

The development of scientific psychological publishing in Italy

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Abstract

In the last ten years, the question about the possibility of entering the psychological scientific information has come to the fore. We know that scientific psychological information about research has not been placed at all psychologists' disposal.

Today in Italy, in spite of this, the scientific and research activity has been carried out by a marginal segment of psychologists who mostly work in the Academic area, but an important part of professional psychologists devote themselves to research, above all in the clinical field. Researchers in Psychology publish an average of one article per year, almost always in the national language.

The CRUI (Italian Universities vice-chancellors Conference) has arranged an assessment parameter system for research taking into account the kind and place of editing, the score is from one to ten for editing in journals with a high Impact Factor, from one to twelve for books published both in Italy and abroad, from 0.1 to four for congress works, from 0.5 to five and from 0.2 to three for articles, included or excluded in the *Journal citation report*.

Key words: scientific communication; psychology; Italy; information dissemination; evaluation

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Nowadays we are confronted with a steady increase of psychological demand.

There is a growing presence of expert psychologists who through mass-media make clear the scientific psychological point of view in different social situations.

A proliferation of new monthly, periodical and quarterly national popular psychology magazines destined for the public can be found in newspaper stands.

Regarding our profession, there is a large spread of requests above all in the health-care field not only in the sectors of management and caretaking of people who suffer from acute or chronic pains, and not only for psychiatric disorders.

At present, there are fifty-three thousand psychologists who are members of the Psychology Association, and a little bit less are students attending the Psychology department, fifty nine are in specialist degree programs and thirty two are studying at the Universities in fifty-four three-year courses.

In the last ten years, the question about the possibility to enter the psychological scientific information has come to the fore.

We know that scientific psychological information about research has not been placed at all psychologists disposal. To tell the truth, a part of the professional scientific world has remained for a long time at the margins of the Academic scientific research and, partially it is still true, just because of the difficulty in submitting to publications produced by Academic niches.

On the other hand, there are opposing cases such as the birth of open archives, the movement for free software and the Linux phenomenon that have pointed out the benefits of the free circulation of the information and the cooperation among the Web scientific users.

Another remarkable event is the emergence of the Internet as a revolutionary vehicle for the transmission of scientific information.

Although, the outline of the psychology world at the beginning of the twenty-first century is very checkered, the importance is clear of the rising development of our profession in different fields such as health-care, traffic psychology, and emergency psychology, to give some examples.

It was not like this at the beginning of the last century, when the science of psychology had not yet rules and a social importance like today.

All this changed after the Second World War, also thanks to the decisive contribution of our American colleagues of APA, and during these last ten years more and more psychologists have been working; the same can be said about the wide number of researches, theoretic innovations and their applications.

Today in Italy, in spite of this, the scientific and research activity has been carried out by a marginal segment of psychologists who mostly work in the Academic area, but an important part of professional psychologists devote themselves to research, above all in clinical field.

Psychology is successful in our society as a scientific subject with complex knowledge and acts in different social and cultural contexts as clinical research, home and work environment, school and Institutions.

Psychological technique and technology are operating more and more in searching new applications useful for human needs interlacing demand and supply for psychological knowledge.

The Academic world and the professional reality are called to answer new needs and new emergencies generated by the complexity of the transformations that is almost demanded by modern life.

To separate didactics from profession, theory from practice, experimental research from clinical research means to give birth to a baby and not take the responsibility for bringing him up.

In front of such deep and radical transformations, the nature of psychological research has changed, the way of doing psychology has changed and therefore the scientific information has assumed a different role.

In days of Freud, scientific information was considered an addition to the activity of a scientist and the scientific discovery and diffusion easily were under his complete care.

Nowadays everything has changed: scientific information is no more under the revision of scientists, on the contrary, a scientific article, just finished and published, seems to assume autonomy of its own and becomes an independent product.

The fact is that scientific information has lost its original virginity, its value of pure knowledge of the real and perceived world; it cannot move in peace in the solitary Olympus of scientists but it is compelled to become visible and reproducible in the real world covered with meanings different from the original ones.

Scientific information can take on a role of a product and be exposed to the market laws. This employment of scientific information can develop in three different ways:

- 1) Directly: Scientific information can appear as a new element to prompt and is critical for the development of new technology (information systems and software) and new products (i.e. psychological tests); to invest itself with the same value of these objects and to be considered as a product. This is the case, in the medical field, of the attempt to privatize the decryption of the human genome.
- 2) Media: It becomes more and more evident that scientific psychological information gives the idea to the journalistic entertainment industry (from the kamikaze massacre to the incestuous father who had six babies with his own daughter) as the recent incredible fame of some television programs reserved for closer examination by “experienced scientific spreaders” shows.
- 3) Publishing: publishers have fully recognized the market value of the specialized journals (social-psychosomatic- clinical and neuropsychology) and books in psychology. It is just this publishing exploitation of scientific information that is mostly put forward because of the innovation introduced by the computer revolution.

The fact that a scientific work in the field of psychological is absorbed by the marketing area has been occurring since the fifties when psychological production has been able to produce products such as reviews, books, and psychodiagnostic tests, as well as intangible products such as scientific training. This is a proof of the maturity and degree of development reached by psychological research, and its applications are able to play a humble leading role in the wide circle of the world publishing scientific production.

Anyway, we cannot uncritically accept every manipulation and unconventional use of scientific psychological information only because it is “ennobled” by the market demand.

The psychologists and all who have psychological science at heart have the duty to keep their eyes open in order that, either the publishing of wild psychological books or the monopolization for private use of the scientific high-class production cannot damage or be an obstacle for research.

The example of scientific publishing

Every psychologist researcher should, like a scientist, inform the colleague belonging to the Scientific Community about the results of his own research above all through the articles published in journals. This rule goes back to the origins of scientific revolution but has assumed a new importance in the second half of the past century. It is based on the “peer review” that is the judgment of experienced colleagues who have to decide if the article should or should not be published.

Thanks to some editors, who have seen a chance to make a profit from this exchange of information and have invested in correct publishing instruments, the specialized journals have received great importance and social visibility.

A lot of specialized journals were published above all in the U.S.A and they were able to ensure the quality of the scientific information and the widespread distribution.

Some of these publishing houses became multinational as the Dutch Elsevier which has conquered a main position thanks to a long-term acquisition.

According to a report by the European Committee, the medium price for the publications of the scientific commercial publishers has gone up between 1975 and 1995 from three to a hundred percent compared to the rate of inflation.

Between 2001 and 2005 the increase exceeded 26% in the U.S.A and 29% in Europe.

While technological innovation allowed the publishers to charge the authors themselves for a part of the expenses, these publishers coming into the marketing logic forced up the prices so that scientific journals became an unendurable weight for the uncertain budget of Universities and Research Institutes.

If this has been a reality for the scientific production in general, it has been much more negative for the cutting of financial resources year after year in psychology.

At the beginning of the nineties, there was a reaction against the multinational Elsevier which has been the logical effect of the previous situation. Elsevier in 2001 bought Harcourt and consequently the trademark Academic Press and, at present, it publishes more than two-thousand scientific journals.

Wiley, one of the largest publishing houses that in 2006 published over two-thousand and four-hundred scientific journals, in last November bought the publishing house Blackwell for over eight-hundred and fifty million Euros that in 2005 published more than eight-hundred journals.

Springer Scientific+Business Media, owner of some historic trade marks in scientific publishing such as Kluwer (six-hundred and seventy five scientific journals among them the Italian backlist Ippsoa), Springer (more than seven-hundred journals) and Lippincott (specialized in medical field, with over seven-hundred journals) was born from the fusion of the Dutch Wolters Kluwer and the German Bertelsmann Springer. This fusion was taken by the two private equity British funds owners of the Companies.

Taylor & Francis, shareholder of the Informa Group, and Routledge trade-mark's owner, publish more than two-thousand journals.

Let's think about the heavy criticism on scientific publications in the medical fields. These publications are financed by the pharmaceutical multinationals and are accused of partiality in evaluation and certification.

Nevertheless, an unforeseen event has upset and is still upsetting the inelasticity of the market and, probably, this could have not happened without the advent of the Internet and the scientific innovations that have paved the way for further changes in scientific publishing.

The Italian publishing market in comparison with the international one presents a limited presence of the University Press, Academic Associations or Research Agencies that are financed by their own Institutions and that are able to operate under favorable market conditions.

The University Presses do not only publish works of their own researchers but they operate transversally involving the researchers of other Universities.

English-speaking nations have a well-established fame, i.e.: the Oxford University Press, The University Press of Cambridge, Yale, Harvard, Stanford, MIT

Internet and the revolution of scientific publishing

The development of the information systems has radically changed the market of the scientific publishing, converting almost 90% publications into electronic publishing and reorganizing the Academic libraries and the most important Research Institutes.

Researchers and applicative psychologists started to exchange information at close range by e-mail.

In a short time, also the practice to exchange articles on paper or by fax was replaced by exchanging these articles on files that are cheapest and more rapid.

Anyway, there was a problem due to the lack of selective filters. The problem was resolved by the centralization of arcs, portals, etc.

The successful idea of the electronic archives is to assemble all the abstracts on files divided into disciplines and sectors and make them available for scientific community.

Every researcher can e-mail his files to the archives so that the files are immediately networked and to be at the disposal to colleagues all over the world.

Whether to submit or to download files from some electronic libraries in the website is free of charge.

The electronic publishing has become a great success. Millions of documents collected are becoming usual work tools for every researcher, thanks to the rapidity, saving lots of time and money for the scientific Institutes.

An interesting example of scientific free offers in the Internet is the Cochrane library that offers bibliographical information about over four-hundred and seventy nine thousand controlled clinical studies in the health-care.

Unfortunately, the abstracts about psychology that are present in these archives are absolutely not enough in spite of their publication in psychology journals, this means that research psychologists are not yet able to develop scientific theories worthy of becoming part of the scientific EBM Olympus, even if an important percentage of psychologists work in the health-care field.

This is the Public Library of Science model, thanks to an initial assignment able to provide a very high marketing. The initiative which aims to give open access to all its products, intends to develop specialized electronic reviews above all in the biological science field. In that case, the authors of articles have to pay the publishing expenses. So, there are neither subscriptions nor open access. The international movement to open access publications is very active: the scientific portal Pleiadi with its principles, declared in Berlin

Declaration, has been signed by the majority of the Italian Universities with the Messina Declaration subscription. In this Declaration we read: “We, the underwriters, will face the Internet challenges as means of knowledge spreading. We believe that these developments will be important both for the scientific publications and for the existing scientific quality evaluation system.”

According to the Declaration of the Budapest Open Access Initiative, the ECHO Paper and the Bethesda Statement on the Open Access Publishing, the Berlin Declaration has been written to promote the Internet as a functional means for general scientific knowledge and human thought other than indicating the measures which should be taken into consideration by research experts, scientific institutions, sponsors, libraries and museums.

The electronic journals

Electronic journals have appeared afterwards. To first sight, *abstract files* could provide specialized scientific information spreading. However, the scientific results evaluation matter still remains open. The application of the principle that all articles have the same value would be the psychological science refusal. Psychologists’ work does not end when their works have been spread and published, no matter how reliable the sources are. Psychological scientific research should exist through clinical testing reproducibility, constant evaluation, survey and method reliability. This represents a critical point in our discipline.

The whole psychological research must be evaluated: the scientific work seriousness should be stressed this way. The Scientific Community has developed a scientific reviews filter to give an initial evaluation and choose the works, postponing the final judgment to further controls. That is why specialized reviews should adopt the *peer review* method: the author sends his/her article to some anonymous colleagues who are the *referees* and they decide whether the article is interesting or not, if it needs to be reviewed and if it can be published. Although this procedure cannot be completely correct, it is the only method available at the moment as we do not know a better one.

Electronic reviews, due to economic reasons, make editing faster and keep costs lower as far as the art director and printing are concerned.

Criticism exists concerning electronic reviews development due to resistance from the scientific community, still devoted to the paper format, and to the payments and subscriptions to reviews: new electronic reviews substitutes or supports traditional reviews so that to buy the new one we need to increase costs or give up traditional reviews. However, giving up paper format by Universities in Italy means a 20% increase in subscription cost.

There are about 50 scientific reviews of Psychology in Italy, edited by Scientific Societies or by small editors in the scientific market. The electronic journals, instead, are only a few. As to the paper reviews, their distribution are very limited, it goes from a few hundred to ten-thousand copies maximum.

To conclude

Among contradictory factors concerning scientific information spreading at the beginning of this century, the presence of the Internet seems to offer to the scientific world the opportunity

to partially control the scientific information. Researchers' works belong to the technical-scientific sectors rather than to Psychology. Researchers in Psychology publish an average of an article per year, almost always in the national language. In the mathematical, physical and natural sciences, engineering and architecture, the number of scientists who have never published anything abroad is not over 10%. The large demand of people with a degree in Psychology has increased the number of enrollments to Italian Universities.

The peculiarity of the researcher in psychology is represented by the key role given to the University professor in choosing the research topics and in the assessment of young scientists. The contribution of the Academic Psychology is still too much devoted to the symbolic and cultural rather than to the economical and social. This is an Italian peculiar limit: not to support applicative psychology sufficiently considering the large number of professional psychologists (there are over seven-thousand psychologists working as an executive manager in the health sector).

Maybe our Universities are still devoted to the misunderstanding of philosophical-humanistic psychology charged with ideal values: not to develop a technical-scientific culture applicable to the economic and social field is a big problem.

A bizarre destiny for the Italian research assessment.

A secret activity and surely snubbed until some time ago, it has become a central matter both for the need to have unique parameters to organize researchers' careers and for the need to have a systematic index of efficiency to grant economic funds.

The most important instrument is with no doubt the Impact Factor, a measure system which indicates the frequency an article has been quoted in a certain period of time.

Despite its diffusion, the Impact Factor is a rather questionable bibliometric instrument. Lots of authors quote for convenience and not for the credit assigned to a work; others develop quotation nets to favor members of school groups.

Similarly, the CRUI (Italian Universities vice-chancellors Conference) has arranged an assessment parameter system for the research considering the kind and place of editing, the score goes from 1 to 10 for editing in journals with a high Impact Factor, from 1 to 12 for books published both in Italy and abroad, from 0.1 to 4 for congress works, from 0.5 to 5 and from 0.2 to 3 for articles, included or not in the *Journal citation report*.

To know that 48% of psychologists in the world live in Europe and that in the Old Continent we concentrate on scientific production, research and professional activity, it makes us more responsible in being more actors of the European Psychology.

Co-operation and international exchange together with the free circulation of psychologists are increasing the standard of our profession. The need of training process and common standards to become professionals is now real.

In the meta-code preamble we read: "Psychologists develop a valid and reliable body of knowledge based on research and apply that knowledge to psychological processes and human behaviour in a variety of contexts. In doing so they perform many roles, within such fields as research, education, assessment, therapy, consultancy, and as expert witness to name a few."

The deep content of article no. 3 in the Ethical Code binds us even more to our scientific discipline: "The Psychologist considers his/her duty to improve his/her knowledge on human behaviour and uses it to promote the psychological well-being of people, groups and communities".