

DEVELOPING THE GENEALOGY OF FAMILY BUSINESS INTERNATIONALIZATION LITERATURE: REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

VINCENZO PISANO
University of Catania
Dept. of Economics and Business
Corso Italia, 55
95129 Catania, Italy

MARCO GALVAGNO
University of Catania

INTRODUCTION

The internationalization strategy of family business (IFB) has reached significant consideration in the last decades (Arregle, Duran, Hitt, & Van Essen, 2017; Calabrò, Brogi, Torchia, 2016; Kontinen & Ojala, 2010; Pukall & Calabrò, 2014).

We provide a bibliometric review of IFB literature trying to describe its genealogy: namely, what we might consider the research field's 'family tree'. In major details, we examine the most cited papers among the 141 ones published on IFB between a time interval going from 1988 until 2017, and indexed on Web of Science (WoS) of Clarivate Analytics®. In line with this metaphor, we identify (1) the most important research themes and methodological approaches (i.e. the 'fathers': the most relevant papers within the research field), (2) their theoretical bases (i.e. the 'ancestors': the papers which the fathers have been built upon, hence the theoretical roots of the field), and (3) the latest areas of investigation (i.e. the 'descendants': the most recent papers published within the field), and propose potential future research directions.

We contribute in two ways. First, we integrate, update, and extend previous reviews through the examination of the theoretical roots and of the most recent areas of investigation within the areas of family business and internationalization. Second, we explain how studies are evolving and why they should evolve toward an integration of the theoretical approaches employed within internationalization and family business research.

METHODOLOGY

Our study employs the bibliometric methodology. It is a methodology based on the postulation that the structure of a scientific field can be empirically acknowledged by linking papers. The benefit is given by the possibility to outdo many limitations typical of those reviews based on qualitative methods: most of all, it allows a future replication of the research as the method elucidates the logic behind sample selection (Zupic & Cater, 2015).

In this paper, we used the most relevant bibliometric methods, such as citation analysis, co-citation analysis, and bibliographic coupling.

To measure its relevance within a specific research field, citation analysis uses the number of citations of a specific paper (Garfield, 1970). This allows us to offer information on the relative impact of a certain paper.

To measure the similarity between two papers, we used co-citation analysis, which looks at the number of times those two works are concurrently cited (Small, 1973). Therefore, if they are co-cited by a third one, this latter work creates a connection between those two. The logic is that, if two papers are concurrently and regularly cited, there should be a link among the two as they probably have something in common (e.g. similar topic, similar theoretical framework, and so forth). Hence, when looking at an extensive period, co-citation analysis is able to draw the structure of a research field. More precisely, there are two typologies of co-citation analysis. The first – the ‘external’ – measures the co-citations deriving from all those papers that cite the documents included in the sample to be analyzed. The second – the ‘internal’ – measures the co-citations that instead derive from those papers that are included in the analyzed sample. So the first kind is meant to cluster and map the papers included in the sample; while the second is meant to cluster and map the papers that are cited by those included within the sample. Here we underline the crucial difference between the two kinds as, while the first allows us to depict the most important topics and methodologies employed in the field (i.e. the fathers), the second allows us to depict the theoretical roots upon which the research field has been developed (i.e. the ancestors).

The last method employed – namely, bibliographic coupling – connects those papers that are characterized by citing the same publications (Kessler, 1963). The logic is that, even if they do not directly cite each other, papers are interrelated by sharing some references (Boyack & Klavans, 2010). If we apply this methodology to some recent papers in a specific research field, they can be classified depending on their similarity, and this process allows us to identify the research fronts (what we named ‘the descendants’). While bibliographic coupling is static, co-citation analysis is dynamic as linked to how recent vs. old is a certain paper. Additionally, co-citation analysis may be used only for papers that have been cited a minimum number of times; hence it underestimates the most recent ones. In this regard, bibliographic coupling fits better for recently published papers.

Our research has been conducted through a five-step analysis: (1) data gathering and identification of the literature on IFB; (2) citation analysis of the located papers to identify the most influential ones (i.e. the fathers); (3) external co-citation analysis of the fathers that were grouped into clusters to identify the intellectual structure of the research field; (4) internal co-citation analysis of the fathers to identify the theoretical roots upon which these papers have been built (i.e. the ancestors); (5) bibliographic coupling of the publications of the years 2016 and 2017 to group them by similarity and to individuate the most recent areas of investigation (i.e. the descendants).

 Figure 1 about here

DATA GATHERING

The adopted databases were the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) of WoS of Clarivate Analytics[®]. We performed two searches among papers published over a 30-year period and, precisely, from 1988 to 2017. The first search extracted a subset of 411,478 documents whose title, abstract, or keywords contained at least one of the following words: “international*”, “global*”, “export*”, “international sales”, “foreign direct investment*”, “FDI”. The second search extracted a subset of 3,079 documents whose title, abstract, or keywords contained at least one of the following words: “family firm*”, “family business*”, “family organization*”, “family enterprise*”, “family owned”. The papers included in both subsets were 404.

These latter documents were filtered by including only papers and reviews (i.e. excluding book reviews, editorial comments, and conference proceedings) that were published in journals listed within the two categories of Management and Business. This process led to a set of 247 papers. To ensure that no papers were overlooked, we carried out an additional search. As we are aware that the review paper of Pukall and Calabrò (2014) is currently the most complete review in IFB, we adopted the same filters to locate those publications citing Pukall and Calabrò (2014), but possibly overlooked by our search because they might not contain the selected keywords. This took us to individuate 4 additional papers, expanding our set to 251 documents. To avoid the inclusion of papers that could not be in line with our topic, we read each title, abstract, and conclusions of the 251 papers independently fulfilling a relevance and consistency check and excluding substantially irrelevant papers. Finally, we had a sample of 133 papers published between 1988 and 2017.

Last but not least, since *Family Business Review* (FBR) may be considered the most important journal in the family business field, we included few more papers that could not be included in the final sample because FBR was indexed in the SSCI only after 2005. Thus, we found 8 further papers that formed a final sample of 141 documents.

ANALYSIS

To identify the fathers of the IFB literature and consistently with the methodological prescriptions (Zupic & Cater, 2015), we then selected the most cited papers in the field. Prior studies have used a conventional number of citations, e.g. the 100 most cited papers or those with a minimum of 50 citations (Ramos-Rodriguez & Ruiz-Navarro, 2004). Drawing on Di Stefano and colleagues (2012), our sample instead included only papers with a number of citations greater or equal to the average number of citations received (i.e. 31). Thus, our filtered sample consists of 34 papers that we labeled as ‘the fathers’ of IFB field.

 Table 1 about here

We used VOSviewer 1.6.6 to map and analyze the co-citation network (Van Eck & Waltman, 2009; Waltman, Van Eck & Noyons, 2010) of the 34 fathers. The analysis produced a few clusters, each one of them including papers characterized by similar topics or approaches. We labeled such clusters as it follows: *Management decisions* (Cluster #1); *Ownership Structure* (Cluster #2); *Network ties and opportunities recognition* (Cluster #3); *Drivers and inhibitors* (Cluster #4); *Resources and capabilities* (Cluster #5).

To identify the theoretical bases of the 34 fathers, we accomplished an internal co-citation analysis. Specifically, we define ancestors those papers that have been co-cited by the 34 previously identified fathers. A brief scrutiny of the ancestors shows that family business and internationalization were two separate research streams at the beginning; then they employed two theoretical frameworks that were external to the field of family business and more typical of management studies (i.e. agency theory and the resource-based view); finally they begun to employ the SEW approach (that is specific of family business research), while they refer to born-again global and international entrepreneurship (that are typical of international business).

To identify the most recent areas of investigation in IFB – i.e. the descendants – we implemented a bibliographic coupling on all papers published within the years 2016-2017 from our

main sample. Descendants amount to 48 and are divided in six clusters portraying the current research trends scholars are mostly focused on in the IFB literature: *Family ties and networks* (Cluster #1); *Board composition* (Cluster #2); *CEOs and managers' personal characteristics* (Cluster #3); *Country specific conditions favoring internationalization* (Cluster #4); *Innovation and entrepreneurship* (Cluster #5); *Opportunities recognition and management decisions* (Cluster #6).

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, important contributions emerge from this study. To our knowledge, this is the first review studying the intellectual structure of IFB research through a bibliometric approach and depicting its genealogy. The metaphor of the family tree allowed us to deeply analyze the most important papers in the field (the fathers), identify their theoretical roots (the ancestors), and represent the most up-to-date researched topics (the descendants) providing advices for future research. From a practical perspective, this study is useful for theory building, family owners' decision-making, and teaching. Indeed, scholars can now position their work in the literature, as well as recognize potential new topics and gaps that may help formulating new research questions.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHORS

Figure 1 – Framework of analysis

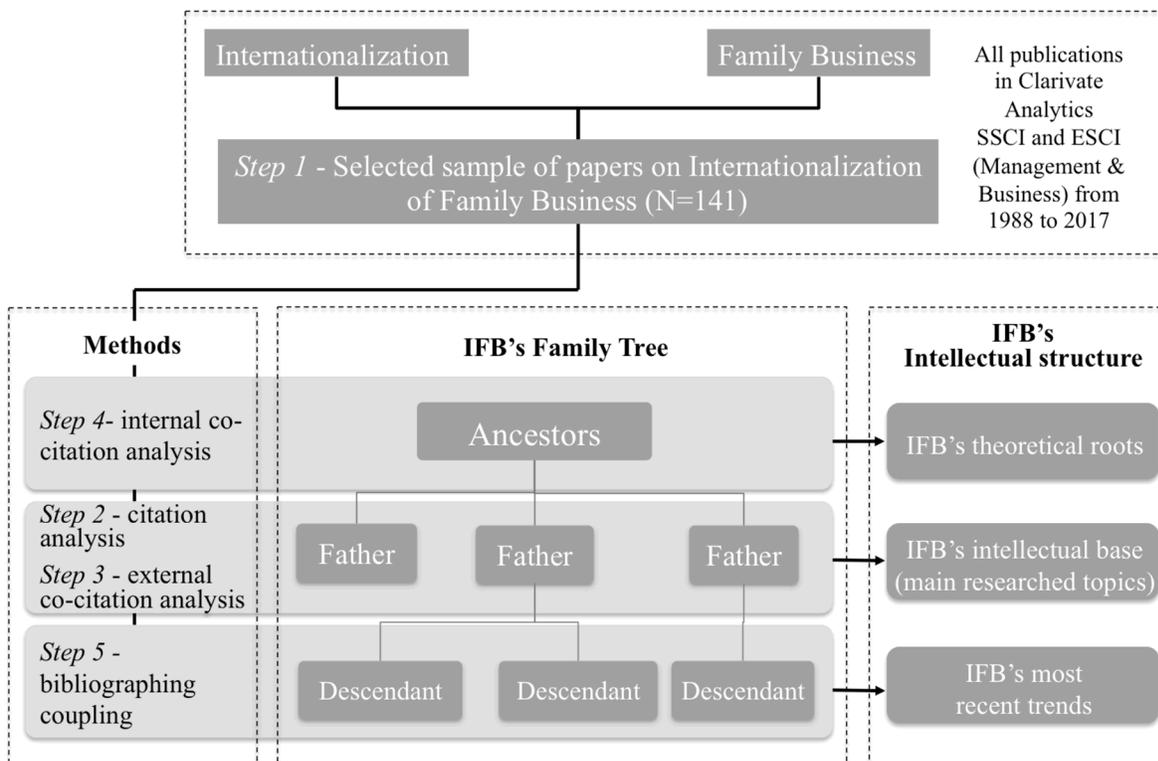


Table 1 – The ‘fathers’ of the IFB research field

	Articles	Journals	No. of Citations
1	Gomez-Mejia et al. (2011)	<i>Academy of Management Annals</i>	386
2	Gomez-Mejia et al. (2010)	<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	302
3	Zahra (2003)	<i>Journal of Business Venturing</i>	286
4	Fernandez & Nieto (2005)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	192
5	Fernandez & Nieto (2006)	<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>	188
6	George et al. (2005)	<i>Journal of Management</i>	176
7	Zucchella et al. (2007)	<i>Journal of World Business</i>	166
8	Sciascia & Mazzola (2008)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	143
9	Westhead & Howorth (2006)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	141
10	Graves & Thomas (2008)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	120
11	Sirmon et al. (2008)	<i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i>	106
12	Bhaumik et al. (2010)	<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>	105
13	Graves & Thomas (2006)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	105
14	Sciascia et al. (2012)	<i>Small Business Economics</i>	99
15	Pukall & Calabrò (2014)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	80
16	Kontinen & Ojala (2011a)	<i>International Business Review</i>	73
17	Claver et al. (2009)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	73
18	Arregle et al. (2012)	<i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i>	66
19	Tsang (2002)	<i>Journal of Business Venturing</i>	66
20	Kontinen & Ojala (2010)	<i>Journal of Family Business Strategy</i>	60
21	Tsang (2001)	<i>Journal of Small Business Management</i>	57
22	Gallo & Garcia Pont (1996)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	57
23	Okoroafo (1999)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	57
24	Banalieva & Eddleston (2011)	<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>	55
25	Davis & Harveston (2000)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	49
26	Kontinen & Ojala (2011b)	<i>Journal of Small Business Management</i>	46
27	Jorissen et al. (2005)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	46
28	Pinho (2007)	<i>International Marketing Review</i>	43
29	Habbershon (2006)	<i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i>	43
30	Escriba-Esteve et al. (2009)	<i>British Journal of Management</i>	42
31	Lin (2012)	<i>European Management Journal</i>	39
32	Gallo & Sveen (1991)	<i>Family Business Review</i>	35
33	Kontinen & Ojala (2012)	<i>International Marketing Review</i>	34
34	Eberhard & Craig (2013)	<i>Journal of World Business</i>	31