

## **RECENT TRENDS IN LIFESTYLE RESEARCH: A LITERATURE REVIEW PERSPECTIVE**

***Abstract.** The paper comprises a literature review on the occurrences of lifestyle in literature, on samples of academic publications. The importance of work-personal life balance increased in the last 20 years and this can be seen especially in the changing role of lifestyle. So we find it natural that lifestyle is a topic highly debated in literature. Still, given the all-roundness of the concept, some frequency disparities appear. The first results show that only few articles refer to lifestyle in Europe, analyzed from the point of view of social sciences. The remaining majority discusses lifestyle from life sciences perspectives, with a particular focus on health acceptations of the concept.*

**Keywords:** family studies, lifestyle, marketing, sociology

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## 1. Introduction

The symbolic threshold of 2000 reshaped the attitudes people held towards work-life balance (Duxbury, Dyke and Lam, 2000), making them wish of quality time outside work, as the *Workforce 2000* report of the Hudson Institute prophesied. Moreover, changes in socio-demographics, like the incremental number of lone-parent households (Duxbury and Higgins, 2001), contributed to the lifestyle transitions which became manifest in the late '90s. A growing sensation of insecurity (Lowe, 2000), giving raise to the “safety utopia” (Boutellier, 2004), as well as an increasing need for a convenient life, for satisfaction, in a world where money earning conflicts with time consumption, dominate the new, emerging, lifestyle pattern. This ego-specific (Funk, 2006) lifestyle suits the individuals who exhibit a strong desire for freedom being, at the same time, prone to affiliation (Rifkin, 2000). In the particular case of Europe (which undergoes a process of gradual expansion), lifestyle changes, related to migration (Jolly and Reeves, 2005), and fluctuating life standards, within a short period, add to macroscopic lifestyle transformations.

## 2. Methodology

Under these conditions, we find it natural that lifestyle is a topic highly debated in literature. Still, given the all-roundness of the concept, some frequency disparities appear. The SCOPUS database includes 32,539 research articles on lifestyle, published between 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2000, and 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2007. But only 158 articles – approximately 0.48% – out of these refer to lifestyle in Europe, analyzed from the point of view of social sciences. The remaining majority discusses lifestyle from life sciences perspectives, with a particular focus on health acceptations of the concept, as a dietary parameter, and a means to assess health risks (Stürmer, Hasselback and Anelang, 2006; Manheim, 2007).

Starting from this finding, we analyzed the articles on lifestyle contained in seven major research databases (EBSCO, Emerald Management Extra, Oxford Journals Online, PROQUEST, Sage Journals Online, SCOPUS, SpringerLink), in the aforementioned period, 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2000 and 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2007, after having excluded the repeated results. The relative frequency of the articles discussing, socio-economically, lifestyle in Europe is:

- 4.27% for Oxford Journals Online
- 11.66% for PROQUEST
- 12% for Springerlink
- 24% for Sage Journals Online
- 25.1% for EBSCO
- 27.76% for Emerald Management Extra.

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Based on these data, which reveal that examination of the European lifestyle from a social perspective forms less than one third – in the most socially specialized databases – of the total research papers dedicated to the topic, we set, from the 2010 publications included in the Social Sciences Citation Index, a main group of seventeen journals, and a control group of three journals, publishing in English, French and German. The main group includes leading journals in the fields of sociology and marketing, while the control group includes journals which were thought to be more specialized on behavioural, lifestyle aspects, in order for us to be able to contrast the general trends with the specific ones.

We examined exclusively research articles, leaving apart reviews, comments, viewpoints. The two groups of journals analysed are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1*

**Main and Control Group of Journals Included in the Analysis**

Main Group	Control Group
Acta Sociologica	Ageing & Society
Archives Européennes de Sociologie	European Journal of Marketing
Berliner Journal für Soziologie	Family Relations
Current Sociology	
Economy and Society	
European Sociological Review	
International Journal of Social Welfare	
Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour	
Journal of Consumer Research	
Journal of Leisure Research	
Journal of Marketing	
Journal of Social and Personal Relationships	
Journal of Sociology	
Marketing Science	
Population and Environment	
Psychology and Marketing	
Sociological Perspectives	

The conceptual map of the research areas and topics which are, very probably – to our previous knowledge – reflected in literature is illustrated by Table 2.

*Table 2*

**Current research agenda**

Research Areas	Research Themes
State, citizenship and institutions	Citizenship
	Constitution
	Country characteristics
	Norms
	Social system

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Research Areas	Research Themes
Migration	Demographic shifts
	Globalization
	Glocalization
	Immigration
	Localization
	Overpopulation
	Retirement migration
	Transitional migration
Identity and difference	Culture
	Ethnicity
	Individualization
	Self-awareness
	Self-esteem
	Social differentiation
	Terrorism
	Violence
Comparative studies	Cross-countries comparisons
	Between gender comparisons
	Intergenerational comparisons
	Urban-rural comparisons
Groups and society	Adoption
	Brotherhood
	Community
	Dating patterns
	Decline in fertility rate
	Division of household labour
	Dual career couples
	Empty/ Full-nest
	Family
	Friendship
	Grandparenthood
	Involvement
	Low income families
	Marriage
	Neighbours
	Parenthood
	Parents-children relationships
	Personal social network
	Social minorities
	Solidarity
Widowhood	
Working mothers	
Individual and collective values, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions	Alcohol consumption
	Age roles

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Research Areas	Research Themes
	Feminine ideal
	Gift giving
	Modes of thought
	Money meaning
	Music/ movie choice
	Playing sports
	Time value
	Vegetarianism
Welfare and consumer behaviour	Advertising
	Career
	Convenience
	Customer goods
	Customer orientation
	Earning
	Education
	Employment/ unemployment
	Gambling
	Homeless
	Inequality
	Loneliness
	Ownership
	Poverty
	Shopping
	Work-life balance
Ageing and generations	Adolescents
	Ageing
	Agelessness
	Children
	Intergenerational conflicts and influences
Ageing and generations	Long-term marriage
	Age labour market
	Social disability
	Early retirement
	Care giving
Future of the society	IT age
Methodological aspects	Conceptual tools

Using content analysis software, we determined the frequencies of lifestyle topics, grouped on journals, years, research areas and research themes.

### 3. Results

After having examined the chosen groups of journals, a content hierarchy resulted, in both the main and the control sample. The ranking of journals in the main and control groups, according to the frequency of articles discussing lifestyle from a European, socio-economic perspective, is presented in Table 3:

Table 3

**The Ranking of the Analyzed Journals**

	Journal	# of articles	% of articles
Main group	Current Sociology	29	13.67
	Psychology and Marketing	25	11.79
	Journal of Marketing	24	11.32
	Archives Européennes de Sociologie	21	9.9
	International Journal of Social Welfare	18	8.49
	Acta Sociologica	16	7.54
	Population and Environment	16	7.54
	European Sociological Review	12	5.66
	Berliner Journal für Soziologie	11	5.18
	Journal of Sociology	11	5.18
	Journal of Consumer Research	8	3.77
	Sociological Perspectives	7	3.3
	Economy and Society	6	2.83
	Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour	3	1.41
	Marketing Science	3	1.41
	Journal of Social and Personal Relationships	2	0.94
	Journal of Leisure Research	0	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>100</b>	
Control group	Ageing & Society	64	45.71
	European Journal of Marketing	45	32.14
	Family Relations	31	22.14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100</b>

The ranking of the first ten main research themes that we identified in the analysed sample of main group journals is presented in Table 4:

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*Table 4*

**First Ten Research Themes in the Main Group**

Research Themes	# of articles	% of articles
Customer orientation	12	5.66
Ethnicity	8	3.77
Community	5	2.35
Unemployment	5	2.35
Family	4	1.88
Poverty	4	1.88
Shopping	4	1.88
Age	3	1.41
Gender	3	1.41
Friendship	3	1.41

It can be seen from here that, due to the large number of identified themes and to the multivariate perspective of approaching lifestyle, the thematic clusters are quite narrow in scope, as far as the main group of journals is concerned. Still, the prevalence of customer orientation is visible, certifying the connection which is made, in literature, between lifestyle and marketing tools.

The corresponding leading ten research themes identified in the journals belonging to our control group are presented in Table 5:

*Table 5*

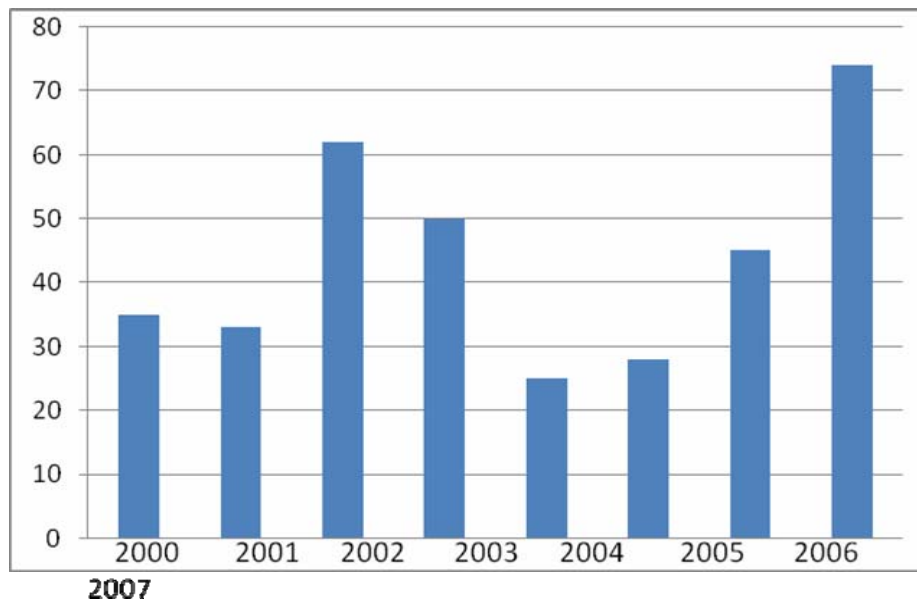
**First Ten Research Themes in the Control Group**

Research Themes	# of articles	% of articles
Customer orientation	11	7.85
Family	10	7.14
Age	9	6.42
Advertising	4	2.85
Globalization	3	2.14
Poverty	3	2.14
Ethnicity	2	1.42
Friendship	2	1.42
Neighbours	2	1.42
Religion	2	1.42

In the control group the clusters are, again, narrow. Their ranking may account for the main directions in defining and theorizing lifestyle. The prevalence of the marketing perspective is maintained in the control group as well, like in the main

group. With some exceptions, the proportion of the themes is similar, between the two groups. In the control group, the second position is held by *family*, and the third by *age*, illustrating the tendency which exists in literature to tie lifestyle, on the one hand, to social groups and, on the other, to generational groups. In order words, lifestyle is thought to vary following a relational and a time pattern.

The frequency distribution of the articles, both main group and control group, by year of publication, is presented in Figure 1:



**Figure 1. Frequency distribution by year**

The chart shows that the interest for lifestyle, in literature, exhibits a peak in 2002 (if we think at the regular academic journals metabolism, the articles published in 2002 seized the transformations which began to take place in 2000), then a regression, between 2003 and 2005, followed by a growth tendency, starting with 2006. The interest in lifestyle being consistent with the interest in fashion, advertising, etc. it is expectable that its evolution has seasonal ups and downs, following the major trends of the considered year.

According to the research methods used in the articles, the distribution, comparatively, in the main and control groups, is presented in Figure 2:



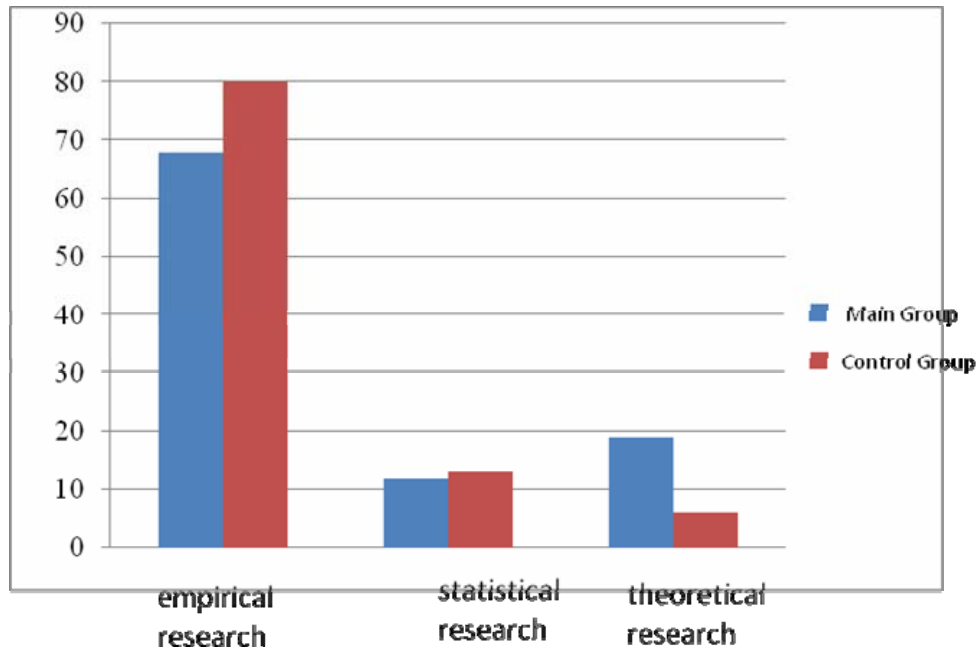


Figure 2. Research methods distribution

Articles in the journals forming the control group are less empirical and statistical than the ones in the main group, which may be explained by the tie existing, especially in the control group, between lifestyle and marketing. If lifestyle data are to be used in market research, then the articles' orientation towards quantitative techniques is a normal consequence.

#### 4. Conclusions

Between January 2000 and December 2007, lifestyle issues were debated in 352 articles, considered in our literature review. Out of these, 212 were found in a group of general sociology and marketing journals, which we designated as the main group, and 140 in a group of more specialized journals, which we designated as the control group. The pattern of distribution over years shows that the interest in lifestyle reached a peak value in 2002, when published literature actually reflected the matters which were in focus in 2000, and that the interest in this topic is currently growing. The mapping of the topics of interest shows a relative homogeneity between the main and the control group, with customer orientation in the leading position, echoed by sub-related topics as shopping and advertising, which certifies the influence of lifestyle studies on marketing studies. Another stream of research refers to family studies, regarding family as the closest social group which may shape a person's way of living. Next, lifestyle is related to generations, to ageing patterns, which may affect

it not only in terms of health capital, “hygiene” (eating, sleeping, etc.) behaviour, but also as far as changes in the social roles are involved. These are to be explored more in detail in a further research.

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