French scholars in "information and communication studies" (1975-2008)

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FRENCH SCHOLARS IN "INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES" (1975–2008)

In this paper we examine the evolution of "Sciences de l'information et de la communication" (SIC) studies in France since the discipline emerged in the 1960s. First, we distinguish the national particularities of these studies on a thematic level, by evaluating the curricular marriage of Information Sciences and Communication Sciences into a unified disciplinary field, and then on a structural level by analyzing the different categories of scholars ("pure" teachers in universities, "pure" researchers in CNRS, "half-teachers-half-researchers" in universities, etc.) Secondly, we portray the numerical evolution of scholars in comparison with other Social Science disciplines and include in this analysis the various categories of personnel. Using statistics and data provided by the French Education Department, we are able to quantify how communication studies in France have flourished by showing how rapidly the numbers of SIC scholars has grown; from 49 scholars in 1977, to more than 723 in 2008. Thirdly, because all civil service positions in France have been published since 1997, we are able to use qualitative details to draw a thematic landscape of university demand for SIC studies. It is worth noting that half of the positions in this field are offered in only four categories: theory (15 %), new technology and multimedia (14 %), good writing and presentation (11 %), and organizational communication (10 %). Finally, we look at SIC curriculums published in the last directory of French Scholars in Communication Studies (SFSIC 2001) to provide a glimpse of the current research themes being pursued and developed by SIC scholars.

Keywords: France, communication, media studies, information science, research, teaching, institution history, academic discipline.

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1. French Creation of "Information and Communication Studies"

Communication studies gained legitimacy in North America and some other European countries (see Averbeck 2005) during the middle of the 20th century whereas in France, these studies emerged later towards the end of the 1960s under the disciplinary title of "Sciences de l'information et de la communication."

For decades prior to the formal creation of SIC studies, trends and views on communication related studies were changing in France (see Boure 2002). Alongside the first journalism schools created in France at the turn of the 20th century, such as the establishment in 1899 of the École du journalisme in Paris, several other specialized institutes that focused on general education in communication began to flourish. Examples include the Institut français de presse (IFP) founded in 1946 for journalism training (see Vroons 2005), and the Centre d'études littéraires et scientifiques appliquées (CÉLSA) in 1963 that offered press relations courses. Similarly, some scholarly reviews began to utilize the term "communication" in their titles *(Communication,* published by the ÉHÉSS post-graduate institute, in 1962).

Table 1: Institutional Birth of "Sciences de l'information et de la communication" in France

1967	Creation of degrees (Undergraduate: 1967; Graduate: 1969; Ph.D.: 1975)
1972	Creation of a "Comité des sciences de l'information et de la communication" with prominent figures (Barthes, Escarpit, Meyriat…)
1975	Creation of a "section" inside the Conseil national des universités (French board for peer evaluation of careers), named "Sciences de l'information et de la communication" (71ᵉ section)
1978	Creation of the Société des sciences de l'information et de la communication (SFSIC, national equivalent of ECA or AIERI). First « INFORCOM » Conference (held in Compiègne)
2007	Creation of a "section" inside the Centre national de recherche scientifique (CNRS, national equivalent of NSF), named "Sciences de la communication" (42ᵉ Commission interdisciplinaire). Creation of an Institut des sciences de la communication du CNRS (ISCC).

But the institutional birth of SIC studies really took place at the end of the 1960s with the development and offering of the first degrees specialized in communication: first in 1967 with the "Diplômes universitaires de technologie" dedicated to "Carrières de l'information" (undergraduate technological degrees with the label "information careers"); followed by graduate degrees in 1969 (technological and generalist "Maîtrises"); and again by postgraduate degrees in 1975 ("Diplômes d'études approfondies," "Diplômes d'études supérieures spécialisées," and "Doctorat"). Then in 1984 the curricular debut of an undergraduate generalist degree finally occurred with the first "Diplômes d'études universitaires générales" in "Communication et Sciences du langage," later transformed in "Médiation culturelle et communication" and "Information et communication."

In 1975, the French Education Department gave an institutional seal to the discipline when it created a "section" (a bureau) inside the Conseil national des universités. This national Board assembles every discipline in France and performs a peer evaluation of careers. It is valuable to note that within the construction of the SIC discipline, two competing fields "Information Sciences" and "Communication Sciences" remain linked in a broad sense by the idea that information is something central to the process of communication. However the discipline allows for some fluctuation around the functional meaning of the term information (e.g. information for journalists, information for library specialists). It is for this reason that the discipline was not named "Communication Studies" nor "Information Studies" nor "Media Studies," but rather "Sciences de l'information et de la communication" ("Information and Communication Studies").

Another structural anomaly is that in a country where research is "trusted" to a high-profile Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), which is somewhat equivalent to a Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, the SIC as a disciplinary field is not allowed into the heart of the French research system until 2007. For long, the rare SIC scholars were hired by the CNRS but they are disseminated throughout numerous other disciplinary sections (e.g. political science, ethnology, etc.). The result is that the practical construction of a SIC discipline was mainly assigned to individual universities and corporate entities. The creation in 2007 of

an interdisciplinary commission (CID 42) aimed to recruit and evaluate scholars in "communication science" will surely make the situation evolve.

## 2. How Rapidly Are Communication Studies in France Flourishing?

At the time of the "institutional" creation of a SIC degree in 1975, only few scholars[1] were inclined to change their existing departmental affiliations to be registered as professors in communication studies; by 1977 only 49 have done so. Then, as the first Ph.D. candidates began to be hired and with some additional arrivals, the "section" began to grow at a surprising rate. As seen in Figure 1, during the past 20 years, the global recruitment of scholars in French universities more than doubled, from 30,000 to over 60,000 scholars. During the same time, the number of SIC scholars grew by a factor 4 and reached a total of 723 professors in 2008. This represents a much faster rate of growth than the average for other disciplines.

The shaded areas of the graph depict the growth within groups of academic disciplines (categories and sizes are given by the French Education Department) over the last 20 years (left scale). The single black line represents the growth in the number of SIC scholars from the earliest stages of the institutional development until today (right scale). In fact, the number of SIC scholars in France has realized around 10% compound annual growth rate (CAGR), from 49 professors in 1977 to 723 in 2008.

Moreover, that expansion must also take into account an additional number of professors working in SIC-related positions without having an official SIC status: professionals with official contracts (i.e. 299 "professeurs associés" and "maîtres de conferences associés"), teachers from high school system (i.e. 255 postings "PRAG" or "PRCE" in 2008), and

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[1] In France, because the lack of "tenure" system, scholars are hired under public contract (they become civil servants) after their first year of work (no mention to trial period). Nevertheless, the "maître de conferences" are not authorized to supervise dissertation work; after completing a second dissertation (the "habilitation à diriger les recherches"), these instructors become "professeurs des universités." Honors and wages differ.

Figure 1: SIC Grow Faster than the Average of all Other Disciplines (2005)
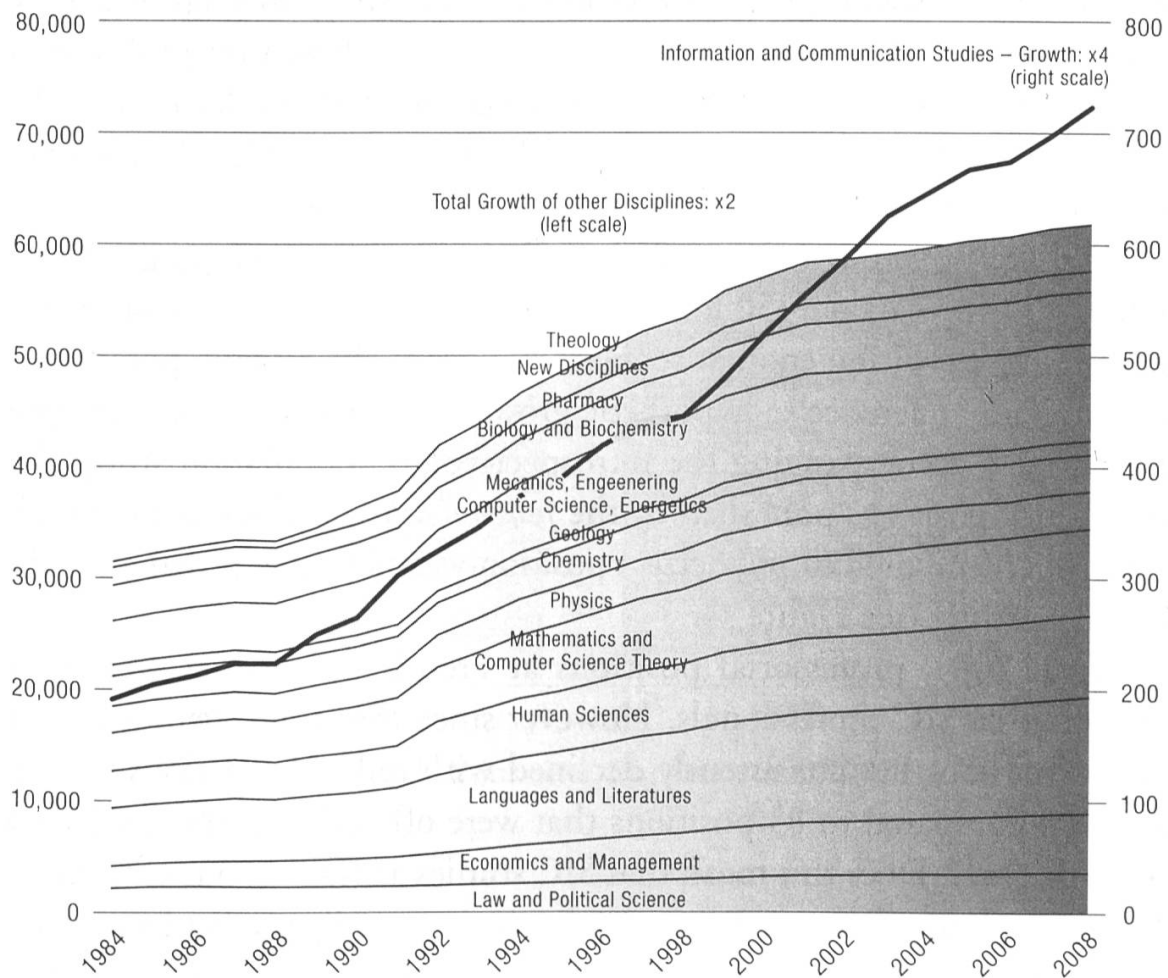
Primary data: French Education Department (DGRH A1-1). *Processing:* P. Froissart, 2009.

a plethoric population of lecturers hired on a part-time basis to teach one or two courses a year[2].

However, the apparent increase in the SIC scholarly population should not mask the vulnerabilities associated with expanding the new field. The French Education Department has already issued warnings stating that

[2] There is no figure for that category, because the hiring is not centralized by the French Department of Education, as it is for other categories. It still represents a lot of people, often professionals. For example, at the University of Paris VIII, for each permanent professor, 3 or 4 lecturers are hired each year.

in less than 10 years, between 20 % and 50 % of the academic population will reach retirement age[3]. Within the SIC community this figure is more than probable. If we make a working hypothesis based on professorial retirements at 63 years of age (average age observed in 2008) 40 % of the population will need to be replaced before 2012 (69 % of "professeurs des universités," 32 % of "maître de conferences" – see Figure 2).

The age pyramid reveals a slight imbalance. The average age of SIC scholars is 48 years old (50 for men, 46 for women), which presages difficulties in recruiting enough scholars to replace the retiring population (without any reference to hypothetic growth). Similarly, unlike the optimistic view accompanying the retrospective SIC population study, the number of positions published by the *Journal officiel,* which is a compulsory procedure used to publicize a position vacancy, may reveal an additional warning (see Figure 3).

Until 2001, professorial positions at French universities were very attractive to SIC professionals. However since that time the number of advertised jobs has consistently declined with only 51 positions offered in 2008 compared to 85 positions that were offered in 1998 or 2001 (a 40% decline). Does this mean that SIC studies are falling out of fashion? It is difficult to say since past results do not necessarily predict future outcomes. From a statistical standpoint, the numerical evolution of scholars underscores how communication studies in France have flourished (e.g. less than 50 scholars in 1977 to more than 700 in 2008), yet it does not forecast the future nor the durability of the field.

3. Productivity of French SIC Research

Assuming that the French SIC community is indeed growing and prospering, what kinds of research is the community addressing? It is difficult to ascertain because it would require a thorough bibliometric survey of all published articles attributable to SIC scholars. Such a survey would be nearly impossible to conduct given the number of reviews and journals

[3] Marc Bideault & Pasquin Rossi, "Les personnels enseignants de l'enseignement supérieur, 2007–2008". Note d'information, 08–25 (Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance).

Figure 2: Age Pyramid in Information and Communication Studies (France, 2005)
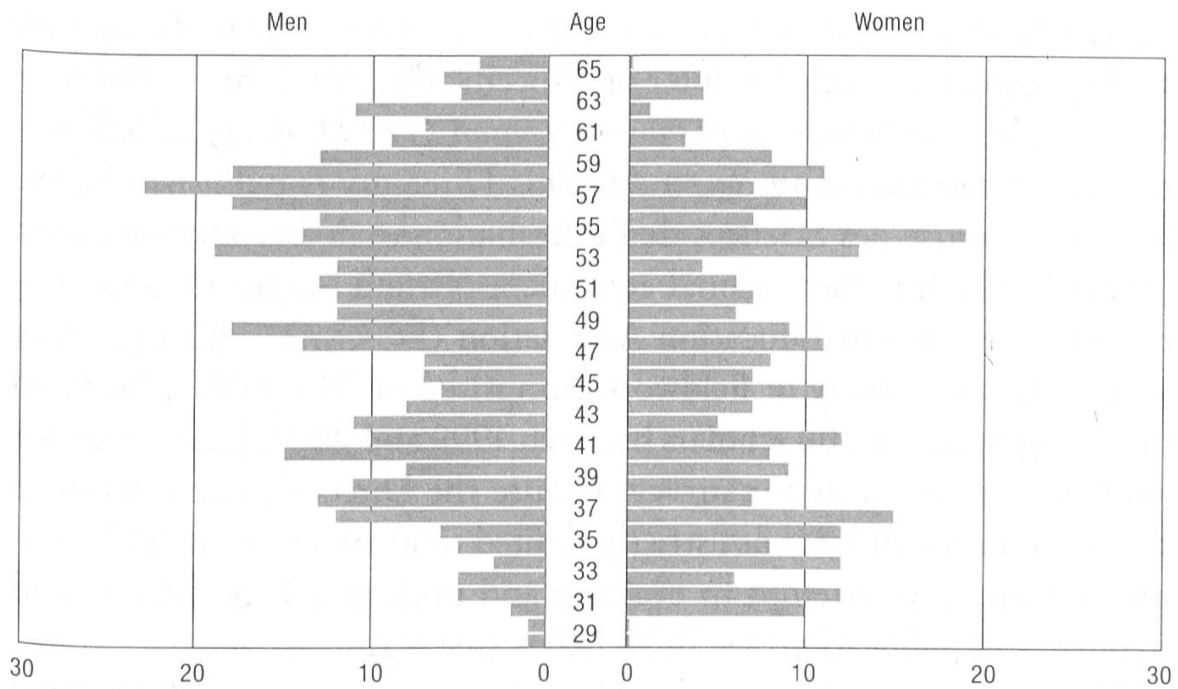
n = 622. *Primary data:* French Education Department (DGRH A1-1). *Processing:* P. Froissart, 2009.

Figure 3: SIC Positions Available (1993–2008)
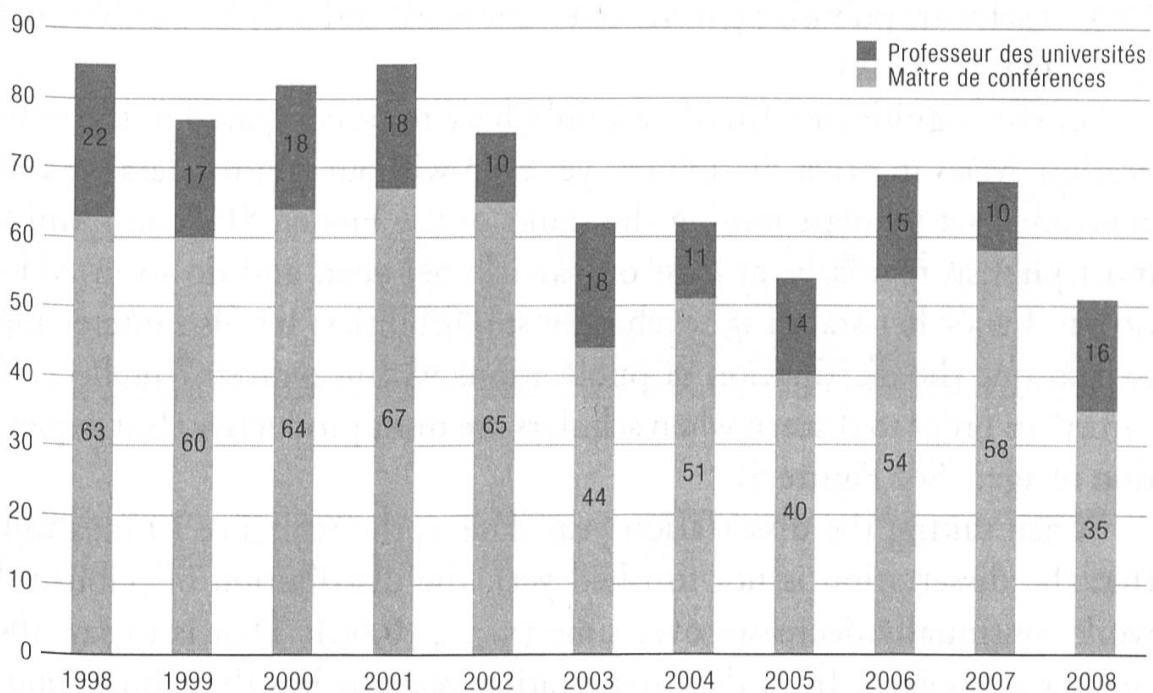
n = 770. *Primary data:* French Education Department (DGRH A1-1). *Processing:* P. Froissart, 2009.

now being published, the absence of a global publications directory, and the fact that scholars do not publish exclusively in SIC reviews. We have chosen nevertheless to analyze the current avenues of scientific inquiry as they appear through the filter of a specific directory, the *Annuaire de la recherche en information et communication (The Directory of Information and Communication Research)*. This Directory is published by the Société française des Sciences de l'information et de la communication (SFSIC), which is the national equivalent of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). This Directory alone offers us a body of fieldwork comprised of 900 publications and including works by 300 scholars between 1999 and 2002. It also provides easily drawn limits to our survey because the Directory subscription is not compulsory and it is not strictly limited to members of the SIC community. First, we attempt to evaluate and understand the volume and frequency of publications by SIC scholars (see Figure 4).

When taking inventory of published works during the 1999–2002 period the *Annuaire de la recherche en information et communication* exemplifies a clasSIC bibliometric distribution. The analysis of 203 records (valid for this question) show that nearly two thirds of scholars authored between 2 and 5 scholarly works during the three year period, with a mere 10 % of scholars publishing fewer than one work and only 7 % publishing more than 10 works.

For true significance this data would have to be compared to the publication cycles in other disciplines, yet even without control data we can conclude that scholars joining the ranks of the French SIC community must publish regularly, at least one article per year, and do so in addition to his or her standing teaching responsibilities. It's also interesting to examine the distribution of publications within a given "intellectual career" in order to discern when scholars are most productive. Is it a question of age? (See Figure 5)

When taking the dissertation year date as the reference (0 meaning that the dissertation is not finished yet), the distribution of published work continually decreases over time ($r_{Pearson} = 0,66$): That is to say, the further a scholar is from their dissertation year the less the scholar publishes. Inside this trend we can spot three periods favorable to publishing: before or during the Ph.D., between 2 and 6 years after completing

Figure 4: Amount of Publications Declared by French SIC Scholars (1999–2002)
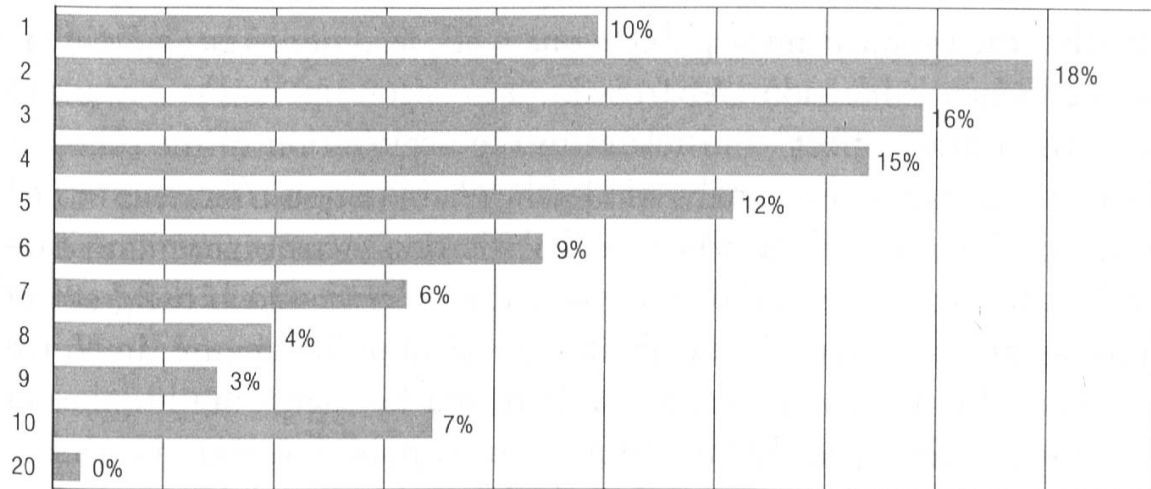
n = 203. *Source:* Annuaire de la recherche en information et communication (SFSIC 2002). *Processing:* H. Cardy & P. Froissart, 2009.

Figure 5: Amount of Publications Declared, in Comparison with the Year
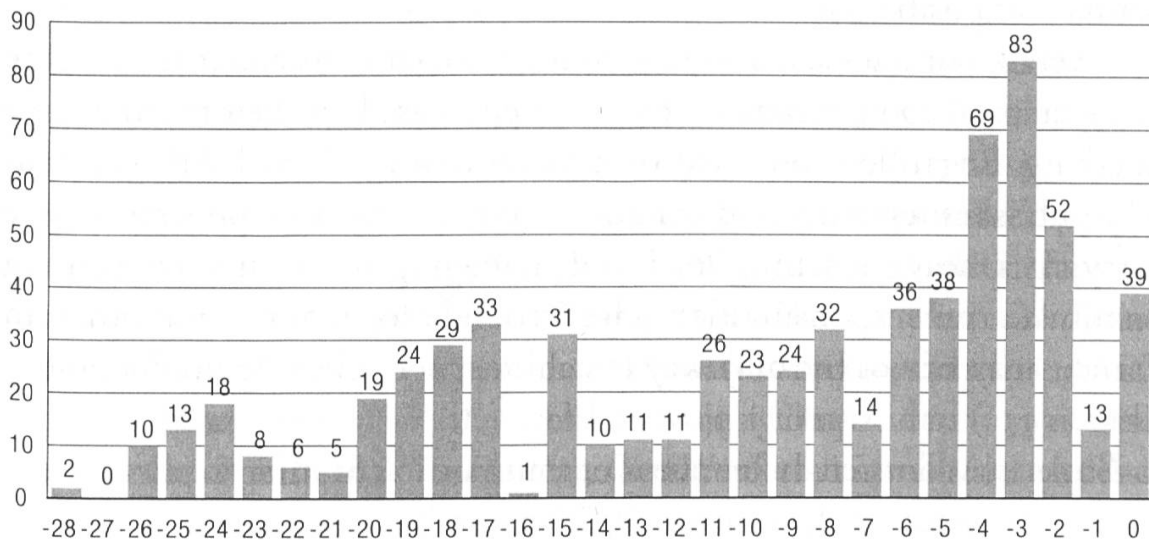
n = 680. *Source:* Annuaire de la recherche en information et communication (SFSIC 2002). *Processing:* H. Cardy & P. Froissart, 2009.

the dissertation, and between 15 and 20 years post-dissertation. The first period is characterized as the "initiatory phase" and corresponds directly to a scholar's entry strategy to an academic career. This is owing to the fact that each scholar must publish one work in order to be "qualified" by the French Education Department. The second period is a result of the "dissertation effect" and relates to the exploitation of the scholar's dissertation results. The final period (the "habilitation effect") is linked to the exploitation of the scholar's "habilitation" results (the "habilitation" in France is a second thesis, written in order to obtain the grade of "Professeur des universités," symbolic equivalent of the "tenure" in North America). Even if the phenomenon is biased by a growing number of reviews (explaining partly why young scholars publish more), the general trend linking a decline in publication activity with distance from the dissertation is mostly understandable given the programmed nature of the French promotion system, which generally increases salaries every 3 years and only grants bonuses to a small number of scholars based on publication and research activity. For example, in 2009 the French Education Department awarded only 16 bonuses to SIC scholars[4] (on a total of 723 permanent positions)!

Overall, our data is inadequate to draw conclusions about the absence of a system of compensation scholars receive based on their research productivity. Regardless, our fieldwork shows that the French SIC community publishes regularly and conducts recurrent research projects despite carrying a heavy teaching load and managing other time-consuming administrative responsibilities. The "struggle for tenure," unknown in France, may be not the only way to achieve good scientific production.

4. Themes Addressed by French Communication Studies

Clearly the total volume of publications has nothing to do with publication themes or their quality. To gain a better understanding of the themes being addressed by either the SIC courses or the SIC research community we conducted a thematic survey. To consider the themes implemented

[4] "Session 2009 - Promotions." [Last retrieved on September 30, 2009 from http://www.cpcnu.fr/statistiquesEtTravauxPromoSection.htm?option=menuSection&numeroSection=71].

into curricular programs by scholars, we examined the job "profiles" ("profils de poste") offered by universities and published by the *Journal officiel* of the French Education Department (582 positions between 1998 and 2005 listed in the French Education Department database). In order to describe SIC research themes, we have taken the list of publications declared by SIC scholars (229 records during the 1999–2002 period) in the *Annuaire de la recherche en information et communication* (SFSIC). We acknowledge that our approach has an inherent weakness in that job profiles are often the result of protracted and difficult negotiations that may not be scientifically oriented, and also because job profiles represent not only courses needs but also research interests.

To study SIC themes, we constructed a thematic grid (see Cardy & Froissart 2002) framed around 10 categories. By applying an empirical methodology and testing the categories on a continual basis, we attempted to cover all the SIC fields without any preconception or value judgment (see Table 2).

We then applied the SIC themes' analysis grid to our fieldwork, first by reviewing the job profiles published by the *Journal officiel* (see Figure 6, left), then by examining the publication titles declared by scholars in the SFSIC *Annuaire* (see Figure 6). The general outcomes are noteworthy because the categories do not appear at the same rate, and the thematic definitions in those categories do not overlap.
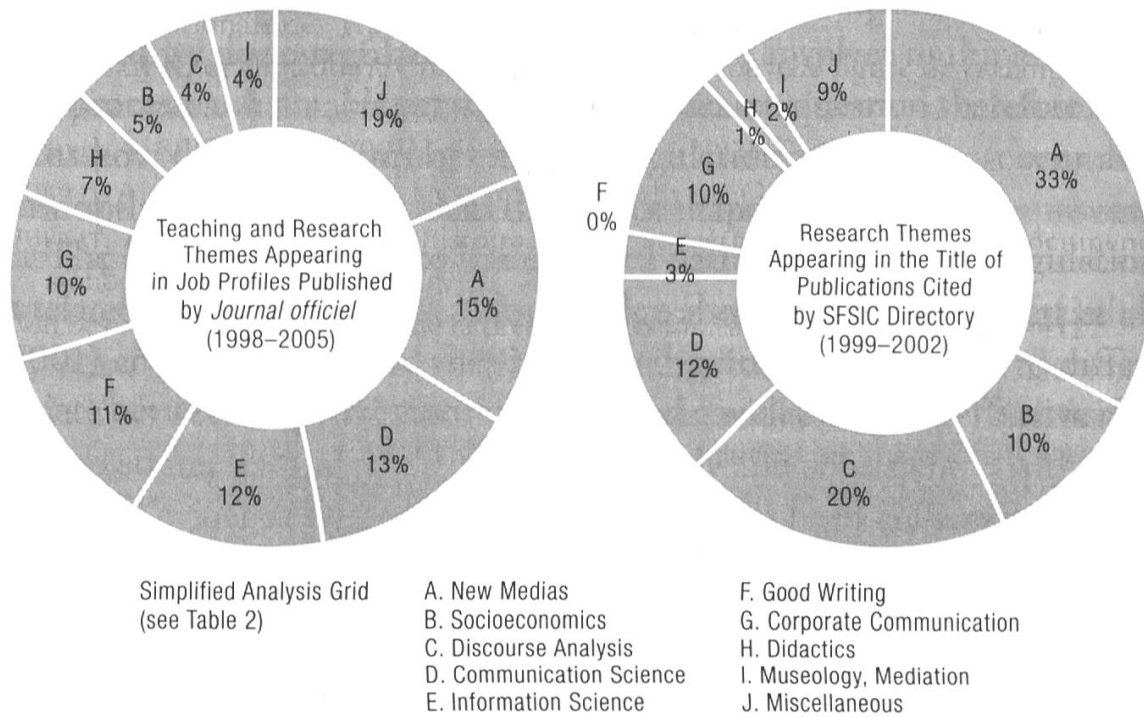
Moreover, the hierarchy is not the same whether one studies the publications or the job profiles. Two thirds of the SIC academic jobs in France are categorized into five specialties[5] (disregarding the "unclassifiable" category): "new media" (15 %), theories of "communication science" (13 %), "information science" (12 %), "good writing" (11 %), and "corporate communication" (10 %). Looking at the French SIC publications, the majority of published articles can be placed into three categories: two thirds of publications address "new media" (33 %), "discourse analysis" (20 %), theories of "communication science" (13 %), followed by "corporate communication" and "socioeconomics" themes. An initial conclusion

[5] It seems to be a dominant trend: the same study three years earlier showed a very similar outcome (see Cardy & Froissart 2002). Despite a high diminution of unclassifiable job profiles (3 times less in 2005 than in 1998), only "good writing" job profiles seem to regress (14 in 1998, 6 in 2005).

Table 2: SIC Theme Analysis Grid

A. New medias. Information and communication technologies, computer, multimedia, hypertext, videotext, desktop publishing, digital medias, networks, Internet, information systems...	**D.** Information, communication (generalist). Communication and society, medias, arts, theories of communication, interpersonal communication, mediation, sociology of communication, reception theories, sociology of journalism, media history, press history...	**G.** Corporate communication, company communication, organizations, advertisement, marketing, management, personnel management...
B. Sociopolitical approach of communication. Cultural politics, local politics, international politics, sociopolitics, socioeconomics, political communication, media economy, institutional communication, public sphere, surveys ...	**E.** Information and documentation. Bibliology, information system, documents, archivistics, library science, indexation, book industry, edition, STI, information scientific and technical information, intelligence	**H.** Professor training, didactics, pedagogy, education sciences, distant education, computer or Web assisted education, evaluation, learning theories...
C. Discourse analysis. Analysis of media production, semiology, semiotics, study of image animated or not, documentary, communication with images, argumentation, rhetoric, representations, analysis of advertisement, education to medias	**F.** Good writing, oral training, audiovisual training, workshop, written communication, journalistic writing, editorial project, directing...	**I.** Cultural mediation, museology, knowledge diffusion and socialization, culture sociology, mediation theories, mediation strategies, popularization of science, scientific mediation ... **J.** Unclassifiable (or without enough details if any)

Figure 6: Job Profiles Themes and Research Themes

Simplified Analysis Grid
(see Table 2)

A. New Medias
B. Socioeconomics
C. Discourse Analysis
D. Communication Science
E. Information Science

F. Good Writing
G. Corporate Communication
H. Didactics
I. Museology, Mediation
J. Miscellaneous

$n_1 = 582$; $n_2 = 229$. *Sources:* Annuaire de la recherche en information et communication (SFSIC 2002); French Education Department (DGRH A1-1). *Processing:* H. Cardy & P. Froissart, 2009.

is that research interests and recruiting interests are quite divergent, particularly with regard to two categories: "good writing" techniques do not inspire much research and few job profiles include "discourse analysis." A recent Finnish study on French communication studies found the same atavism for technology (see Figure 7), but not exactly the same repartition of interests.

In Puustinen et al. (2007), the content analysis of 5 French journals in Communication studies *(Communication et langages, Études de communication, Les enjeux de la communication, Hermès, Réseaux)* for 5 years (2001–2006) shows that, if SIC are clearly "technophiles" in France (13 % of the 872 articles published[6]), the most preeminent approach is the one

[6] … and more than 24 % if you concatenate with themes "Journalism and press" and "TV and radio research."

Figure 7: Research Themes in French Journals of Communication Studies (2001–2006)
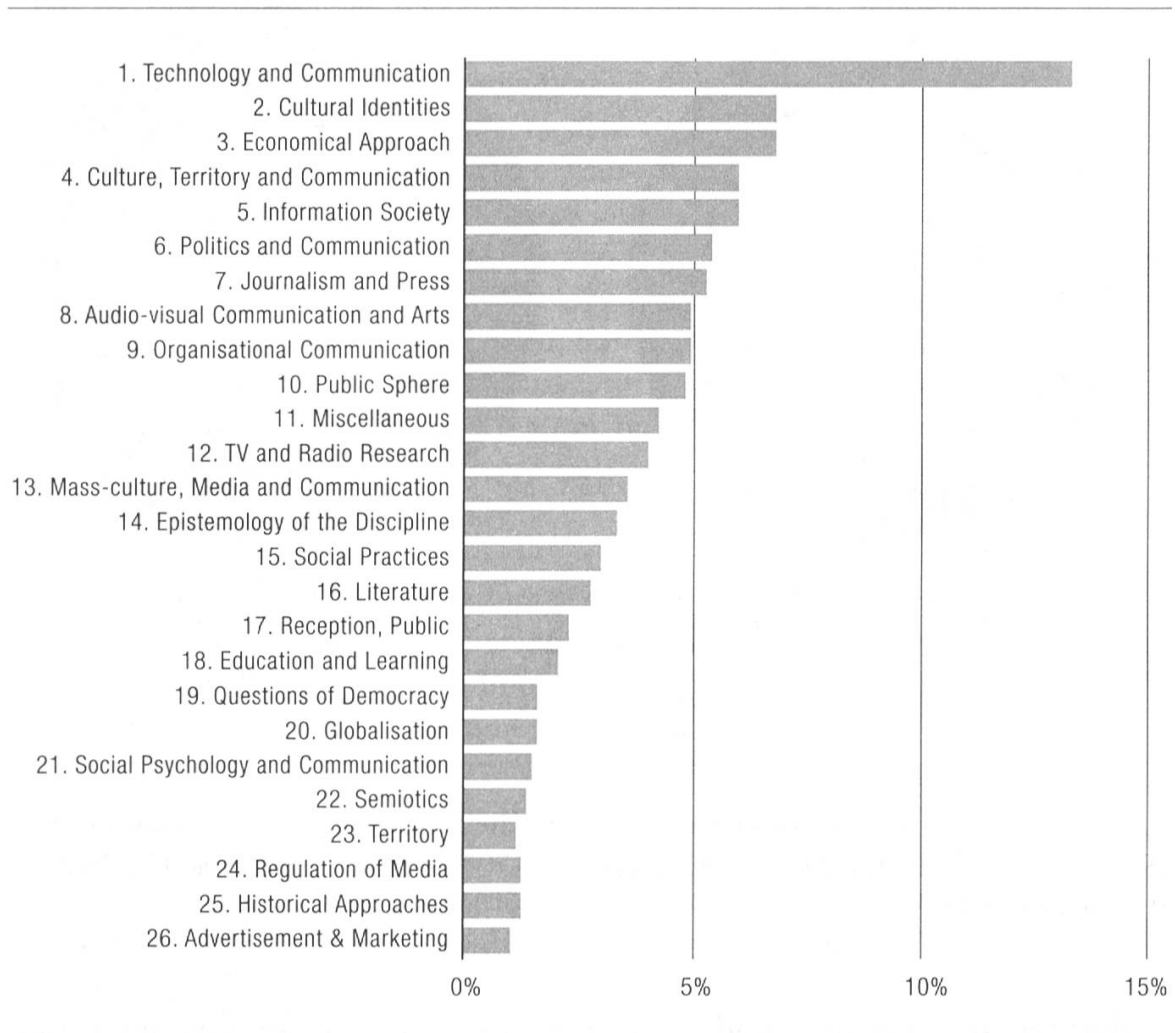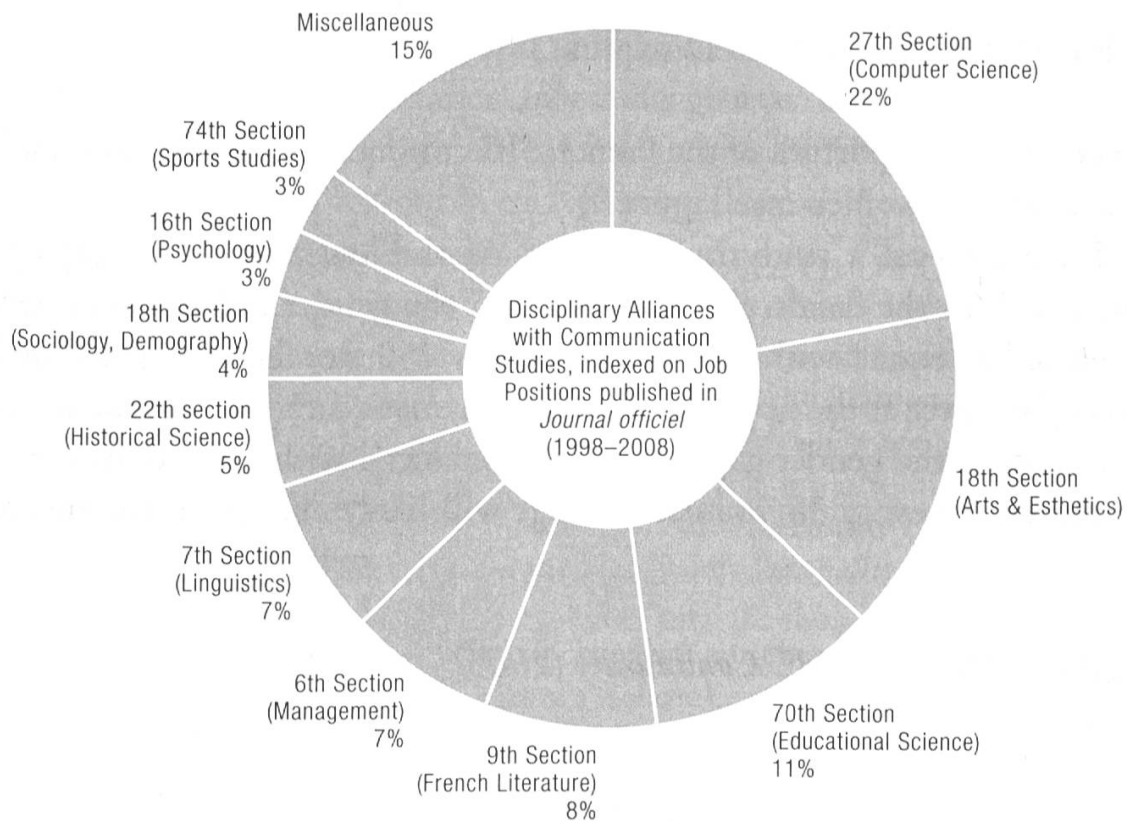

n = 872. *Source:* Puustinen et al. 2007. *Processing:* P. Froissart, 2009.

dealing with political science: 35 % of all articles are linked with themes close to this sister discipline[7].

In order to complete the thematic study we have finally taken one last indicator into account, which is the number of cross-functional job profiles that are SIC related but that are offered in other disciplines. Indeed,

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[7] … if you consider all theses sub-themes: "2. Cultural identities," "4. Culture, territory and communication," "5. Information society," "6. Politics and communication," "10. Public sphere," "19. Questions of democracy," "20. Globalisation," "23. Territory," "24. Regulation of media."

Figure 8. Nature of Alliances in Job Profiles between SIC and other Disciplines (1998–2008)

Miscellaneous
15%

74th Section
(Sports Studies)
3%

16th Section
(Psychology)
3%

18th Section
(Sociology, Demography)
4%

22th section
(Historical Science)
5%

7th Section
(Linguistics)
7%

6th Section
(Management)
7%

9th Section
(French Literature)
8%

Disciplinary Alliances
with Communication
Studies, indexed on Job
Positions published in
Journal officiel
(1998–2008)

27th Section
(Computer Science)
22%

18th Section
(Arts & Esthetics)

70th Section
(Educational Science)
11%

n = 100. *Primary data:* French Education Department (DGRH A1-1). *Processing:* P. Froissart, 2009.

for the 1998–2008 period 100 job profiles were published in collaboration with disciplines outside of SIC (see Figure 8).

Alliances between disciplines show that French SIC has its own interdisciplinary preferences and strengths. Three disciplines summarize more than half of the cross-functional alliances: computer science (24 %), arts and esthetics (15 %), and educational science (11 %). The distribution of these alliances is congruent with data seen as *supra*. That is to say, "computer science" scholars seem to be the best candidates to teach "new media" or to conduct research on that discipline. Similarly even when the disciplinary representation is not respected, we have seen that the French SIC

are thematically close to Educational Sciences. One exception, however, may be the position of SIC with regard to the Arts because this discipline does not appear as a theme in SIC research or in SIC coursework.

5. French SIC, a Gendered Discipline

To complete the portrait of the French SIC community we must also look at the place of women (see Figure 9).

Here we find a study in contrasts. At the lower levels of employment such as the "maître de conferences," the gender balance is largely respected as equal, with 271 men for every 250 women engaged (2005 data). However at the upper levels of employment such as "professeur des universités," the gender gap is visibly imbalanced with around 104 men employed for every 38 women. Things will likely change in the future
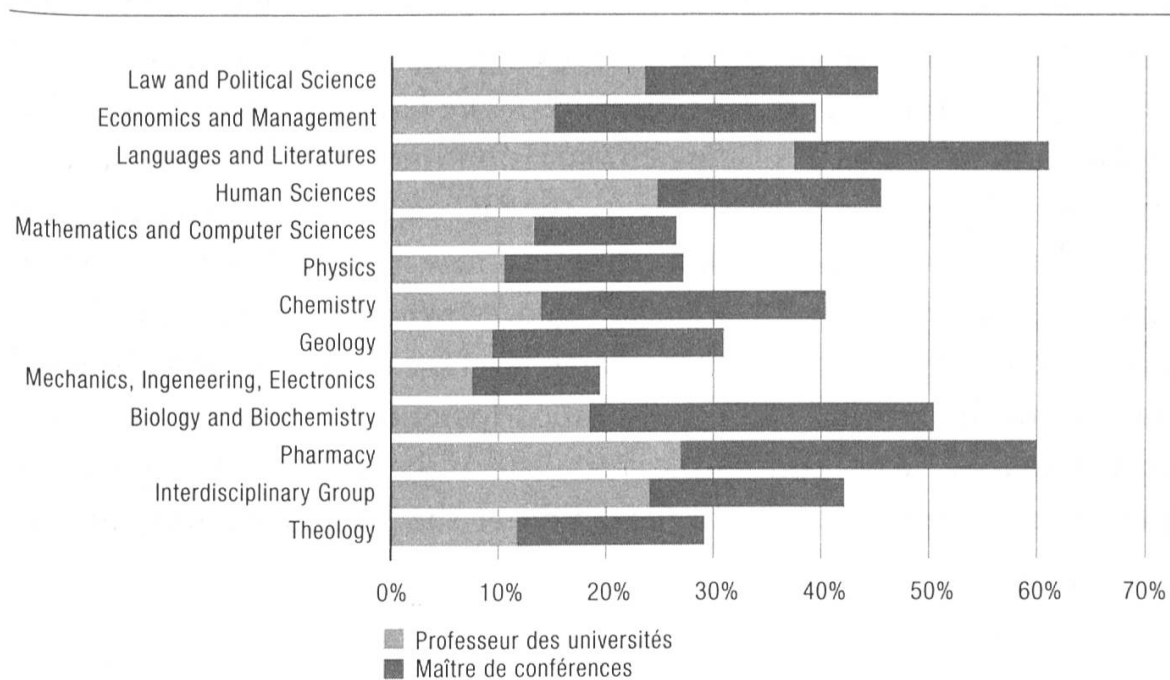
Figure 9: Women in SIC Community (2005)
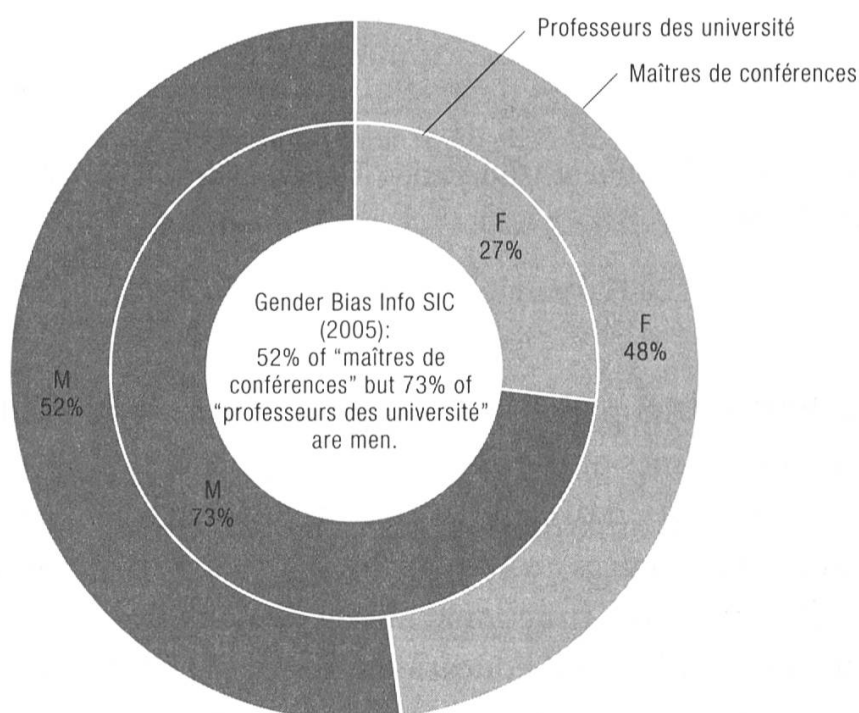
n₁= 921. *Primary data:* French Education Department (DGRH A1-1). *Processing:* P. Froissart, 2009.

given the gender and age composition of SIC scholars. As can be seen in the age pyramid (Figure 2) recruitment now favors a massive hiring of young women into the profession. Still, the French SIC community is not likely to make a gender exception for the top positions since most Universities in the Western world, and in particular in France, remain largely gender biased. In France only three groups of disciplines succeed in raising the female employment numbers above the 50 % "glass ceiling", and for very different reasons in each case (see Figure 10). The disciplines that succeed in this are "Languages and Literatures," "Biology and Bio-chemistry," and "Pharmaceutical Studies." Still, this is only true for the subaltern jobs of "maître de conferences," because in the higher posts of "professeur des universités," no one discipline or group of disciplines reaches more than 40 % of female representation. The closest contender is "Languages and Literatures" with 37 % of the "professeur des universities" made up of women.

Figure 10: Women Gap in French Universities, by Disciplines Groups (2005)

$n_1 = 46,652$. *Primary data:* French Education Department (DGRH A1-1). *Processing:* P. Froissart, 2009.

Yet within these disciplinary groupings the female representation in the SIC community fares better than in many others[8]. Currently 22 % of women in SIC are "professeures des universités" compared to the overall average of 19 % in all disciplines, and 48 % of women are "maître de conferences" compared to the 40 % average in other disciplines. No doubt, the SIC averages are better than the "Mechanics" group where only 8% of "professeures des universités" and 19 % of "maître de conferences" are female. But female SIC scholars are not as successful as their counterparts in "Languages and Literatures" where 37 % of "professeures des universités," and 61 % of "maître de conferences" are women. Processing the gender balance in this way might conceal some surprises, if – for example – men disappeared from the "cultural" disciplines with the purpose of concentrating in "natural" disciplines. However this short foray in gender bias affecting the French SIC community completes the portrait of "Information and Communication Studies" that we have tried to paint here.

To summarize, we have described the SIC community by a demographic factor: 723 "maîtres de conferences" and "professeurs des universités," along with numerous contractual teachers (299 professionals, 255 postings). We have highlighted a potential problem of auto-regeneration in the future by showing the current average age of SIC scholars to be 48 years; 55 for "professeurs des universités." We have also attempted a thematic analysis aimed at placing emphasis on the performance of specific categories. We showed how in France the SIC community is concentrated around coursework themes that center on "new media," "theories of communication," "information science," "good writing" techniques, and "corporate communication." At the research level the themes are less dispersed as most of the scholarly works published focused on "new media," "discourse analysis" and "communication general theories." In doing that, we proposed finally an empirical definition of the SIC community and its concepts.

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[8] SIC is here categorized in the "Interdisciplinary Group."

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