | 0.791 | 0.583 | 2 | 1 |

^a A=who have not undergone retraining

^b 1=Uncharacteristic/ 3=Very characteristic

Table 5. Results of the Mann-Whitney's U test

| Items (see Table 1) | U | Z-score | p-value | Standardized effect size |
|------------------------|---------|----------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. | 113.500 | -5.283 | 1.271e-7 | Large (0.68) |
| 2. | 458 | 0.1278 | 0.8983 | Small (0.017) |
| 3. | 808.5 | 5.7133 | 1.108e-8 | Large (0.74) |
| 4. | 450 | -0.02377 | 0.981 | Small (0.0031) |
| 5. | 100 | -5.6015 | 2.125e-8 | Large (0.72) |
| 6. | 435.5 | -0.2879 | 0.7734 | Small (0.037) |
| 7. | 665 | 3.4921 | 0.0004792 | Medium (0.45) |
| 8. | 384 | -1.3889 | 0.1649 | Small (0.18) |
| 9. | 633 | 3.0844 | 0.002039 | Medium (0.4) |

DISCUSSION

In France, when the summer season came, we read the following online:

"Wages are at half mast, there is hardship, there are difficult hours, and more than 120,000 jobs are not finding takers. A look back at a sector in crisis that must absolutely reinvent itself to become attractive again. After lockdowns that wreaked havoc on their cash flow, restaurateurs really did not need a new crisis. This time, it is on the recruitment side that the problems arise. While there are still, according to INSEE, 3.75 million unemployed in France, restaurants are unable to recruit candidates. Many employees who stayed at home during lockdown have

simply decided not to return to work or have changed their vocation. The cause? Salaries, first, are considered too low by the candidates. " (Laclau, our translation)⁶

The results obtained with the use of a mixed methodology allow us to conclude that hypotheses have been globally confirmed. The analysis of free associations shows that the structure of social representation is different within groups (H1). According to the CCT, the constitution of the core must be strictly identical to consider that it is the same social representation. According to Abric (1987), the central core is: "Any element (or set of elements) that gives this representation its meaning and its coherence. In other words, the central core of a representation is the very foundation of the structure and the nature of the representation" (p. 68, our translation).

Several studies have dealt with the affective dimension of SR and its importance (e.g., Banchs, 1996; Gutiérrez, 2013; Höjjer, 2010). The interpretation of the discourse remains a problem in its collection. Whenever possible, it is preferable to ask respondents about the orientation (positive, negative, or neutral) of their answers. Thus, we observe in this study a difference in the connotation of the object, the catering being for group A rather positive and for group B rather negative. But it goes beyond the central core (H.1.1. & H.1.2.) and affects the SR as a whole. The professionals in group A positively evaluated the items given at 51.4%, compared to 20.7% for those in group B.

There are several studies on the social representation of work, and we see here the specificity of the "catering" activity. Whether with a standard population (Flament, 1996, 2003) or one with a disability (Gaymard, 2014b), salary (or earning money) remains a central element of representation. In the SR of catering and for the two groups, "salary" only appears in the second periphery, confirming the problem of salaries and/or the fact that we don't choose this profession for that⁷. Thus, for group A, the main motivation is based on a passionate conception of the profession and the pleasure that professionals experience. The "centrality" of this element contrasts here again with classic studies on the SR of work where the notion of pleasure is "peripheral" (Flament, 1994). With the element "passion", we observe the notions of "share" (CC) and "social link" (P) in the SR of group A, recalling the importance of human relations in this sector. Whyte developed research about the human structure of the restaurant and wrote, "It is a place where old friends meet, where new friendships are made, and where the foundations are laid for innumerable business transactions." (Whyte, 1948, p.6).

The elements "schedule" and "constraint" are shared by the two groups on the first periphery. The fact that group A cited this last term 9 times and group B cited it 28 times gives the latter a sense of saturation. In the second periphery, the items "rhythm", "weekend" and "family" are

⁶<https://www.la-clau.net/economie/emploi-pourquoi-la-restauration-peine-a-recruter-2-80254/>

⁷<https://www.la-clau.net/economie/emploi-pourquoi-la-restauration-peine-a-recruter-2-80254/>

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also shared by the two groups. Retraining professionals have chosen to change jobs, particularly following the pandemic. This change allows them to have a rhythm of life that they consider "standard" compared to their rhythm of work; indeed, we observe the specificity of the word "change" in their first periphery. This "stop" linked to the health crisis allowed them to question their professional future by highlighting all the negative points they found within the catering industry. The impact of the health crisis on the world of work is felt at different levels⁸, and all the consequences are not yet known. Concerning psychological factors linked to work and private life in general, several studies highlight that working conditions have deteriorated and that employees express mental health problems like stress and depression (Brooks et al., 2020; Gaymard et al., 2022; Koh & Goh, 2020; Rodríguez-Rey et al., 2020). In this context, we hypothesize that the element "COVID-19" will be a central element for the two groups. This central element is mentioned 23 times in group A and 29 times in group B; in fact, it is the most cited item in this last group.

The results of the characterization questionnaire confirm those obtained with the inductive or qualitative phase, and several significant differences are observed with the Mann-Whitney's U test t (H3). Descriptive statistics show that the most characteristic item of catering is, "passion" for group A (2.80), and "difficulties related to COVID-19" for group B (2.83). Thus, "passion", which was a central element for group A, remains decisive because it is the one that is chosen as the most characteristic of the object. This is even if the difficulties linked to COVID-19 and the tiring aspect of the activity come just after to define the object. Concerning group B, the fact that "difficulties related to COVID-19" appear as the most characteristic confirms its central position via the free associations. For professionals who have undergone retraining, these results show the decisive impact of the health crisis on their professional choices; by the way, the item "retraining" is the second most characteristic of the object. Finally, the third position is occupied by 2 items that obtain the same average: "a tiring pace" and "closures". As a result, what most clearly defines the object for group B is decidedly negative.

For the two groups, the least characteristic item of catering was "unemployment" (H.3.2.). This result is explained by the recruitment shortages experienced by this sector of activity. Hospitality businesses struggle to fill vacancies. The hospitality industry, with a reputation for working long hours for low pay, has experienced recruitment difficulties for a long time, and the pandemic has only made hospitality hiring more difficult. This sector had to transform during periods of lockdown by eliminating restaurant service and developing takeaway meals. Thus, the social dimension of the profession and the importance of interactions are among the aspects directly affected. An analysis of McKinsey & Company highlights the changes post-COVID-19: "Before COVID-19, the largest disruptions to work involved new technologies and growing trade links. COVID-19 has, for the first time, elevated the importance of the physical dimension of work⁹". They quantified the required proximity and they established scores

⁸ <https://www.oecd.org/employment/covid-19.htm>

⁹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19>

according to occupations. The sector "leisure and travel", with a score of 75 out of 100, occupies fourth place. In this study it was shown that the social bond was part of the central core of the representation of group A. It is, therefore, necessary to define social representation. Whyte's work (1948) attests to the importance of this dimension.

The results of the Mann-Whitney's U test highlight five significant differences between the groups: "closures" (item 1), "passion" (item 3), "retraining" (item 5), "to have a good time" (item 7), "professionalism and know-how" (item 9). So far we have discussed the specificity of the items "passion" (for group A) and "retraining" (for group B). The important difference reflects the essence and specificity of the social thinking of each group. Concerning the item "closures", much more characteristic of the object for group B, it is interesting to note a difference with the free association. Indeed, it only appeared in the second periphery of group B and in the first periphery of group A. The combination of these 2 tools has already shown that certain terms could stand out more with the characterization questionnaire. Certain "normative" aspects of social representation explain these differences (Gaymard, 2014a). The other differences reinforce the positive feeling of group A with regard to the object since it is associated with "a good time" and "professionalism and know-how". The latter shows that professionals in catering have a positive identity and are proud of their profession. Thus, this study highlights the link between SR and practices; the social representations serve to justify actions and positions (Abric, 1993).

The limits of this study relate to access to the population, in particular for professionals in retraining who found a job directly after their resignation. This difficulty of access also explains why we had to adapt to different locations (even if the collection was done face- to-face). The data collection context (public place) was also not suitable for collecting more personal elements. A comparative SR study requires a minimum of 20 people per group. Our numbers did not allow us to compare men with women in each group. This comparison would have been relevant in particular for aspects of professional life and private life.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to illustrate the SR of catering among two groups of French professionals who had or had not undergone retraining. This is the first study carried out with this theoretical framework. The methodological approach, both qualitative and quantitative, made it possible to illustrate the field of social thinking and its unbreakable link to the practices. Catering is an object of SR for professionals, but depending on their choices and practices it is an object with a positive or negative connotation. The COVID-19 present in the core of each representation attests to the impact of the pandemic on professional activity. Salary is only a "secondary" element of representation, and it is not certain that the improvement of this one is sufficient to mitigate the difficulties of hiring. Other levers that appear in the structure of group A, particularly around the passion and the social dimension, deserve to be explored further. These aspects could be examined in recruitment processes.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the temp agency for her help to find professionals.

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