

Comparing French and English literature on family business research

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Introduction

Academic interest in family firms is relatively new and still trying to gain legitimacy (Craig et al., 2009). Despite family firms' long tradition of existence and their importance in many economies, it was only in the 1990s that family firm research has been recognized as a separate research field when the academic journal *Family Business Review* was initiated by the Family Firm Institute (USA) (Bird et al., 2002). In the following years, various publications have appeared, innovative research has been produced, new knowledge has been created, and the quality of research output has improved (Short et al., 2016). Nevertheless, family firm research is still young and emergent (Chrisman et al., 2005; Sharma, 2004). To develop the knowledge, academics have synthesized existing research efforts by reviewing the literature and mapping the past trends and future directions in this field both in the English (Xi et al., 2015) and French literature body (Allouche and Amann, 2000). Family firm research has gained a strong reputation, reinforced by associations, specific journals and conferences at the international, Anglophone level (Sharma et al., 2007). In this sense, focusing on the Anglophone literature base, Xi et al. (2015), identified 1,103 publications until March 2012. Concerning Francophone literature on family firms, Lorrain (2005) noted a quasi-disinterestedness of Francophone researchers and more precisely family-led SMEs which represent the majority of firms in most economies. However, for the period 2000 to

2015, five special issues of Francophone scientific journals, 88 articles were dedicated to family firms could be identified. This underlines that the field is gaining increasingly attention also in the French research context.

Even in research on entrepreneurship and SMEs, France already seemed to have a slight shift compared to the Anglo-Saxon world. While the Academy of Management already created the Entrepreneurship (ENT) Division in 1986 the French speaking world created their pendant in 1996 during their third (!) congress on SMEs. This does not mean that researchers were not interested in SMEs, or even family firms. In fact, French speaking researchers contributed very early to the development of the field as the first volume of the “documentation internationale” (international documentation) edited by the “Union internationale de l’artisanat et des petites et moyennes Entreprises” (UIAPME) – a union of French speaking SMEs (Voléry & Gundolf, 2009) was published in 1950 already. However, the different attempts of structuring the field for researchers only lead to a succession of different institutions and reviews that were not long lasting and got only stabilized in the 1990s.

The specificities of the French research context on entrepreneurship were already underlined by Lasch & Yami (2008). Given that the research on family firms is highly related to the research in entrepreneurship in general, we seek to examine whether or not there is also a Francophone specificity in research on family firms.

Given our research question, this research seeks to compare and find explanations for these eventual different developments and to propose research directions inspired by both the Francophone and Anglophone understanding of family firms. As such, we analyze the past trends and future directions of the Francophone literature through a bibliometric analysis and compare the results with the most recent bibliometric analysis of the Anglophone family firm literature base.

1. Methodology

12.1 Bibliometric analysis

The origin of the use of citation analysis techniques can be found at the time when the *Science Citation Index* was launched in 1961 and citation analysis has subsequently become a commonly-applied method (MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 1989). This method represents a quantitative-oriented bibliographic approach which is applied to provide insights into the historical development of scientific fields (Prévot et al., 2010) based on the following two

key assumptions: citations (1) are an effective and reliable indication of scientific interaction between studies, (2) make conceptual linkages of scientific ideas visible (Garfield, 1979).

By means of citation analyses, the most influential contributions are identified based on citations' frequency, which acts as an indicator of significance and qualitative value of the literature (Moed, 2005). Frequently cited publications constitute a major groundwork for research (Yue & Wilson, 2004) as they are said to present relevant scientific insights. Although this method sparked attention in academic research (Roth & Gmür, 2006), its application is still rare in business and management studies. Topics that have already been explored by means of this method include management (Gundolf & Filser, 2013), marketing (Hubbard et al., 2010), entrepreneurship (Dos Santos et al., 2011), or family firm research (Filser et al., 2016; Xi et al., 2015).

We use a bibliometric citation analysis to explore the development and evolution of Francophone family firm research over the last decades as well as its current state. A citation analysis provides insights into the historical development of scientific fields (Prévot et al., 2010). This quantitative-oriented bibliographic approach identifies the most influential contributions based on the citations' frequency which serves as an indicator of importance and qualitative value (Moed, 2005). Regularly cited publications represent a major foundation to the respective research field (Yue & Wilson, 2004) as they report essential scientific insights and form a substantial basis for future research.

1.2 Research design

To identify the relevant Francophone literature, we scanned the databases ABI Inform/ProQuest, EBSCO, Emerald, Google Scholar, ingentaconnect, JSTOR, MENDELEY, ScienceDirect and Springer as well as French journals which were not included in these databases for scientific, peer-reviewed publications containing the term "entreprise familiale" (French translation for "family enterprise") or "firme familiale" ("family firm") in title, abstract or keywords. After removing duplicates, a data set of 88 publications was retained. Second, information on each contribution in the sample was transcribed manually into an excel sheet. This database then contained all relevant information of the publications including author names, publication year, publication title, journal, reference type and cited references. Through this manual data input, the dataset was checked in terms of consistency, and citation errors could be easily identified and corrected. The dataset of citations included 4,436 citations. Third, we identified the 25 most frequently cited publications and authors, the

number of citations, and the most cited journals. The focus on the top 25 most cited publications was chosen as it allows for clarity, compactness, and overall practicality. Fourth, to create topical clusters, each of the top 25 most frequently cited publications was scanned multiple times with respect to study subject, research questions and main findings by three researchers to find contextual similarities and differences and to be assigned to a cluster. In the end, the individual examinations were compared and after debating the differences, consensus was reached on the contents of each cluster based on majority voting. Finally, the Francophone clusters were compared with the Anglophone clusters presented by Xi et al. (2015).

2. Results

In the following, we will present the results of the descriptive analysis of the overall Francophone family firm literature (3.1) as well as the insights obtained from the descriptive analysis of the 25 top cited publications in the Francophone family firm literature (3.2). Afterwards, we will outline the identified clusters of the top 25 cited publications (3.3).

2.1 Descriptive analysis of the Francophone family firm literature and the cited references

The growing number of Francophone publications on family firms (see Figure 1) points out that researchers are paying increasingly attention to family firms as topic in academic contributions. Figure 1 reveals that until the end of 2003 there were only 12 publications constituting the Francophone family firm literature whereas from 2004 onwards contributions got published on a regular basis with an average of 6.3 publications per year. In fact, 13.64 percent of the Francophone family firm literature was published before the end of 2003, while 86.36 percent were published after 2004.

These contributions cited a total of 4,436 references which refer to 2,559 individual contributions published between 1826 and 2014 (see Figure 2) and mostly in scientific journals (Figure 3). Figure 2 also reveals that the Francophone literature is primarily based on works that are published between the 1980 and 2007 while contributions published from 2007 onwards are less cited due to their younger availability.

Figure 1. Chronological growth of Francophone family firm literature (sources of the references)

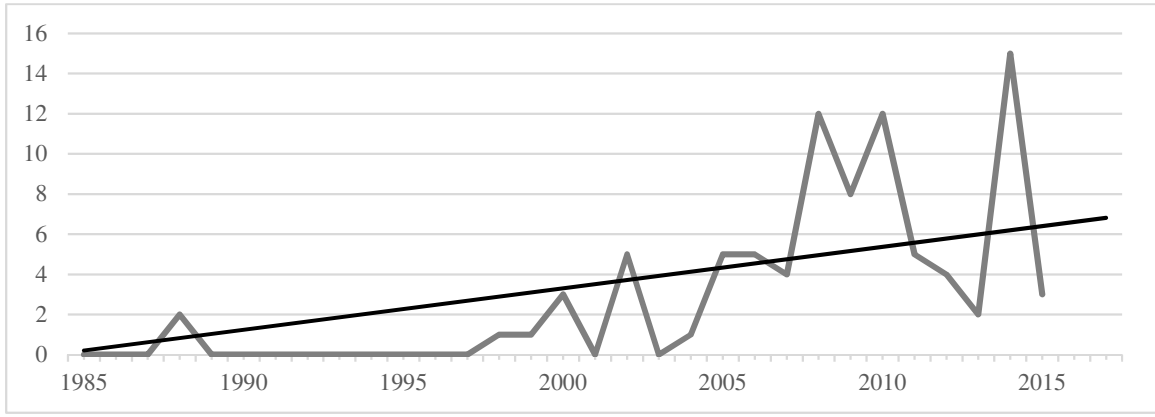


Figure 2. Number of contributions cited by Francophone family firm literature

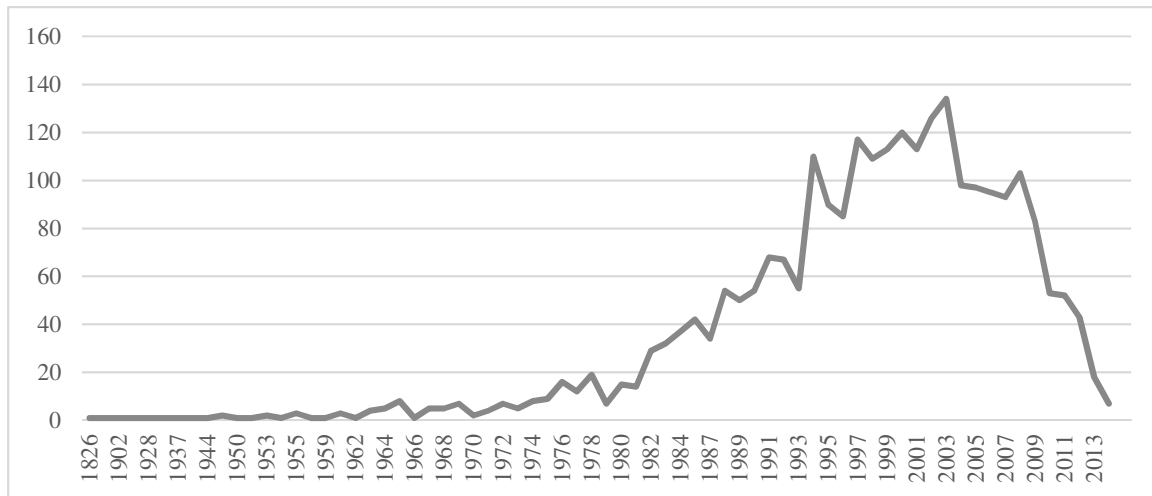
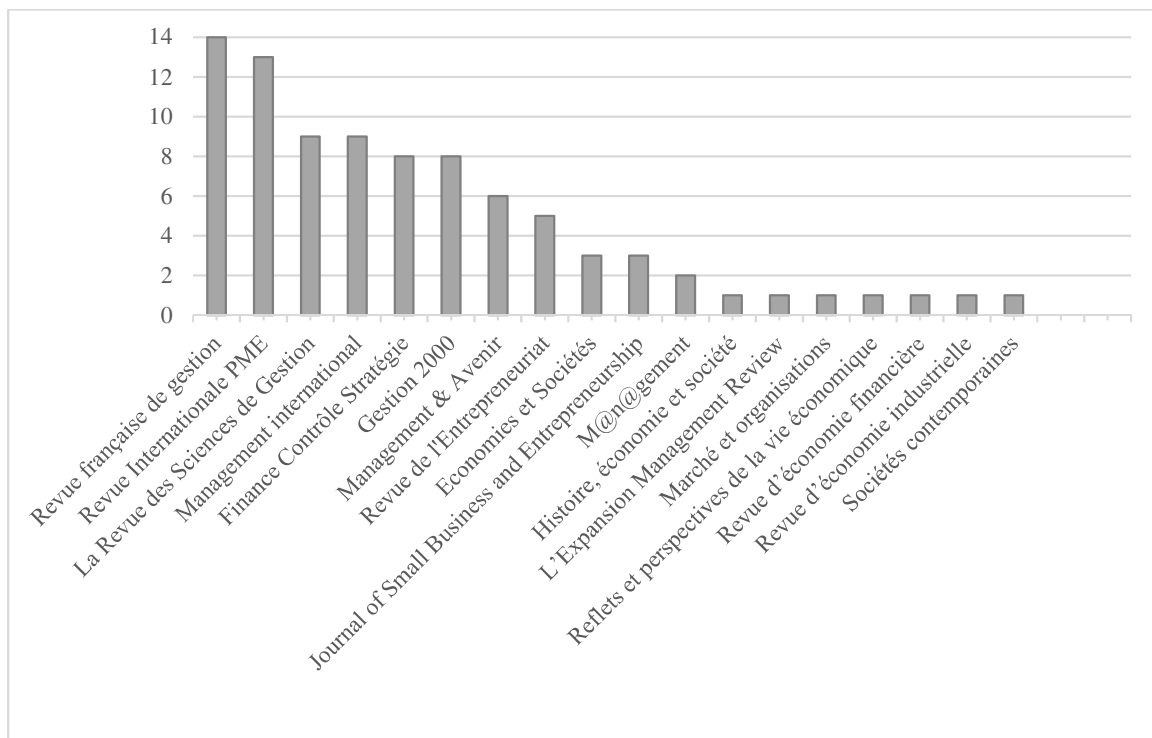


Figure 3. Main journals publishing Francophone family firm literature (from 1826-2014)



One of our objectives was to identify the 25 top cited publications of the Francophone family firm literature and the most covered themes in this literature stream in the form of clusters. In doing so, we seek to propose a set of contributions which represent the founding works of the Francophone research in the field of family firms.

The 25 top cited contributions were published between 1976 and 2006 (see Figure 4). The majority of these contributions are journal articles (N=19), while five books and one book chapter are within the top 25, too. The journal articles were published in 13 different academic journals, including *Family Business Review* with six publications (see Figure 5). Interestingly, only five of the most frequently cited publications are Francophone, implying that the majority is published in the English-speaking realm.

Figure 4. 25 top cited publications in Francophone family firm literature per year

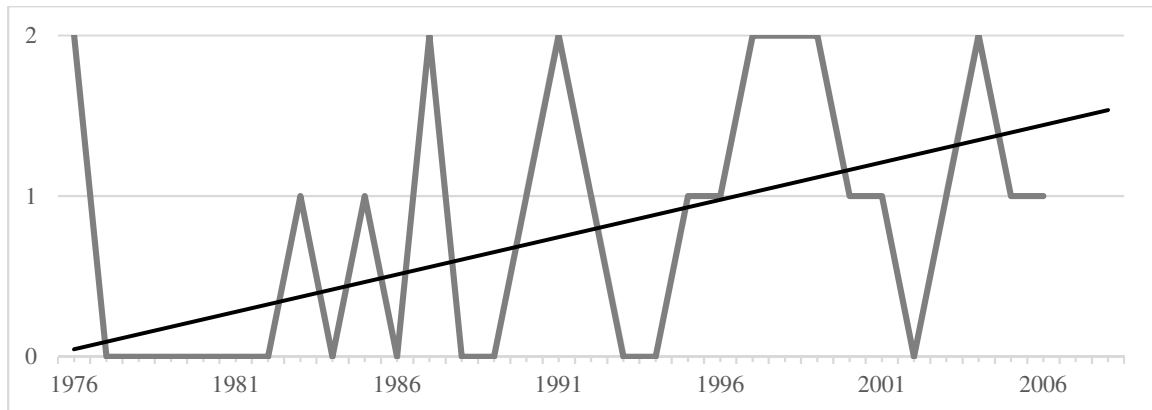
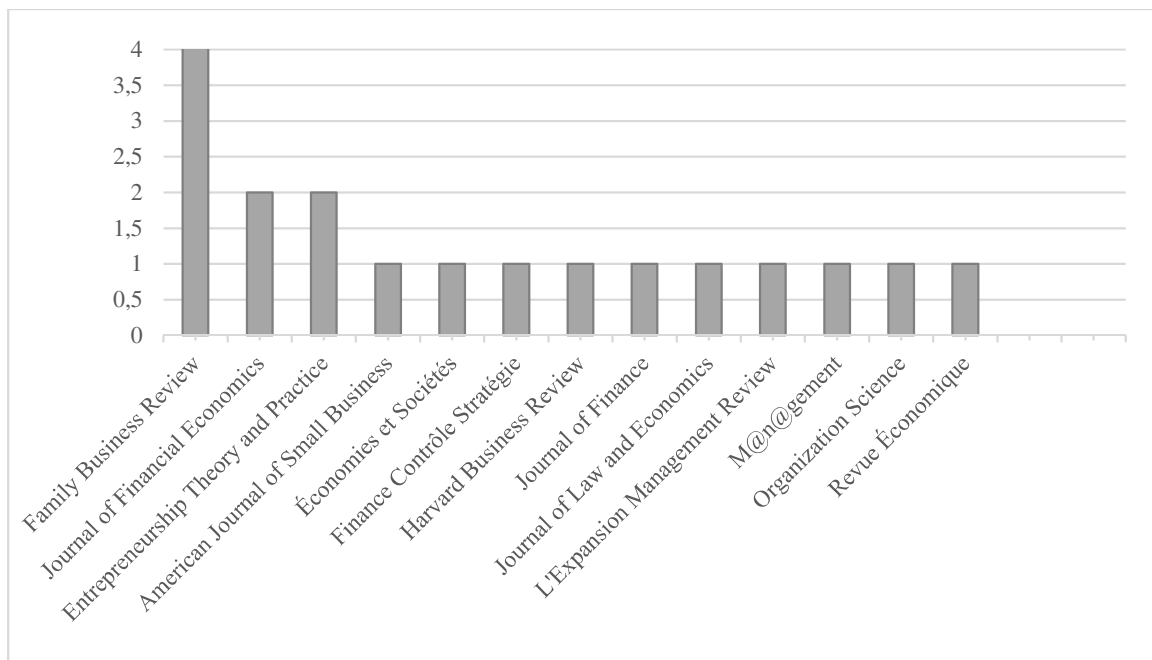


Figure 5. Journals publishing the 25 top cited publications in Francophone family firm literature



2.2 Identified clusters within the 25 top cited publications in the Francophone family firm literature

Our analysis of the Francophone literature reveals five clusters in the top 25 most cited publications (see Table 1 for an overview): Cluster A “Family firm definitions” (N=4); Cluster B “Family firm governance” (N=6); Cluster C “Family firm performance” (N=4); Cluster D “Family firm specific characteristics” (N=5); (e) Cluster E “Family firm succession” (N=6). Table 1 represents the identified clusters in the 25 top cited publications of Francophone family firm research.

2.2.1 Cluster A: Family firm definitions

In 2000, Allouche & Amann (2000) emphasized the lack of consensus regarding the definition of family firms although, for instance, Chua et al. (1999) already attempted to extend previous definition efforts by developing a family firm definition. The definition proposed by Chua et al. (1999) takes into account the family firms’ specific behavior which tends to be different compared to non-family firms. As such, the authors propose to define family firms as firms which are “*governed and/or managed with the intention to shape and pursue the vision of the business held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family or a small number of families in a manner that is potentially sustainable across generations of the family or families*” (p. 25). Being highly cited, this definition represents one of the most dominant definition and operationalization in family firm literature. This is in line with Allouche & Amann (2000), who argue that the most relevant definitions of family firms are those taking into account three criteria: control/ownership, management, and the intention to transfer the firm to the next generation. Also discussing definitional issues of family firms, Sharma (2004) stressed the pursuit of financial and non-financial goals as typical characteristics of family firms and presented therefore a two by two matrix which helps to understand family firms and their performance along business and family harmony dimensions.

Table 1. 25 top cited publications

Clusters identified in Francophone family firm literature						Comparison with clusters identified in Anglophone family firm literature presented by Xi et al. (2015)	
Cluster	Author(s)	Year	Title	Journal/Book	Citations	Cluster	Citations
Cluster A: Family firm definitions (N=4)	Allouche & Amann	2000	L'entreprise familiale: un état de l'art	Finance Contrôle Stratégie	24	-	-
	Chua et al.	1999	Defining the family business by behavior	Family Business Review	12	1: Defining pieces	161
	Allouche & Amann	1995	Le retour triomphant du capitalisme familial	<i>Book</i>	13	-	-
	Sharma	2004	An overview of the field of family business studies: Current status and direction for the future	Family Business Review	17	1: Defining pieces	106
Cluster B: Family firm governance (N=6)	Jensen & Meckling	1976	Theory of the firm: Managerial behavior, agency costs and ownership structure	Journal of Financial Economics	19	2: Governance in family businesses	167
	Schulze et al.	2001	Agency relationships in family firms: Theory and evidence	Organization Science	15	2: Governance in family businesses	166
	Daily & Dollinger	1992	An empirical examination of ownership structure in family and professionally managed firms	Family Business Review	13	2: Governance in family businesses	100
	Fama & Jensen	1983	Separation of ownership and control	Journal of Law and Economics	13	2: Governance in family businesses	100
	Neubauer & Lank	1998	The family business: Its governance for sustainability	<i>Book</i>	12	-	-
	Villalonga & Amit	2006	How do family ownership, control and management affect firm value?	Journal of Financial Economics	12	4: Leadership and Management	103

Cluster C: Family firm performance (N=4)	Anderson & Reeb	2003	Founding family ownership and firm performance: Evidence from the S&P 500	Journal of Finance	22	3: Competitive advantage	168
	Allouche & Amann	1998	La confiance: une explication aux performances des entreprises familiales	Économies et Sociétés	20	-	-
	Charreaux	1991	Structures de propriété, relation d'agence et performance financière	Revue Économique	14	-	-
	Miller & Le Breton-Miller	2005	Managing for the long Run: Lessons in Competitive Advantage from Great Family Businesses	<i>Book</i>	13	-	-
Cluster D: Family firm specific characteristics (N=5)	Habbershon & Williams	1999	A resource-based framework for assessing the strategic advantages of family firms	Family Business Review	21	3: Competitive advantage	113
	Arrègle et al.	2004	Origines du capital social et avantages concurrentiels des firmes familiales	M@n@gement	16	-	-
	Donckels & Fröhlich	1991	Are family businesses really different? European experiences from STRATOS	Family Business Review	15	-	-
	Gallo & Vilaseca	1996	Finance in family businesses	Family Business Review	15	-	-
	Rosenblatt et al.	1985	The family in business: Understanding and dealing with the challenges entrepreneurial families face	<i>Book</i>	12	4: Leadership and Management	114
Cluster E: Family firm succession (N=6)	Gersick et al.	1997	Generation to generation: Life cycles of the family business	<i>Book</i>	19	5: Succession	215
	Ward	1987	Keeping the family business healthy: How to plan for continuing growth, profitability, and family leadership	<i>Book</i>	18	4: Leadership and Management	250
	Barnes & Hershon	1976	Transferring power in family business	Harvard Business Review	13	-	-
	Churchill & Hatten	1987	Non-market-based transfers of wealth and power: A research framework for family businesses	American Journal of Small Business	12	-	-
	Handler	1990	Succession in family firms: a mutual role adjustment between entrepreneur and next-generation family members	Family Business Review	12	-	-
	Barach et al.	1988	Entry of the next generation: strategic challenge for family business	Journal of Small Business Management	11	-	-

2.2.2 Cluster B: Family firm governance

Based on agency theory, property rights theory and the theory of finance, Jensen & Meckling (1976) developed a theory of the ownership structure of the firm. When identifying the family firms' most effective governance structure, the authors emphasized that family firm owners typically have stronger incentives to supervise family firm managers since as owners, holding undiversified portfolios and investing primarily in the firms, they bear the costs of the business. This seminal article has been recognized as a starting point for discussing family firms and their governance structures through the lens of agency theory in more detail. Also building upon agency theory, Fama & Jensen (1983) argued that the efficiencies resulting from a separation of ownership and management exceed the costs in large organizations even if such a separation can give rise to agency problems. In this vein, the authors propose that the shareholders can use the board of directors to exert control over (non-family) top executives and thus to decrease the potential risks of moral hazard issues. Daily & Dollinger (1992) concentrated on consequences of a unification of ownership and control. Based on their field survey, the authors observed that family firms differ in terms of structural, process, and performance dimensions and that they exhibit performance advantages stemming from the unification of ownership and control. Advancing the understanding of agency theory on the economic theory of the household, Schulze et al. (2001) argued that also privately held and owner-managed firms may have to deal with agency costs when family firm owners exhibit opportunistic behavior, a situation which was overlooked by Jensen & Meckling (1976). Since family dynamics, in particular altruism, intensify agency problems in family firms, shareholders have an incentive to invest resources in monitoring both managerial *and* owner opportunism. In their book, Neubauer & Lank (2016) presented real examples from family firms all over the world to provide insights on how to effectively organize and manage family firm governance systems, focusing on the family and its institutions, the roles of the board of directors and the family council, and the family firms' key governance measures, including securing chief executive officer (CEO) succession, vision and strategy and financial resources. Villalonga & Amit (2006) identified the role of the founder as a crucial context variable and revealed that family ownership can lead to value creation only when the family firm founder is either the CEO or the chairman with a hired CEO. The authors suggested that it is crucial to realize whether the CEO is the founder or a descendant since in the latter case firm value is mitigated.

2.2.3 Cluster C: Family firm performance

Analyzing the linkage between the financial performance and ownership structures of listed French companies, Charreaux (1991) found the form of organization has no significant impact on the return on equity. However, it seems to have a significant influence on economic performance, in favor of family companies. According to Allouche & Amann (1998), family firms are important performers in many national economies in terms of economic and social performance. Discussing this superior performance, the authors emphasized the importance of trust. Anderson & Reeb (2003) examined S&P 500 firms and presented the first strong empirical evidence for the claim that family businesses perform better than their non-family counterparts. The authors identified family ownership as an effective organizational structure in well-regulated and transparent markets since family ownership of public firms has the potential to diminish agency problems without resulting in losses of decision making efficiency. Miller & Le Breton-Miller (2005) focused not on the average family-controlled firms but on exploring the performance of large, long-living family firms. They found that the studied firms demonstrated four driving priorities or passions: command, continuity, community and connection.

3.2.4 Cluster D: Family firm specific characteristics

Cluster D groups publications analyzing the particular specificities of family firms focused on a diversity of characteristics of family firms, including their specific strategic challenges (Rosenblatt et al., 1985), values and attitudes, objectives, and strategic behavior (Donckels & Fröhlich, 1991); familiness (Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Arrègle et al., 2004), financial structure (Gallo & Vilaseca, 1996). According to Rosenblatt et al. (1985), who analyzed fifty-nine family-held companies of different sizes, one of the main challenging specificities of family firms is their concern to maintain family functioning and protect the business at the same time. Comparing family and non-family firms, Donckels & Fröhlich (1991) found that family firms tend to be characterized by inwardly directed or closed family-related systems. Their managers are oftentimes "all-rounders" and organizers and their strategic behavior is rather conservative. The authors argued that family firms should be considered as rather stable and not progressive or dynamic actors in the economy. Habbershon & Williams (1999) and Arrègle et al. (2004) concentrated on the so-called "familiness" of family firms which refers to "the unique bundle of resources a particular firm has because of the systems interaction between the family, its individual members, and the business" (Habbershon &

Williams, 1999, p. 11) and characterized family firms based on affective relationships that go beyond mere economic relationships and provide both competitive advantages and disadvantages. Investigating the financial issues of family firms, Gallo & Vilaseca (1996) explored these firms capital structure, behavior towards investments and risk, and dividend policy as well as the relation between these dimensions and performance. The authors revealed that family firms differ compared to their non-family counterparts as they typically have low debt/equity levels, especially the firms with an important market-share position in the industry. Family firms with leading market-share positions have lesser financial performance than the one who are followers in terms of market share.

2.2.5 Cluster E: Family firm succession

Barnes & Hershon (1976) emphasized that the transition phase represents one of the most agonizing experiences of family firms which is often far from orderly. The authors argued that family firm transitions tend to be more productive when family and company transitions occur at the same time. The authors further proposed that third party involvement can prevent family-internal conflicts and firm stagnation. Both Ward (1987) and Barach et al. (1988) pointed out the strategic importance of succession planning for the family firms' long-term survival. According to Ward (1987), productive succession of family firms depends highly on succession planning which should take into consideration both the needs of the business with the needs of the family. Barach et al. (1988) added that successful succession is further facilitated when the young generation attempts to gain experiences outside the family firm before joining the family firms' management. In 1990, Handler (1990) reviewed the empirical and conceptual state of the research on family firm succession and identified five streams of research: (1) succession as a process, (2) the role of the founder, (3) the perspective of the next generation, (4) multiple levels of analysis, and (5) characteristics of effective successions. The contribution of Gersick et al. (1997) represents one of the publications that concentrated on the idea that family firms typically progress through a certain sequence of stages. In doing so, the authors added a developmental dimension to the concept of overlapping systems in family firms. According to Gersick et al. (1997), family firms are characterized by special features in each life stage, incorporating new features as they advance to next stages. Similarly, Churchill & Hatten (1997) proposed a framework for studying family firms succession which they defined as process in which changes in management, in strategy, and in control are planned for and executed. Their framework built upon stages of the family firm which emerge "from the biological reality of parent and

offspring being separated by age and business experience, but wedded together by “blood” and a shared family experience” (Churchill & Hatten, 1997, p. 53).

3. Discussion

3.1 Comparing the clustering of the top 25 cited publications of the Francophone and Anglophone family firm literature

3.1.1 Descriptive comparison

Xi et al. (2015) identified five clusters in their top 25 most cited publications in the Anglophone family firm literature (see Table 2). Our analysis of the Francophone literature reveals a similar picture as we also identified five clusters in the top 25 most cited publications, however, with slightly different thematic emphases.

This finding is not surprising as only 12 out of the top 25 cited publications are the same in both literatures implying that the Francophone family firm literature is based on a slightly different set of past publications. The identical publications, however, differ largely in terms of number of citations. The average number of citations of 25 top cited article in the Anglophone family firm literature was 125.7 while this number was only 15.3 for the Francophone family firm literature. The most cited contribution in the Anglophone family firm literature was the English-written publication of Ward (1987) which was cited 250 times and was clustered in the “leadership and management” cluster by Xi et al. (2015). In the Francophone family firm literature, the topic cited contribution was the work of Allouche & Amann (2000) written in French which received 24 citations and was included in the “family firm definitions” cluster in this study. The oldest contribution in the 25 top cited articles in the Anglophone family firm literature was Levinson (1971) while it were Barnes & Hershon (1976) and Jensen & Meckling (1976) in the Francophone family firm literature.

Both categorizations reveal a contextual emphasis on the topic of family firm governance which is the largest cluster in the top 25 cited references of the Anglophone as well as Francophone family firm literature based on the number of contributions per cluster and therefore a highly discussed topic (see Table 2). Focusing on the average number of citations, however, the “leadership and management” cluster of the Anglophone top 25 cited references presented by Xi et al. (2015) and the “family firm performance” cluster of the Francophone top 25 cited references identified in this study seem to be highly cited and impactful clusters with average numbers of citations of 154.3 and 17.3 respectively.

In the sample of Francophone family firm literature, the large majority of contributions was written in English (25) while only five publications were French which have been written by French speaking authors.

Table 2. Comparison of clusters

Clusters identified in Francophone family firm literature			Comparison with clusters identified in Anglophone family firm literature presented by Xi et al. (2015)		
Cluster	Number of contributions	Average number of citations	Cluster	Number of contributions	Average number of citations
A: Family firm definitions	4	16.5	1: Defining pieces	5	107.2
B: Family firm governance	6	14	2: Governance in family businesses	8	118.1
C: Family firm performance	4	17.3	3: Competitive advantage	5	127.6
D: Family firm specificities	5	15.8	4: Leadership and management	4	154.3
E: Family firm succession	6	14.2	5: Succession	3	135.7

3.1.2 Contextual comparison

Cluster A of this study and cluster 1 identified by Xi et al. (2015) both group publications which contribute to definition efforts in the Anglophone and Francophone family firm literatures. Comparing cluster A with cluster 1 reveals that, except for the two French contributions, two articles are equal, namely the works of Chua et al. (1999) and Sharma (2004). This findings is not surprising, as both articles represent foundational pieces of family firm literature. Chua et al. (1999), for instance, have developed one of the most dominant definition and operationalization of family firms while Sharma (2004) has explicated the need to analyze both financial and non-financial goals when studying family firms. Accordingly, this discussion of Sharma (2004) can be considered as a predecessor of the socio-emotional wealth concept (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007).

Cluster B of this study and cluster 2 presented by Xi et al. (2015) deal with contributions on corporate governance issues in family firms. The works of Jensen & Meckling (1976), Fama & Jensen (1983), Daily & Dollinger (1992), and Schulze et al. (2001) appear in cluster B of the Francophone as well as cluster 2 of the Anglophone family firm literature. These articles focus primarily on agency problems that can arise in family firms when principal and agent follow different goals. These problems can, for instance, occur when the owners of a family

firm (the principals), i.e. the family members, pursue other goals than a firm's non-family managers (the agents). According to Daily & Dollinger (1992), these problems can be minimized when ownership and control of family firms are unified rather than separated. While Xi et al. (2015) group the contribution of Villalonga & Amit (2006) in cluster 4 "leadership and management", we include their work in cluster B "family firm governance" since the authors focused on the role of the founder within family firms' governance structures. Additionally, the book of Neubauer & Lank (2016) is included as the authors examine effectively organized and managed family firm governance systems.

Cluster C of this study and cluster 3 of Xi et al. (2015) bring together the works concentrating on the performance or the competitive advantage of family firms respectively. The comparison of both clusters shows that only the article of Anderson & Reeb (2003) is included in both clusters which stems probably from the fact that the authors presented one of the first empirical insights on performance differences between family and non-family firms; family firms outperforming their non-family counterparts.

Cluster D of this study and cluster 4 identified in Xi et al. (2015) group the publications on family firms' specificities as well as the leadership and management respectively. The only publication these clusters have in common is the book of Rosenblatt et al. (1985) who explored the main challenging specificities of family firms. The authors found that family firms' concern to maintain family functioning and protect the business at the same time is one of the most difficult characteristics of family firms.

Cluster E of this study and cluster 5 identified in Xi et al. (2015) both focus on publications on succession in family firms. Nevertheless, they only have one contribution in common, namely the work of Gersick et al. (1997). These authors have proposed that family firms progress through a certain order of life stages and in each stage the firms incorporate new characteristics while advancing. According to Xi et al. (2015), the value of the work of Gersick et al. (1997) lies in the fact that this publication has influenced other highly valued contributions in this field (Schulze et al., 2003). While Xi et al. (2015) include the contribution of Ward (1987) in cluster 4, we add it in cluster E since the author has focused on the healthy succession of family firms by suggesting that succession planning is of crucial relevance for their long-term succession.

3.2 Implications

We start with a discussion on the similarities between Anglophone and Francophone family firm research. In general, we can see that four of the five clusters are treating similar topics:

1) definitions (cluster A and cluster 1); 2) governance (cluster B and cluster 2); performance/competitive advantage (cluster C and cluster 3); and 4) succession (cluster E and cluster 5). This likeness underlines that French researchers are working on the same matters and that French family firms are probably facing the same practical issues that their non-French counterparts. Besides, the clusters dedicated to the definitions emphasize the fact that this research field is still looking for stabilization and that it is relatively young (Allouche & Amann, 2000).

We continue by looking at the divergences. Cluster D (Francophone family firm literature) is dedicated to the specificities of family firms and detects mostly the differences between family and non-family firms using a particular theoretical lens. This cluster is somehow extending the definitions and pushing a little bit further. Besides, cluster 4 (Anglophone family firm literature) is dedicated to leadership and management. It includes two of three books that are ranked in Xi et al. (2015), and provides mainly empirical and practical data regarding problems and opportunities family firms confront. Here we can here observe a slight preference of the Francophone world on theoretical aspects, while the Anglo-Saxons include some practical tools.

There is also a difference in using books. The Francophone clusters rank six books in the top 25 citations, while the Anglo-Saxons only three. This underlines, that books *versus* articles have probably a different value in the Francophone world.

Last, we can also see that only 12 out of 25 citations are similar in both approaches and that there are five top 25 Francophone citations in the French cluster. We can thus affirm that even if the research topics are overlapping in the Francophone and Anglo-Saxon world, the citations used and referred to are not the same. The Francophones have a slight preference for French authors, with five out of 25 Francophone citations. The leading French authors on family firms are without doubt Allouche & Amann cited twice in this top 25 list.

3.3 Limitations

When interpreting the findings of this study, some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the data collection process for the citation analysis could be criticised for not including all significant contributions in the field of family firm research. Nevertheless, to limit this weakness, the systematic data collection was guided by a comprehensive selection procedure. As such, a literature sample was developed which should represent as completely as possible the existing Francophone family firm literature.

An additional limitation associated with the citation analysis method stems from the assumption that “references cited by an author are a roughly indicator of influence on his work” (Cole & Cole, 1972, p. 369). Critics of citation analyses have openly doubted the reliability of citations as indicators of publications’ influence while protagonists have defended the method by acknowledging the possible problems of citation analyses (MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 1989; Cole & Cole, 1974). The critical issues of citation analyses can include, for instance, non-cited formal influences, biased citing, self-citing, different citation types, citation rate variations, and technical limitations of citation analyses (MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 1989). However, not all issues are equally severe for all kind of research fields or theories (MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 1989). When exploring the development of the Francophone family firm literature, we sought to restrict especially the technical limitation of the analysis through the identification of the literature using synonyms in a number of databases as well as the manual input of the data into the required excel sheet which helped us to check persistency and to minimize spelling errors.

Conclusion

Even though the Francophone and Anglophone family firm research have very similar founding topics, there remains a little specificity regarding Francophone research. In fact, it is based only partly on the similar sources and often refers to Francophone literature. However, we showed that this little French touch does not make a big difference regarding the main topics that are treated.

Regarding future research directions, we underlined that this field is young as it still searches for definitions and needs additional input. More recent research cannot appear in our clusters, as we have not enough distance regarding their possible future citations. However, regarding the articles we used in our analysis, we found several developments that may be considered as future research directions: a) the development of new theoretical perspectives (e.g., Arrègle et al., 2004; Coeurderoy & Lwango, 2014; Hirigoyen, 2014; De Freyman & Richomme-Huet, 2009; Arrègle & Mari, 2010); b) with a main switch from factual to more “soft” or emotional variables (e.g., Carella et al., 2008; Mzid Ben Amar & Mezghani, 2010; Richomme-Huet & d’Andri, 2012; Schier, 2014; Robic et al., 2015; Bauweraerts & Colot, 2014). Moreover, c) much Francophone researchers also stress the fact that more empirical research has to be done (e.g., Arrègle & Mari, 2010; Debicki et al., 2009), even if there have been advances in the last years. These research directions could be explored in another article.

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