



International Behavior of Family Businesses: New Insights After 30 Years of Research

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In 2021, the anniversaries of three relevant events coincided. In 1981, 40 years ago, Beckhard and Dyer's seminal work, entitled 'Challenges and Issues in Managing Family Firms' was published. Ten years later, in 1991, Gallo & Sveen published the first article on the internationalization of family businesses (Gallo & Sveen, 1991). Finally, in 2011, the first issue of the *European Journal of Family Business* came to be published. All these reasons justify the release of this special issue on the 'International Behavior of Family Business. The Role of Corporate Governance'.

As already mentioned, this year is the 30th anniversary of the publication of the first article on the internationalization of family businesses (IFB) (Gallo & Sveen, 1991). Since then, there has been a growing interest in the topic among researchers worldwide, resulting in an increased number of published articles on the topic, especially in the last few years (Arregle et al., 2017; Casillas & Moreno-Menéndez, 2017; De Massis et al., 2018; Kontinen & Ojala, 2010; Metsola et al., 2020; Pukall & Calabrò, 2014). While this topic was initially found in the journals specifically devoted to the field of family business (*Family Business Review* from 1991 to 2000), research on IFB can now be read from the highest-ranked international business journals, such as the *Journal of International Business Studies* (Boellis et al., 2016; Fernández & Nieto, 2006), *Journal of World Business* (Aguilera & Crespi-Cladera, 2016; Xu et al., 2020), and *International Business Re-*

view (Alayo et al., 2019; Bauweraerts et al., 2019).

In their seminal paper, Gallo and Sveen (1991) remarked that the family nature of the business presents both facilitating and restraining effects on internationalization (related to the family business objectives, organizational structure and systems, and company culture). It is the more recent research that has come to develop these seminal ideas, including new constructs such as familiness (Habbershon & Williams, 1999) or socio-emotional wealth (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007). Most researchers associate the internationalization of family firms with the sequential model proposed by Johanson and Vahlne (1990, 2009) (Pukall & Calabrò, 2014). This is often associated with risk aversion as family members might want to preserve their companies for future generations, and thus, they are not willing to take high risks in the internationalization process (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2010). However, other scholars have found links between the internationalization processes of family firms and the international entrepreneurship field, showing for example, a higher agility in decision-making among family managed firms (Piva et al., 2013; Thomas & Graves, 2005).

The increase in the number of published papers has motivated the need to carry out continuous review studies in the last years (Alayo et al., 2021; Arregle et al., 2017, 2021; Casprini et al.,

<https://doi.org/10.24310/ejfbefjb.v11i2>

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European Journal of Family Business is an open access journal published in Malaga by UMA Editorial. ISSN 2444-8788 ISSN-e 2444-877X
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2020; Debellis et al., 2021; Kontinen & Ojala, 2010; Metsola et al., 2020; Pukall & Calabrò, 2014). The first attempt to review the literature on IFB was conducted by Kontinen and Ojala (2010), who summarized the research field during its initial stage. More recently, Pukall and Calabrò (2014) offered a clear integration between the sequential models of internationalization based on the Uppsala school (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009), and the process of international expansion of family businesses. This study proposes that these companies tend to follow the sequential model based on a progressive commitment of resources, to the extent that family businesses show a greater aversion to taking risks in their decision-making processes.

Metsola et al. (2020) highlighted the need to approach the internationalization process of family businesses from a longitudinal perspective, where the study of time is more relevant. Other reviews, such as Casprini et al. (2020) and Alayo et al. (2021), used different bibliometric techniques to identify the main research fields and to propose future research lines. The reviews highlighted the need to continue analyzing the heterogeneity of family firms, given the inconclusive findings of previous research. It is on this basis that the meta-analysis of Arregle et al. (2017) tried to answer the divergent results on the topic and reconcile the mixed evidence of previous research.

In their review, Debellis et al. (2020) offered an integrative framework through a description of the main theoretical perspectives, and subject areas. This study identifies four major stages or 'waves' in the research on the internationalization of family businesses. While in the first stages, the interest was focused on the dichotomy between family and non-family companies, later the question of the heterogeneity of family companies, contingency, and contextual factors were recognised and addressed. Finally, interest focused on the approximations of the micro-processes derived from international behavior in this type of companies.

This fourth wave proposes a synthesizing concept, the so-called 'bifurcation bias'. The bifurcation consists of the '*de facto* differential treatment of family or patrimonial assets versus non-family assets' (Kano & Verbeke, 2018, p. 158). Bifurcation bias encompasses all waves of research on the internationalization of family businesses by simultaneously considering both the uniqueness and heterogeneity of the internationalization of family businesses in relation to issues such as the allocation between specific, often dysfunctional, family assets and assets that are external, often functional and complementary, in the internationalization process.

Along these lines, Arregle et al. (2021) have published the most recent review work. They concluded that the future research agenda should be addressed through an interdisciplinary and multi-theoretical approach that considers different crossed levels. These authors argue that a lot of work still needs to be carried out in terms of rationalizing the assumptions, definitions, and measures, and that more theoretically well founded and methodologically rigorous studies are needed in the future.

In summary, different types of behaviors in relation to internationalization have been found in the extant literature, and IFB continues to be far from being a mature topic. Casillas and Moreno-Méndez (2017) identified six promising areas where research could be carried out in the IFB field: (1) mission and objectives of firms: the meaning of 'performance', (2) corporate government and international business, (3) attitude to risk and internationalization patterns, (4) timing, pace, and speed of internationalization, (5) cross-cultural management, and (6) network perspective and social capital of firms. The potential heterogeneity of the internationalization process of family business is derived from the influence of different combinations of family involvement on the corporate government structure and functioning.

This special issue aims to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the first paper on IFB (Gallo & Sveen, 1991), stimulating thinking on the international behavior of family businesses from theoretical and practical perspectives. Four papers were finally selected for publication in this special issue. These papers bring out the diversity of the development of the topic. Once constituted the main classic issues, such as differences between FB and non-FB internationalization, and the role of corporate governance structure on international behavior, research have come to be deeply investigated in the recent years. The papers are aligned with new developments in IB fields, such as the integration of international value chains (Arregle et al., 2017; Majocchi & Strange, 2012), the speed of the internationalization process (Casillas & Acedo, 2013), the effect of governance structure on different firm outcomes (innovation growth and exports), and the heterogeneity of the family business internationalization-performance relationship, applied to the specific characteristics of the internationalization process in the hotel industry.

The first paper of this special issue, by Moreno-Méndez, Castiglioni, and Cobeña, is entitled '*The influence of socio-emotional wealth on the speed of the export development process in family and non-family firms*'. It argues that family firms do not necessarily internationalize less than

non-family businesses, but rather, they do it more slowly. This is due to three main reasons: (a) long-term orientation of family businesses (Lumpkin & Brigham, 2011), and the role of 'patient capital' (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003); (b) risk aversion of family businesses in order to preserve SEW (Berrone et al., 2012); and (c) family businesses' lack of high-level resources to protect their independence from external agents. The empirical research, based on a panel of more than a thousand Spanish manufacturing firms over nine years (2006-2014), supports the hypothesis proposed independent of a firm's previous size, age, and export commitment level.

In the second paper, '*The role of family firms' heterogeneity on the internationalisation and performance relationship*', Rienda and Andreu contribute towards an understanding of the internationalization-performance relationship of family businesses, focusing on the moderating role of some heterogeneous characteristics of family firms. Specifically, they analyze a sample of 76 companies belonging to the Spanish hotel industry, one of the most internationalized sectors, and with a large presence of family businesses. The results show that family involvement in ownership and management, as well as generation, moderates the relationship between internationalization and profitability in the Spanish hotel industry.

The third paper, entitled '*Family and non-family businesses in Iran: Coupling among innovation, internationalization and growth-expectation*', by Samsami and Schøtt investigates how innovation, exports, and growth expectations are aligned in family businesses via a coupling that may be loose or tight. This research is based on quantitative methodology and used a sample of 530 businesses in Iran. The findings suggest that coupling of performance outcomes in family businesses can be tightened feasibly, thereby reinforcing the performance. In other words, coupling among performance outcomes facilitates internationalization, which is an advantage that reinforces the internationalization process. However, empirical results show that the advantage occurs less frequently in family businesses than in non-family businesses and that it should be reinforced.

The last paper, by Molina-Quintana and Quintana-León, is entitled '*Comparison of international family business supply chain integration and non-international family business supply chain integration of the food industry sector of Michoacán, México*'. Supply chain integration can be defined as the degree to which all the activities within an organization, its suppliers, and its customers are integrated (Huo et al., 2014; Leuschner et al., 2013). Having used the arcs of integration as a methodology applied

to a sample of 93 manufacturing companies, Molina-Quintana and Quintana-León found that the internationalization of family businesses contributes significantly to supply chain integration in terms of suppliers, but not in terms of customers.

IFB is a research field that is attracting a growing interest among family firm researchers. The evolution of the research field shows that research on IFB is currently focused on a variety of diverse topics, as it can be seen in the articles in this special issue. Finally, as guest editors of the special issue, we would like to express our gratitude to the editor-in-chief and the associate directors of the *European Journal of Family Business* for their collaboration and support.

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