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RESEARCH PAPER

International business & family business: Potential dialogue between disciplines

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Abstract 25 years ago, Gallo and Sveen (1991) published the first paper about internationalization of family businesses. Since then, research in this area has steadily increased. In this article, I review the evolution of the literature that has combined international business and family firms (102 papers from 1991 to 2015), and I identify six promising areas for research through a dialogue between both disciplines: (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.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Negocios internacionales;
Empresa familiar;
Investigación futura;
Teoría

Negocios internacionales y empresa familiar: el potencial de un diálogo entre disciplinas

Resumen Hace ahora 25 años, Gallo and Sveen (1991) publicaron el primer artículo sobre la internacionalización de la empresa familiar. Desde entonces, la investigación en esta área ha crecido significativamente. En este trabajo se hace una revisión de la literatura que se encuentra en la intersección de los campos de estudio de negocios internacionales y la empresa familiar (102 trabajos a lo largo del periodo 1991 a 2015) y se identifican 6 áreas prometedoras de investigación como fruto del diálogo entre ambas disciplinas: 1) la misión y visión de las empresas: el significado del «rendimiento»; 2) el gobierno corporativo de los negocios familiares

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internacionales; 3) la actitud ante el riesgo y los patrones de internacionalización; 4) el ritmo y la velocidad de la internacionalización; 5) la gestión cross-cultural, y 6) la perspectiva de redes y el capital social en la empresa familiar.

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Introduction

The study of the international activities undertaken by family businesses is a growing field of research that straddles the two disciplines of international business (IB) and family business (FB). Following the first article by Gallo and Sveen (1991), research in this area has steadily increased over the intervening 25 years (Arregle, Duran, Hitt, & van Essen, 2016; Kontinen & Ojala, 2010; Pukall & Calabro, 2014). There are two reasons for the growing interest in research into the international dimension of family business (IFB). Firstly, patterns of internationalization and globalization have changed in recent decades, with new actors being introduced to the global arena, such as born-global firms, multinational SMEs, and multinational corporations (MNCs) from emerging countries. This changing scenario presents new opportunities for family firms, the majority of which are smaller than non-family companies (Fernández & Nieto, 2006). Secondly, the increasing number of researchers and the greater impact of their publications mean that studies into family business are becoming increasingly relevant (Casillas & Acedo, 2007; Zattoni, Gnan, & Huse, 2015). These two opportunities can be illustrated by examples of family multinational firms all over the world, such as Samsung (South Korea), Koch Industries (USA), Carrefour (France), Faber-Castell (Germany), Bombardier (Canada), Tata Group (India), Cemex (Mexico), and so on.

The majority of research has focused solely on the internationalization of family businesses (Arregle et al., 2016; Pukall & Calabro, 2014), although the field of international business covers many other areas (Acedo & Casillas, 2005; Melin, 1992). With regard to the process of family business internationalization, Pukall and Calabro (2014) summarize what we actually know and propose a hybrid model that combines the socio-emotional wealth (SEW) view of family businesses (Gómez-Mejía, Haynes, Núñez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007) and the stage model of the internationalization process (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 2009). Different authors find contradictory results in their review of the literature on family business internationalization, showing a positive (e.g. Carr & Bateman, 2009), negative (e.g. Fernández & Nieto, 2006), or no relationship (e.g. Cerrato & Piva, 2010) between the internationalization activities of family and non-family businesses (Arregle et al., 2016). In fact, as Pukall and Calabro (2014) argue, not all family businesses are homogeneous, and the most important variable that pushes family firms towards internationalization is the ownership structure (the role of external owners), via the board of directors.

However, as we have indicated above, international behavior goes beyond the level of a firm's internationalization. In their seminal works, Hawkins (1984), Toyne (1989) and Melin (1992) identify different areas of research in the international business field, only one of which is concerned with the internationalization process; other topics include the organizational behavior of MNCs, or cross-cultural management, among others. New approaches have arisen in recent decades in relation to international activities, such as the emergence of born-global firms and international new ventures, the role of networks, etc. (Coviello, 2015; Jones, Coviello, & Tang, 2011; Knight & Cavusgil, 2004; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994, 2005). These topics have largely neglected the prominent role of family businesses, which indicates that there are opportunities for a fruitful dialogue between the disciplines. In this paper, we review the evolution of the literature that has combined international business and family firms over the past 25 years (from the first article by Gallo and Sveen in 1991, to 2015); and identify promising areas for research through a dialogue between the disciplines of international business and family business.

Convergent evolution of IB and FB

Gallo and Sveen (1991) published the first paper on the international dimension of family businesses 25 years ago, in *Family Business Review*. Since then, interest in the topic has grown significantly among researchers all around the world. Our criteria for the selection of articles published over the past 25 years were the following: (1) articles must be published only in peer-reviewed journals; (2) the title or abstract should include the words international and family business (or similar words); and (3) the article should deal with the international dimensions of family business. The criteria for each paper were assigned on a case-by-case basis. To test our selection, we also looked at two previous review papers, published by Pukall and Calabro (2014) and Kontinen and Ojala (2010). The sample for our literature review consisted of 102 papers.¹ This figure is higher than in previous review processes in this area (Kontinen and Ojala included 25 papers in 2010; Pukall and Calabro analyzed 72 works, in 2014).

As stated above, there has been an annual increase in the research into the international dimension of family business, as Fig. 1 shows. More than four papers have been published

¹ Appendix shows the 102 papers, in alphabetical order.

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