ARE ALL FAMILY BUSINESSES EQUALLY INVOLVED IN SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ACTIONS?

AN IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE

Lissana Elena

Ph.D. in Business & Law

XXXIV Ciclo

Supervisor: Prof. Bergamaschi Mara
Co-supervisor: Prof. Bettinelli Cristina

University of Bergamo

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To my mother

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1. Introduction

1.1 Relevance of the topic

Family businesses represent the largest fraction of all organizations worldwide (Sharma, Melin, & Nordqvist, 2014) since, according to several studies, they constitute between 60% and 90% of the businesses all around the world, depending on how they are defined (Martinez & Aldrich, 2014). Indeed, they have a fundamental role in the global economy (Colli, Pérez, & Rose, 2003), significantly contributing to creating new jobs and developing new communities (Heck & Stafford, 2001; Neubauer & Lank, 2016).

Reporting some key numbers, in the US several studies showed that up to 50% of the firms are controlled or owned by families (Anderson & Reeb, 2003; Astrachan & Shanker, 2003) and they contribute to almost 60% of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product, or an average of $8.3 trillion, and employ over 65% of the national workforce (Annual Family Business Survey, 2011). In Europe, the importance of family firms is even greater, representing the backbone of the economy (Botero, Cruz, Massis, & Nordqvist, 2015). The European Commission estimates that family businesses are more than 14 million (60% of all European companies), contributing to around 50% of the European GDP and creating more than 60 million positions in the private sector (European Parliament Report, 2015; European Family Businesses Report, 2021). A lot of European listed and family-controlled firms, such as Hermès, LMHV, Exor, Beretta or Swatch, are among the most famous in the world and together with the other listed European family businesses, they worth more than 50 million Euros in the market capitalization (Cruz & Nuñez, 2013). In the European context, a specific mention of Italy is needed as it is characterized by an outstanding number of firms owned and controlled by families (Barontini & Caprio, 2006; Faccio & Lang, 2002), which represents 69% and 62% respectively of the small and medium-big size companies of the country (Corbetta & Quarato, 2021). To a lesser extent, but still relevant, family businesses also contribute to the growth of the countries' economy in the rest of the world and in particular in developing countries in South and East Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Basco, 2018).

Family firms are peculiar due to the presence of families, which are involved in the company's ownership and governance. Being in such a relevant position, the family acquires a fundamental role in the organizational decision-making processes, being thus

allowed to manage the business as it wishes. What is interesting here is that, together with the typical business concerns such as growth and performance, families are often focused on other goals aimed at meeting their own needs such as emotional attachment, preserving the family identity and reputation, maintaining control, and perpetuating the family dynasty (Gómez-Mejía, Haynes, Núñez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007). However, the standard economic goals (more related to the business) and these other objectives (related to the family) are not always aligned, sometimes affecting the family firms' long-term economic strategies for the sake of the family's desires and interests (Gomez-Mejia, Cruz, Berrone, & De Castro, 2011). Thus, family firms often face several challenges due to the presence of these two overlapping systems (i.e., the family and the business) which are "inextricably intertwined" but often misaligned (Pearson, 2008, p. 966).

The co-existence of the "family" and the "business" social categories is what differentiates family from non-family businesses (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2013). However, several studies suggested that more differences are found among family firms than between family and non-family firms (Chrisman & Patel, 2012), highlighting the importance of considering this group of firms as heterogeneous (Chua, Chrisman, Steier, & Rau, 2012; Daspit, Chrisman, Ashton, & Evangelopoulos, 2021; García-Álvarez & López-Sintas, 2001; Memili & Dibrell, 2019). Numerous factors have been pointed out as sources of such diversity, for example, the form of corporate governance and the degree of family involvement in ownership (Breton-Miller & Miller, 2006; Nordqvist, Sharma, & Chirico, 2014), communication and branding strategies (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011), accounting strategies (Salvato & Moores, 2010), the organizational culture (Howorth, Rose, Hamilton, & Westhead, 2010), and diverging goals and missions (Chrisman, Sharma, Steier, & Chua, 2013).

Consequently, there is a "clear need to focus research efforts on the uniqueness of family firms which differentiates them from other organizational forms" (Gomez-Mejia, Cruz, Berrone, & De Castro, 2011, p. 695), but even more on the differences *among* family firms (Chua, Chrisman, Steier, & Rau, 2012). Academic scholars have done and are doing a lot of efforts to unveil this uniqueness, using refined and thoughtful research questions, theories, and methodologies (Sharma, De Massis, & Gagne, 2014). However, there are some areas that are still largely unexplored while others are just superficially approached.

Among the others, one area that deserves more attention in family businesses is identity, which is strictly related to firms' uniqueness and distinctiveness. Identity is a strategic task and shapes different aspects in every organization (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000), something particularly relevant for family firms (Cannella, Jones, & Withers, 2015). Indeed, family firms are constructed as a combination of different otherwise separate social categories, the "business", the "family", and sometimes the "owners" (Gersick, Davis, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997; Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2013), each "heavily laden with beliefs, emotions, values, understandings, and expectations" (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2013). These different subsystems are represented by multiple identities, that are separated but yet intertwined (Dyer & Whetten, 2006; Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). From their co-existence, complex dynamics of interaction and tensions arise and influence the business, the family, and all the actors involved.

For example, in organizational identity, the co-presence of the business and the family lead to the necessity of finding an equilibrium between economic rationality and the family imperative (e.g., Berrone, Cruz, Gomez-Mejia, & Larraza-Kintana, 2010; Suddaby & Jaskiewicz, 2020). Similarly, as regards the individual, in the family business context a person may hold multiple role identities simultaneously, being at the same time the owner, an employee, and a family member. This may lead to significant identity conflicts, both in terms of individual identity salience (e.g., Reay, 2009; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009) and between different individuals (e.g., Trippe & Baumoel, 2015). Furthermore, the interaction among identities at different levels, such as the family identity and the business identity (e.g., Cruz, Justo, & De Castro, 2012), implies the necessity of social boundaries management (e.g., Knapp, Smith, Kreiner, Sundaramurthy, & Barton, 2013) and may affect business strategies (e.g., Miller & Le Breton–Miller, 2011) as well as the relationship with the community (Sasaki, Ravasi, & Micelotta, 2019).

In summary, identities in family firms deserve more attention to better understand their idiosyncratic nature and how they make family businesses a unique environment. Which identities are peculiar to the family business context? How have they been studied over the years? What consequences do they have on the family business characteristics and strategic aspects? These were some of the questions that guided my research from the beginning. Through this dissertation, my hope is to shed light on the literature about

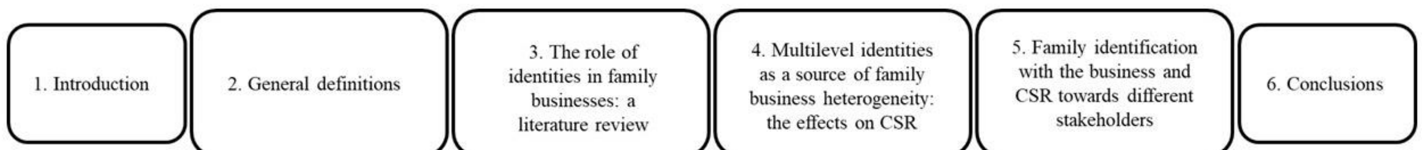
identities in family businesses and highlight the existent gaps, with the aim of enhancing the understanding of particular aspects of the family business field.

1.2 Purpose of the dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation is threefold. The first objective is to offer an overview of family businesses, highlighting the difficulties encountered in the provision of a unique definition. Furthermore, a deep analysis of the identity concept and its related constructs unveils its high complexity as well as the wide range of theoretical perspectives that can be used to study it. A second objective is to explore and summarize the literature developed over the years at the intersection of these two topics, i.e., family business and identity, using as a categorization factor the subject to which pertains the identity studied. In particular, identities are divided according to their level, i.e., whether they pertain to an individual, a group, the whole organization or if multiple levels simultaneously are explored. Through this framing, the hope is to emphasize the importance and the peculiarity of each identity, since some of them are unique to the context of family businesses (e.g., the successor, the family). Moreover, it allows to identify potential gaps in the literature and provide some future research directions. Lastly, building on the future avenues proposed, identities are used to investigate how and to what extent they prompt different specific outcomes in family businesses. The third objective is thus to empirically test whether and how the joint effect of different identities and the family identification with the business influences the level of specific corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies implementation in family businesses.

1.3 Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation comprises 6 chapters, as outlined in Figure 1.



Source: personal elaboration.

Figure 1: Structure of the dissertation

Chapter 1 offers an introduction to the research topic as well as a presentation of the purpose and structure of the dissertation. Chapter 2 aims at providing a general overview of the definition of family firms and the principal characteristics. Furthermore, an outline of the identity concept and its main constructs is presented. This is followed by Chapter 3, which provides a review of the current body of literature on identities in family business and highlights potential hints for future researches. Based on the gaps enlisted, Chapters 4 and 5 present two empirical studies, which explore how identities can explain differences *among* family businesses in the implementation of CSR activities and strategies. In particular, Chapter 4 analyzes how family business identities and CEO identities affect the level of socially responsible actions of the biggest listed family businesses in the world. Focusing on medium-large Italian family businesses, Chapter 5 delves into the family identification with the business and investigates how different degrees of identification can explain the level of CSR actions implemented towards different stakeholders. Lastly, Chapter 6 finalizes this dissertation with a general conclusion that offers its overall theoretical implications, further research avenues, and limitations.

2. General definitions

This chapter provides the basis for understanding what are identities in family businesses, trying to find an answer to the questions: what are family businesses? What are identities? To this end, the chapter starts with an explanation of the family business, highlighting the difficulties that researchers are encountering over the years in agreeing on a single definition. After that, identity is defined, explaining first its theoretical conceptualizations and then moving to its extension at the organizational level and identification.

2.1 Defining family business

In academics, family businesses represent a topic of interest in management and organizational studies, as well as in social sciences. In recent years, this research area has undergone significant changes, aiming at becoming an independent academic field of study (Evert, Martin, McLeod, & Payne, 2016). Its prestige and acceptance as an established field are demonstrated by the growing number of journals dedicated and of studies published also in generalist journals, as well as by the impact of such studies on the broader academic community (Sharma, Chrisman, & Gersick, 2012; Smyrnios, Poutziouris, & Goel, 2013).

Although the interest in family business research is remarkably increasing and everyone seems to easily understand what a family business is, there are still issues in articulating a unique definition of the "family business" term (Astrachan, Klein, & Smyrnios, 2002; Chrisman, Chua, & Sharma, 2005; Sharma, 2004). Moreover, scholars do not fully agree on family firm boundaries and source of distinctiveness (Zahra & Sharma, 2004), still trying to converge in defining the foundations of a possible family firm theory (e.g., Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999).

Over the years, academics have approached the definition of family businesses from several perspectives, and even today are used "as many definitions for 'family enterprise' as there are researchers in the field" (Lank, 1997, p. 154). Their efforts to capture the diversity of family firms and reconcile the various definitions in the literature have been directed in two general directions: the articulation of multiple definitions (e.g., Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999; Daily & Thompson, 1994; Habbershon & Williams, 1999),

and the development of scales to capture various features (Astrachan, Klein, & Smyrnios, 2002).

In the next sections, definitions and scales will be discussed more in detail, to shed light on the existing debates and provide a definition that will also be used in this dissertation thesis.

2.1.1 The definition dilemma

As a starting point, family businesses have been identified as opposed to non-family businesses, through a dichotomous differentiation (e.g., Klein, 2000). Logically, a definition of family business should clarify how it is different from a non-family firm because in case a difference does not exist, there is no need for a specific "family firm" theory.

Two dominant approaches have emerged from the literature in defining a family business by distinguishing them from other forms of organizations. Chua et al. (1999) categorize them as the *components* approach and the *essence* approach.

The components approach considers the family involvement in ownership, management, and control (Chrisman, Chua, & Sharma, 2005; Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999) and discusses the nature and extent of such involvement (Miller, Le Breton-Miller, Lester, & Cannella Jr, 2007; Sciascia & Mazzola, 2008). In particular, it argues that the involvement of the family in one of these three dimensions is sufficient to label the business a family business (Pearson, 2008) and that these three dimensions are operational and measurable (Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010). However, some scholars criticized the ability of this approach to distinguish a family from a nonfamily firm, mainly because it leads to potential firm's misclassifications (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999). For instance, when a firm is owned by a family that strongly influences the decision-making process, even though not directly involved in it, it may be erroneously classified as a non-family firm, due to the application of only a component of the involvement perspective. By contrast, when the company is controlled by the family but the management is external, it may be classified as a family business, while the family involvement is not relevant at all. Moreover, by focusing on combinations of management and ownership involvement, this approach is grounded in the agency theory and it does not really capture the stewardship-based behaviors that distinguish family businesses from their non-family

counterparts (e.g., Corbetta & Salvato, 2004; Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007; Schulze, Lubatkin, & Dino, 2003). Thus, this approach seems to capture the potential of the family to influence the business, but it does not fully explain how and whether it does it (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999; Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010).

In contrast with the components-of-involvement approach, there is the essence approach. Indeed, the essence approach argues that family involvement is a necessary but not sufficient condition to define a business as a family business (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999), but the main focus should be on the family essence, namely on the objectives and behaviors of the people who control the firm. In particular, the attention is posed on the family's willingness to pass the business to the following generations (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999). Consequently, according to this approach, the family business is "a business 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" (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999, p. 25). Differently from the components-of-involvement approach, this definition does not specify whether this transgenerational vision belongs to family members that are part of the owning or the managing group. It only requires that the family controls the dominant coalition, i.e., it is the powerful actor who controls the overall organizational agenda (Cyert & March, 1963; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). In this way, this definition comprehends all the others that emphasize the influence of the family on the organizational strategic directions (e.g., Davis, 1983; Donnelley, 1988; Handler, 1989) and, in the meanwhile, it reflects Cyert and March's (1963) argument that family firms can have both economic and non-economic goals.

An additional point of view on this dilemma is the "familiness" aspect, which was proposed by Habbershon and Williams (1999) and Habbershon et al. (2003). It argues that the main peculiarities of family businesses should be identified in the unique and "synergistic" resources and capabilities that are created and developed in the organization as a consequence of the family involvement and interaction (Habbershon, Williams, & MacMillan, 2003). Alternately to Chua's (1999) approaches, this perspective is based on the Resource-Based View and, instead of considering only the firm's behavior in general,

it requires they produce “unique and synergistic outcomes” (Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Habbershon, Williams, & MacMillan, 2003).

In reviewing the family business literature, Chrisman and colleagues in 2005 re-divided the field of family business research into two areas, depending on whether the study follows the family *involvement* or the family *essence* approaches. On the one hand, scholars relying on the family involvement approach include in their studies criteria such as ownership, governance (directorship), management, and the involvement of multiple generations. On the other hand, those using the family essence approach considered the intent of succession, the self-identification as a ‘family firm’, the creation of unique and synergistic resources, and the preservation of socio-emotional values. Further revising this division, Chrisman et al. (2012) showed the relationship between essence and involvement of the family, demonstrating that the essence partially mediates the relationship between the family involvement and the firm’s (family-centered) non-economic goals. Therefore, scholars started to consider the involvement approach as a tool to differentiate family from non-family firms, while the family essence approach as useful to highlight family firms’ heterogeneity (Chrisman, Chua, Pearson, & Barnett, 2012).

Another approach, similar but less popular, associates the adjective “family” to a business only if the firm remains controlled by the family beyond the founding generation (e.g., Daily & Thompson, 1994). Many empirical studies found differences between firms controlled by the founding generation and those controlled by later generations (e.g., Eddleston, Kellermanns, Floyd, Crittenden, & Crittenden, 2013; Lussier & Sonfield, 2010; Sreih, Lussier, & Sonfield, 2019). For example, scholars demonstrated that they have different survival rate, since about one-third of family businesses survive into the second generation, and only 10-15% make it into the third generation (Beckhard & Dyer, 1983; Kets de Vries, 1993; Ward, 2016). Moreover, and more in general, there is a tendency for later-generation firms to underperform compared to founder-controlled firms (e.g., Nordqvist & Zellweger, 2010; Sreih, Lussier, & Sonfield, 2019).

From an operational standpoint, many scholars have tried to find a “demarcation line”, a sort of cutoff level for the family involvement above which a firm is defined as a “family firm” and below which as a “non-family”.

In his handbook, Zellweger (2007) collected a summary of such criteria, which is reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Family business definitions

	Cutoff criterion distinguishing family vs non-family firms	**Rationale**
Influence dimension	*For small firms*: at least 50% of voting rights in family hands *For large and public firms*: at least 20% of voting rights in family hands	Ownership rights, and in particular voting rights, equip actors with a decisive power to alter the strategic direction of the firm.
Ownership	*Small firms*: family involvement in top management team *Large and public firms*: involvement often not required	Management involvement is what allows a dominant coalition (the family) to imbue a firm with particular values and to directly influence decision-making.
Management	Firm is controlled by a family with the intent of passing it on to the next family generation	It is the desire for transgenerational control that distinguishes a family from a non-family firm.
Transgenerational outlook	*First-generation firms*: founder-controlled firms *Later-generation firms*: family firms	Control that spans generations—and hence is not limited to a founding generation—is what constitutes a family firm.
Later-generation control	*First-generation firms*: founder-controlled firms *Later-generation firms*: family firms	Control that spans generations—and hence is not limited to a founding generation—is what constitutes a family firm.

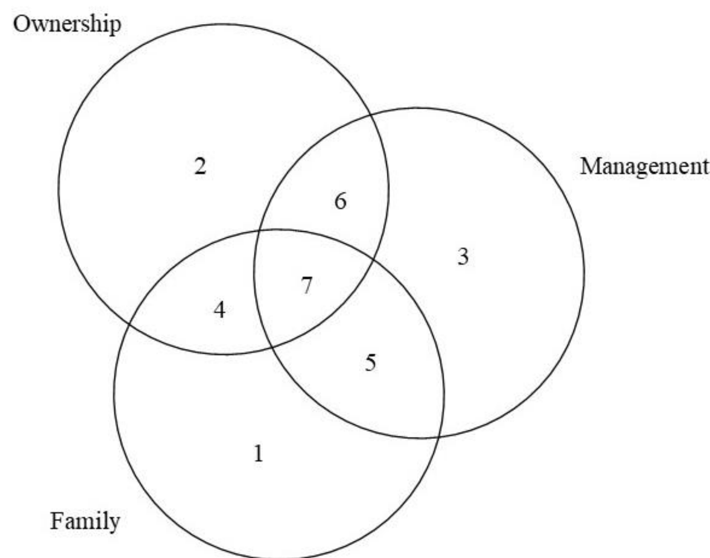
Source*:* Zellweger, T. (2017). *Managing the family business: Theory and practice*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Nonetheless, clarity and uniformity in the definition of such boundaries are missing, due to the difficulties in finding general rules for all firms all over the world (Wortman, 1995). For this reason, often the classification of family businesses is done on a case-to-case basis (Astrachan, Klein, & Smyrnios, 2002) and a lot of scholars decide arbitrarily the cutoff to use and simply declare it in their method section. In conclusion, scholars argue that a dichotomous perspective may not be enough in capturing what makes a family business unique (Klein, Astrachan, & Smyrnios, 2005).

2.1.2 Circle models

In a different way, family businesses have been defined by highlighting the presence of different subsystems - the family and the firm. Representing the family business as the partial overlap of two circles is helpful to remind that such organizations are a combination of potentially incompatible systems, each of which follows different logics and has different goals. In this way, scholars can understand what lies behind some particular tensions or synergies that arise inside family businesses and that are mostly impossible to observe in other contexts like, for example, the co-presence of economic and family-centered goals, the conflict between the necessity to embrace innovation and the willingness to preserve familial traditions, or even the fact that the succession decision involves both strategic and family issues (Lansberg, 1988).

The major contribution to this perspective is the three-circle model, introduced by Hoy and Verser (1994) and Tagiuri and Davis (1996), which highlight how these systems interact and influence each other. In particular, this model comprehends three subsystems, instead of two, which are family, ownership, and management (see Figure 2).



Source: Tagiuri, R., & Davis, J. (1996). Bivalent attributes of the family firm. *Family Business Review, 9*(2), 199-208.

Figure 2: Three-circle model of family influence

The interaction of these three subsystems affects all the family business characteristics, shaping them in a set of unique and inherent features also called “bivalent attributes”, due to the influence they receive from both the family and the business systems (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996). These “bivalent attributes” represent the unique source of advantages (and disadvantages) of this type of organization and they affect the leadership, culture, board of directors (BoD), life cycles, strategic management processes, ethics, and values of the company (Hoy & Verser, 1994).

Moreover, the three-circle model identifies seven different roles that an individual can play inside a family business depending on his/her position inside the firm and helps the understanding of the role-related complexities (s)he can experience. The roles identified are:

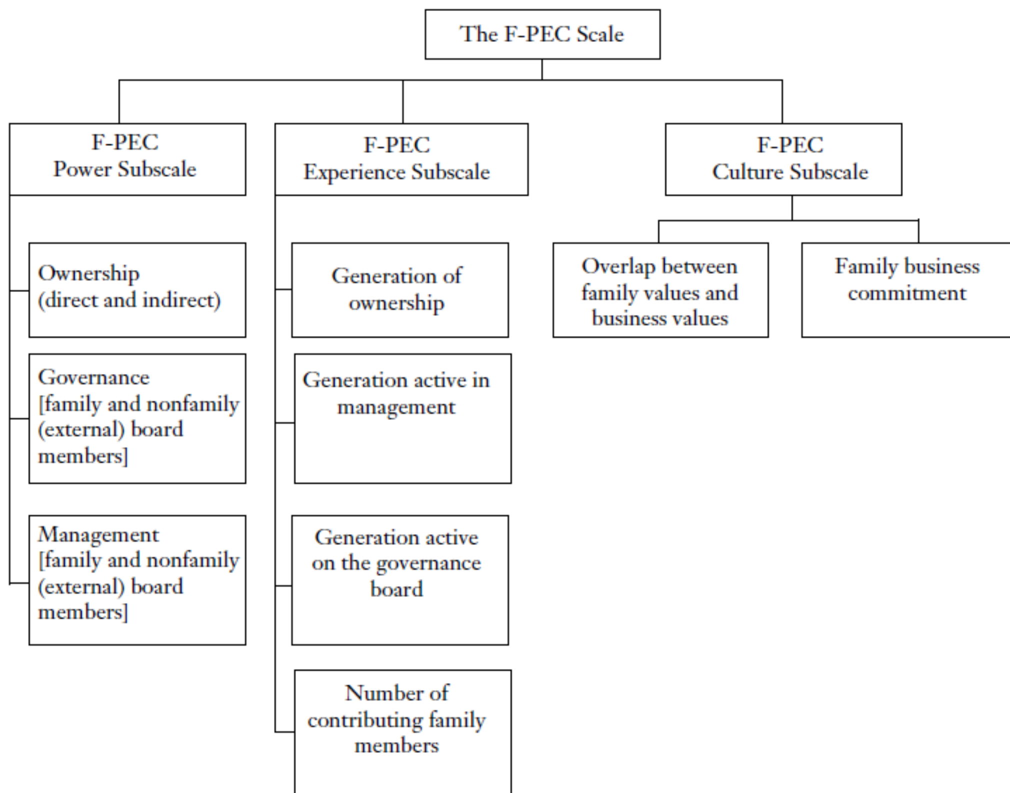
1. family members, who are not actively involved in the business, not as shareholders nor managers;
2. external investors and shareholders, who own part of the business but are neither family members nor managers;
3. non-family employees and managers, who are not part of the owning group;
4. family members who are part of the owning group, but do not work in the business;
5. family members who are actively involved in the management, but do not own shares;
6. non-family managers and employees who are part of the owning group;
7. family members who are actively involved in the business and own shares.

This model is one of the most commonly used to analyze the family influence and governance in family firms, mainly due to its easiness in underlying the different logics behind every subsystem. Moreover, it clearly highlights that individuals may play different roles and have different interests depending on which subsystem(s) they belong to, revealing also the complexities arising in cases of individuals playing multiple roles (Zellweger, 2017).

2.1.3 Scales of measurement

Over the years, there have also been attempts to directly measure the family nature of a family business, moving from a dichotomous approach (i.e., simply dividing family vs non-family), to the development of a continuous variable.

One important example is the F-PEC scale, developed by Astrachan and colleagues in 2002, which tries to capture the essential dimensions of family involvement through the measurement of the degree of family influence on the organization. It defines three dimensions of family influence that are power (P), experience (E), and culture (C). The power subscale refers to the family's influence in terms of ownership and involvement in governance and management. The experience subscale identifies the succession path of the family firm, looking at the involvement of different generations and other factors related to succession, such as the number of family members involved. Finally, the culture subscale addresses the overlap between the family and business values, together with the family commitment to the business. All dimensions are depicted in Figure 3.



Source: Astrachan, J. H., Klein, S. B., & Smyrnios, K. X. (2002). The F-PEC scale of family influence: A proposal for solving the family business definition problem1. *Family Business Review*, *15*(1), 45-58.

Figure 3: The F-PEC Scale

However, the F-PEC scale has been criticized due to difficulties in quantifying some values, such as the one of the C-subscale, or because the same level of F-PEC can be gained by family firms with very different configurations (Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010).

In conclusion, the dilemma about the family firm definition reflects the fact that these companies are not homogeneous. By contrast, there are relevant differences *among* family firms (Zellweger, Kellermanns, Eddleston, & Memili, 2012), which are fundamental to consider. Heterogeneity of family businesses comprehends goals, structures, resources, and capabilities (Chua, Chrisman, Steier, & Rau, 2012; Daspit, Chrisman, Ashton, & Evangelopoulos, 2021; García-Álvarez & López-Sintas, 2001; Memili & Dibrell, 2019), and so many more have still to be explored when researching in this field.

2.2 Defining identity

Lately, family business researchers suggested that another lens that helps in understanding family firms is identity (Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010). Identity and its related concepts are able to capture the degree of family involvement, family influence on organizational behavior and culture, and also other important dynamics more related to the family members as individuals and as a group (Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010).

Before providing an overview of identities in the specific context of the family business, which will be extensively covered in Chapter 3, it is important to introduce in general the concept of identity, explain its related constructs and situate it in the organizational environment.

2.2.1 Theoretical overview

The last three decades have witnessed identities and identity processes move increasingly to the center of academic interest, creating a debate among the most interesting but contested (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Ybema, Keenoy, Oswick, Beverungen, Ellis, & Sabeliet, 2009). The exponential growth in the literature about identity, in particular in organizations, has led to the production of a multitude of definitions and conceptualizations. Firstly, because identity is a notion

difficult to describe and explain, mainly due to its lack of "substantiality and discreteness" of common objects (Dunne, 1995). Secondly, it has been approached from multiple perspectives, both in terms of theoretical angles (e.g., sociological and social-psychological) and disciplinary domains (e.g., management, marketing, organizational behavior, social and organizational psychology, etc.).

However, in the organizational and management fields, a sort of consensus has been reached defining identity as a set of meanings that provides an individual's self-referential description, developed and sustained while seeking appropriate answers to the question "who am I?" (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Brown, 2015). Furthermore, scholars agreed that most of the identity definitions can be classified under three theoretical lenses: Identity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and identity work perspective.

Rooted in symbolic interactionism, Identity Theory (e.g., Burke, 1980; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1968) argues that identity is the product of social interactions (Mead, 1934), i.e., "a set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in the society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3). Identities inhere in roles (e.g., occupations, careers, etc.), which are self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that individuals apply to themselves depending on the structural role positions they occupy, through a process of self-recognition as a member of a specific social group (Burke, 1980; Thoits, 1991). Each role is associated with certain characteristics and social expectations, providing structure as well as meaning to human behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Moreover, since an individual occupies multiple roles, is a member of multiple groups, and claims multiple characteristics, the self-concept incorporates multiple identities (Burke & Stets, 2009), which are organized hierarchically depending on their likelihood to be activated and performed (McCall & Simmons, 1978). The main objective of Identity Theory is to explain how the social embeddedness of a role, namely the number and strength of important relationships that depend on the occupancy of this specific role, increases (or decreases) its likelihood of being invoked in a given situation, i.e., its salience (Stryker, 1987). This implies that individuals with the same role identities may have different behaviors in the same context due to differences in identity salience (e.g., Callero, 1985; Thoits, 1991). In general, the more important the relationship or the environment, the

more important the role (identity), and the more likely the individual will put effort in confirming such identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). Therefore, Identity Theory helps in the explanation of the individual's more static roles as the self-conceptions and self-definitions (s)he holds about her/himself, which are explained through the set of meanings that defines him/her as a unique individual.

The second perspective is Social Identity Theory (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner J. C., 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), a "social psychological theory of intergroup relations, group processes, and the social self" ((Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 260). According to this theory, the definition of who an individual is, his or her identity, depends on into which social category (e.g., organization, family, nationality) (s)he falls or feels to belong to, and it is related to the specific characteristics of such category (Tajfel, 1982). Thus, individuals' identity is determined by their membership in a collective, as they internalize meanings (of the collective) as part of their self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Given the presence of multiple and diverse social categories/collectives, each individual identifies with specific social categories (in-groups) and dis-identifies with others (out-groups). Identification is then the result of the individual's perception of the differences between the group (s)he belongs to and other groups: (s)he identifies with an in-group in case of underestimation of such differences, while (s)he disidentifies with the out-group when (s)he emphasizes differences (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Moreover, social identities are both "relational and comparative" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 16), because as a group member, an individual can gain both a descriptive (who are we?) and an evaluative (how good are we?) sense of his/her identity by comparing in-group characteristics with out-group ones (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, through identification, individuals define themselves and allow others to define them according to which group they belong to (Hogg, 2003). This, more in general is translated in a feeling of connection between the holder of the identity and the group(s) (s)he is a member of, which implies the individual defining him/herself through such membership(s).

A later extension of Social Identity Theory is the Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). It argues that the self-concept is composed of social identities as well as a personal identity (Turner & Reynolds, 2011). Following Social Identity Theory conceptualization, social identity is defined as "that part of an

individual’s self-concept which derives from his[/her] knowledge of his[/her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). By contrast, personal identity, which is related directly to the self and not to inter-group relations, is defined as “a person’s unique sense of self” (Postmes & Jetten, 2006, p. 260), referring to individual’s idiosyncratic attributes, such as traits, abilities, and interests. The main difference between social and personal identities is the level of the self: while social identities are shared by members of the same group and are different from other groups, personal identities are unique to each individual.

The categorization of the self and of people in in-groups and out-groups leads to the perception that individuals are and act as embodiments of the group they belong to. People are thus “depersonalized”, assuming prototypical behaviors and adjusting their way of acting in order to fit with the relevant in-group prototypical model (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Belonging to social groups is fundamental due to its impact on the individual’s self-esteem since individuals tend to identify with groups that provide a positive distinctiveness (Hogg, Turner, Nascimento-Schulze, & Spriggs, 1986).

By analyzing the identity of individuals according to their membership in one (or more) social group(s), Social Identity Theory and its extension are also useful in explaining group-based identities, as these latter are not only a source of emotional attachment and meanings but also a higher-level form of self-definition (Spears, 2011). As a consequence, this same reasoning may be extended when a whole organization is considered and, through these two theoretical lenses, explain its identity as the organizational members’ self-definition (Albert & Whetten, 1985; see the next section for further details).

Finally, the identity work perspective considers identity as a process (Jenkins, 1996; Ybema, Keenoy, Oswick, Beverungen, Ellis, & Sabeliet, 2009), following a post-modernist view. From this standpoint, identity is always under construction and subject to complex, recursive, and reflexive processes of negotiation. This leads to people “being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising their identities” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). As a result, identity is a set of meanings that are “are always the outcome of agreement or disagreement, always a matter of convention

and innovation, always to some extent shared, always to some extent negotiable" (Jenkins, 1996, p. 4). Whereas there is a relevant degree of individual agency in constructing the individual's identity, some scholars argue that identity is mostly shaped by multiple social discourses (Alvesson, 2010). Interestingly, identity work is "often employed but rarely systematically explored" in the management and organization fields, even though some scholars considered it "the most significant metaphor (cf. Morgan 1980; Tsoukas 1991) among many that may be useful in the analysis of identities construction in and around organizations" (Brown, 2015, p. 20-21). Identity work studies have mostly concentrated on the exploration of challenging situations or transitions, such as when an individual changes position and enters in a new professional role (Ibarra, 1999) or organization (Beyer & Hannah, 2002), as well as when (s)he experiences an identity threat (Collinson, 2003; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012). The main results agree in saying that identity work seems to be more frequent, intense, and perceived as necessary in situations of extreme stress, anxiety, and surprise. In fact, in these conditions, individuals tend to self-examine because of their feelings of confusion and self-doubt (Brown, 2015). In sum, identity work is a continuous process that sees individuals building, preserving, and adapting their identities in relation to the external environment in an attempt to reflect their own self-conception.

In conclusion, the three theoretical lenses all are useful to study identity, as they provide different insights to disentangle this complex phenomenon. On the one hand, through their analysis emerged three different concepts: first, from Identity Theory can be derived the more general concept of *identity*, which explains the static role/status and the set of meanings that makes the entity unique; from Social Identity Theory emerged the concept of *identification*, which highlights the feeling connection between the entity and its referent group; and finally, the identity work perspective provides a more dynamic point of view to understand how identities are shaped and evolve over time (*identity work*). On the other hand, the presence of three different levels emerged, i.e., individual, group, and organizational levels. In particular, individual-level identities are more related to the personal sense of self; group-level identities are shared in social categories, sections, and collectives; organizational-level identities, which will be explained more in detail in the section that follows, are related to the organization as a whole.

2.2.2 Organizational Identity

This section is focused on defining organizational identity as well as some related concepts (corporate identity, organizational reputation, organizational culture), and highlighting the presence of multiple identities.

In the current managerial and organizational literature, there is a great debate on organizational identity. Depending on the epistemological and ontological approach followed, it can be considered both an objective and a subjective entity. The first view, which some authors call the "social actor" perspective (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013), is rooted in the modernist posture and relies mainly upon Identity and Social Identity Theory. The organization here is considered an "actor" that has rights and powers, and its identity reflects the main features it possesses (Whetten, 2006; Whetten & Mackey, 2002), which are "essential, objective, and often tangible features" (He & Brown, 2013, p. 6). Organizational identity was originally introduced by Albert and Whetten (1985), who define it as the answer that organizational members provide to the question "who are we, as organization?" (p. 264). In their conceptualization, it is the set of central, enduring and distinctive features of an organization (CED), which are reflected in beliefs, values, and objectives of the organization and members. Centrality refers to the "features that are somehow seen as the essence of the organization" (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 265), which also considered are the starting point on which organizational success, decisions, and relations are built. The endurance is related to the "features that exhibit some degree of sameness or continuity over time" (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 265). Finally, distinctiveness encompasses the "features that distinguish the organisation from others with which it may be compared" (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 265). Thus, organizational identity is a self-determined, self-defined, and self-proclaimed adoption of organizational members (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016) and it is "generally embedded in deeply ingrained and hidden assumptions" (Fiol & Huff, 1992, p. 278). By considering organizational identity as a set of explicit statements, specific expectations are provided to internal and external stakeholders about how the organization wants to behave and be seen (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). This leads to an important issue that is the management of the organizational identity and image, where it is fundamental to maintain an alignment between what an organization is (identity), what it communicates, and how others perceive it. Scholars that espouse this approach mainly see identity as relatively stable,

fixed, monolithic, and enduring over time (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991).

By contrast, the subjective view of organizational identity has its origins in the symbolic-interpretivist posture and it is also called the "social construction" perspective (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013). From this standpoint, organizational identity is "an organization's members' collective understanding of the features presumed to be central and continuous, and that distinguish the organization from other organizations" (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000, p. 64). Therefore, it is socially constructed by individuals, being their shared understanding about what it means to be "who we are, as an organization" (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). These shared understandings are built through the members' interactions (Elstak, 2008), leading to their acceptance of the organizational identity as a distinctive self, not as a set of collective traits (Whetten, 2006). Due to members' interactions with each other and with outsiders, organizational identity is revisited periodically and thus symbolic-interpretivist researchers consider it as "continuous", instead of "enduring". A sense of continuity with the past is preserved thanks to organizational members that provide new meanings to old labels, authorizing new strategic directions without necessarily being too stuck to the past (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). For this reason, organizational identity is fluid and is "created, threatened, bolstered reproduced and overhauled" (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008, p. 11) in a continuous negotiation of meanings about "who we are" and "who we want to be" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

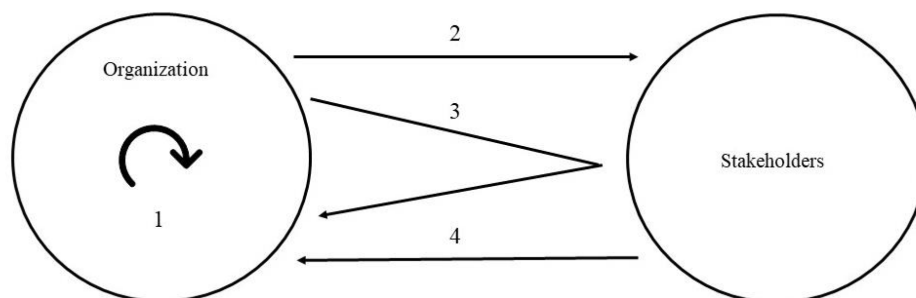
An additional perspective is the one that observes organizational identity through the Institutional Theory lens. According to this theory, organizational identity is built internally but strongly influenced by the social context in which the organization is embedded (Glynn & Marquis, 2007). It is formed as a set of institutional claims (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), and it is independent of the organizational members' opinions about it. The most important aspect of organizational identity is the "membership in a social category or collective identity at the level of the organizational field" (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011, p. 346-347), which emphasizes its similarity to other organizational identities instead of its "distinctiveness".

Some scholars suggested that the social actor and the social construction perspectives are complementary (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). On the one hand, the social actor view sees organizational identity with a function of sense-giving, controlling strategic actions, and indicating how outsiders should relate to the organization. On the other hand, the social construction perspective is drawn upon the sense-making function of the organizational identity, since it emphasizes the "collective beliefs" of organizational members that are negotiated from time to time. Recent works (e.g., Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010) provided a connection between these two perspectives, showing that social actor and social construction views are mutually constitutive and both necessary. Moreover, even though not specifically addressed, these studies report data that seem to implicate the institutional perspective as well (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010).

Related concepts of organizational identity

Organizational identity is often confused with other concepts such as corporate identity, organizational image, organizational reputation, and organizational culture. To avoid any confusion with organizational identity, here follows the presentation of these concepts.

The first three concepts are strictly related and, together with organizational identity, represent the four different viewpoints of an organization (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006). Following Brown et al. (2006), Figure 4 offers an overview of this relation, where each arrow originates from an actor and is representative of the viewpoint that actor has.



Source: Brown, T. J., Dacin, P. A., Pratt, M. G., & Whetten, D. A. (2006). Identity, intended image, construed image, and reputation: An interdisciplinary framework and suggested terminology. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *34*(2), 99-106.

Figure 4: Key Organizational viewpoints

Espousing the social construction perspective, the first viewpoint is organizational identity. It is represented as a circular arrow since it is the mental association that organizational members hold on the organization. In other words, it is what they think about themselves as a collective.

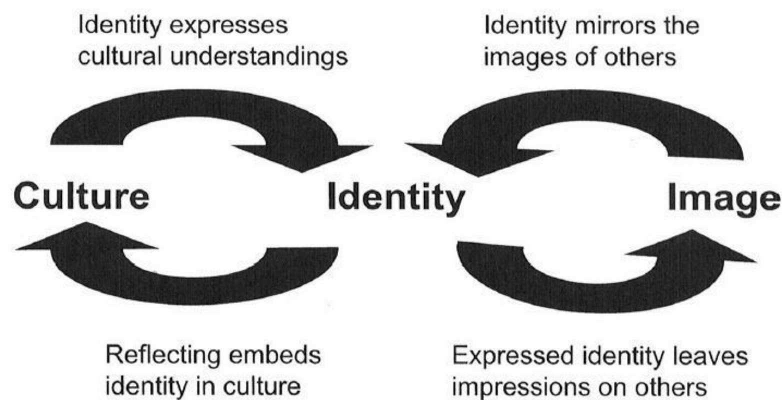
Corporate identity is the second viewpoint, and it is what the organization communicates to its stakeholders (Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007). This concept, according to several authors, has its origin in marketing and communication fields (Balmer, 2001; Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 1997), answering the question "What does the organization want others to think about the organization?" and thus establishing the connection between the organization and its stakeholders (Aaker, 2004). Corporate identity includes all the verbal, graphic, and symbolic representations used in organizational communication, namely the "vision, culture, market positioning and scope, strategy, structure, history, visual symbols, design, activities, and people (Balmer, 2001; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Urde, 2003)" (Blombäck & Ramírez-Pasillas, 2012). Thus, its final aim is to emphasize different but carefully chosen organizational features both to internal and external audiences, providing ''the central platform upon which corporate communication policies are developed, corporate reputations are built and corporate images and stakeholder identifications/associations with corporations are formed'' (Balmer, 2008, p. 886).

The third viewpoint is the organizational image, which is related to the question "What does the organization believe others think of the organization?", namely the way organizational members believe outsiders see the organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Over the years, there have been several studies that theorized organizational image, since it is strictly correlated to organizational and corporate identity, but still different. One of the most important contributions was given by Dutton and his colleagues (1994), who renamed organizational image in "*construed* organizational image". This allows to distinguish between two kinds of image: the (perceived) organizational identity, which is what members believe is the organizational identity, similarly to Albert and Whetten (1985) theorizing, and it strictly resides inside an organization; and a construed external image, which takes into account outsiders and reflects what organizational members assume that outsiders think – which may not be aligned with what outsiders actually think.

"What do stakeholders actually think of the organization?" is the fourth viewpoint, i.e., the organizational reputation. It is the reciprocal concept of corporate identity, which means that it is "feedback from others concerning the credibility of an organization's self-definition" (Whetten & Mackey, 2002, p. 400). It is seen as a relatively stable, enduring, and global judgment of people outside the organization about the actions and achievements of the organization in the long run. To have a good reputation, time and perseverance are necessary (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Several aspects distinguish reputation from the other viewpoints. The most important is the fact that, regardless of what the organization and its members think about the organization, want to communicate, or try to construe as image, they cannot control what other people's beliefs are and which is their "reality" about the organization. Moreover, since this viewpoint is not directly manageable by the organization, on the one hand, it may be instrumental in motivating employees and managers' behavior, while on the other it may affect strategic choices linked to the corporate identity (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006).

Another concept often confused with organizational identity is the organizational culture. Similar to identity, there is still no consensus about a specific definition of organizational culture, and "in most recent publications authors seem to 'solve' the problem by simply omitting or disregarding the less fashionable terminology, many favouring identity" (Alvesson, 2012, p. 38). Among the others, one of the most shared definitions was developed by Hofstede and his colleagues (1990), which outlined six different characteristics of organizational culture: it is holistic, historically determined, related to anthropological concepts, socially constructed, soft, and difficult to change (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990). Providing a more complete overview, Schein in 1990 defines organizational culture as "a pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 1990, p. 113). Another standpoint is the one of Hatch and Schultz (2002), which grew out of Mead's theorizations (1934), and explains organizational culture in light of the personal identity concept. Organizational culture is here defined as "the tacit organizational understandings (e.g., assumptions, beliefs and values) that contextualize efforts to make meaning, including internal self-definition"

(Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 996). To distinguish it from organizational identity, the authors specified that organizational culture is "more easily placed in the conceptual domains of the contextual, tacit and emergent" (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 997). According to their view, organizational identity is connected to organizational culture and organizational image dynamically. The linkages are enlisted in four different processes that are mirroring, reflecting, expressing, and impressing, and are explained in Figure 5.



Source: Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2002). The dynamics of organizational identity. *Human Relations, 55*(8), 989-1018.

Figure 5: "The Organizational Identity Dynamics Model"

Multiple organizational identities

Organizations, like individuals, can assume one or several identities. In the first case, organizational identity is seen as a monolithic object which is single, univocal, and coherent (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997). By contrast, the second conceptualization relies on the idea that similarly to individuals who possess as many identities as many group memberships they have (Tajfel, 1982), organizations have multiple identities according to how many different views of what is central, enduring, and distinctive there are (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Additionally, as individuals manifest their multiple self-conceptions through roles and other characteristics, an organization's multiple identities are manifested according to its core practices and values (Gioia, 1998).

Multiple (or hybrid) organizational identities have been studied by scholars in two different ways. The first group of studies highlights the importance of the number of identities that co-exist in the organization, which depends on how many views of the most

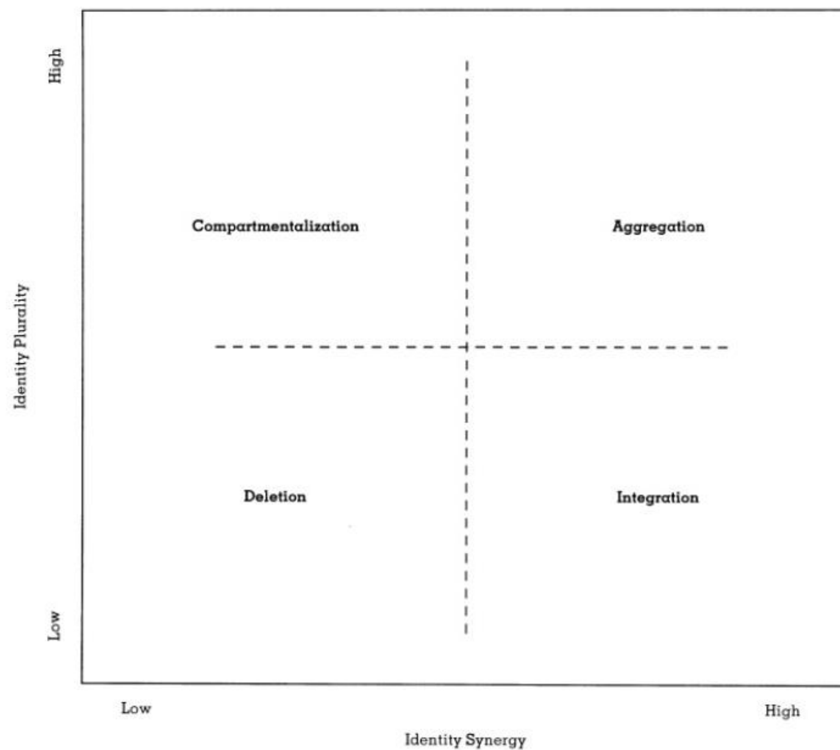
important organizational characteristics (CED) are developed (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). These identities do not need to compete, even though this leads their boundaries to be quite fuzzy (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). However, assuming that identities are not in contradiction opens the debate on whether the organization actually displays multiple identities or it has only one identity but with multiple facets (Corley, et al., 2006). Multiple identities can thus exist in two different forms, namely holographic or ideographic (Albert & Whetten, 1985). In the holographic form, identities are exhibited simultaneously in all the organization units, and each internal unit displays the features of the organization as a whole. In the ideographic form, multiple identities are represented by different units, and each internal unit displays only one of the multiple identities.

The second view explores organizations when they have multiple identities that co-exist but seem in contrast and antithetical. Analyzing this issue from a managerial point of view, Pratt and Foreman (2000) developed a model that helps managers and leaders in avoiding conflicts between different organizational identities and suggests how to intervene. According to this model, there are two main ways: managing identity plurality or managing identity synergy. On the one hand, managing identity plurality implies that leaders can choose to increase, decrease or maintain the number of organizational identities. On the other hand, managing identity synergy requires leaders that "must not only assess the feasibility of linking two or more organizational identities but must also assess whether attempts to link or connect identities will ultimately benefit or harm the organization and its members" (Pratt & Foreman, 2000, p. 25). Depending on which decision managers and leaders take, the authors identified four potential responses (Figure 6):

a. compartmentalization, which establishes that multiple identities are all kept and separately maintained, without creating synergies. The result is similar to the ideographic form of Albert and Whetten (1985);
b. deletion, which means shedding one (or more) identity(ies), decreasing the total number of organizational identities, for example, "via the organization divesting

itself of the business unit or division associated with the "offending" identity" (Pratt & Foreman, 2000, p. 29);

c. integration, which implies the attempt to merge multiple identities into a single (and different) one, such as in the context of mergers and acquisitions;
d. aggregation, which supports the creation of synergies that bridge different organizational identities, retaining all of them at the same time and sorting them into a hierarchy or creating new beliefs.



Source: Pratt, M. G., & Foreman, P. O. (2000). Classifying managerial responses to multiple organizational identities. *Academy of Management Review*, *25*(1), 18-42.

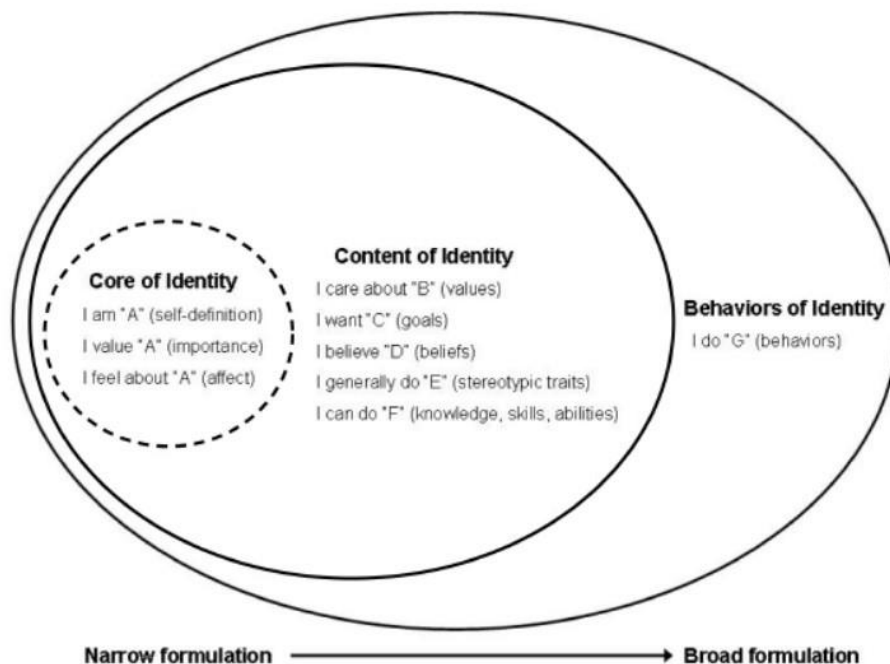
Figure 6: "A Classification Scheme for Multiple Organizational Identity Management Responses"

In conclusion, organizational identity, similarly to individual identity, presents several facets and nuances. Although the concept and its original definition are fairly simplistic, once organizational identity is studied through the lens of the different epistemological and ontological postures, it opens up many questions about its definition, its understanding, and the issues it raises.

2.2.3 Identification

Inside an organization, the presence of multiple entities, such as individuals, groups, and the organization itself leads identities to influence each other and to potentially overlap. Individuals recognize themselves and others through their membership in different social groups, adopting attitudes and behaviors that are as similar as possible to the group ones (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Mainly conceptualized by Social Identity Theory, this is called identification and it is related to how "people come to define themselves and communicate that definition to others" (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008, p. 334). In other words, it is when individuals derive their identity partly from their membership in a group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). Whereas identity seeks answers to the question, "Who am I?", identification asks "How do/come to know who I am in relation to you?" (Pratt, 1998). Identification has been widely applied to disparate social groups, such as individuals identifying with their social category (e.g., Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997), with other people in danger (e.g., Drury, Brown, González, & Miranda, 2016), with their occupation or profession (e.g., Hekman, Bigley, Steensma, & Hereford, 2009), with a brand (e.g., Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013), with their business family (e.g., Bernhard & Labaki, 2021), and of course, also with their organization (e.g., Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006). In other words, identification is defined as "the perception of oneness or belongingness to some human aggregate" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21), "when a person's self-concept contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organizational identity" (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994, p. 239). Thus, it is either self-referential or self-defining (Pratt, 1998).

In theorizing identification, Tajfel recognized that "in order to achieve the stage of "identification," two components are necessary, and one is frequently associated with them. The two necessary components are: a cognitive one, in the sense of awareness of membership; and an evaluative one, in the sense that this awareness is related to some value connotations. The third component consists of an emotional investment in the awareness and evaluations." (1982, p.2). According to Ashforth et al. (2008), the three elements are part of a broader formulation of identification that they organized in the following framework as reported (Figure 7).



Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S. H., & Corley, K. G. (2008). Identification in organizations: An examination of four fundamental questions. *Journal of Management, 34*(3), 325-374.

Figure 7: "Identification: A Fuzzy Set"

The core of identity is represented by a cognitive factor (I am "A"), an evaluative factor (I value "A"), and an emotional investment (I feel about "A"), where "A" is an individual's perception of group belongingness. An individual who can say "I am A and this is important to me" leads his/her cognitions and emotions to reinforce mutually (Kessler & Hollbach, 2005). At a higher level, identification includes the acceptance of attributes like values, goals, beliefs, stereotypic traits, but also knowledge, skills, and abilities, i.e., what it means to be "A". Here, the more an individual embodies those attributes, the more prototypical (s)he is considered (Elsbach, 2004). Therefore, identification influences thoughts, feelings, and actions in situations when such identity is salient (Ashforth, 2000). The distance between the first ("who I am") and the second ring ("what I believe, do, or want") is justified by the fact that the attributes of "A" may be unclear or even espoused but not necessarily enacted. Indeed, they are independent and the identity does not automatically contain each element. The last ring along the continuum is behaviors. They are the most "probabilistic outcomes" of identification, but not an essential component (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

When observed in the specific context of the firm, identification (with the organizations) means the individual feeling of belongingness to the organization and the extent to which (s)he defines him/herself according to the organizational membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Individuals identification has been associated with several outcomes for the organization, mostly positive, such as low turnover intention and higher performance, organizational citizenship behavior, employee satisfaction, well-being, and so on (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Riketta, 2005). However, scholars are also starting to recognize that there may be also negative implications, especially in cases when identification is particularly extreme (or even pathological), such as resistance to organizational change (e.g., Bouchikhi & Kimberly, 2003), pro-organizational unethical behaviors (e.g., Irshad & Bashir, 2020) or organizational learning hindering (e.g., Dukerich, Kramer, & McLean Parks, 1998).

Another important aspect of identification in the organizational context is that companies are complex systems, where an individual may hold different identities as well as be a member of several groups or collectives. As a consequence, (s)he can identify, for instance, with a workgroup, a subunit, his/her specific profession, the whole organization, and even the industry simultaneously. Here, individuals tend to distinguish between different loci of identification (Bamber & Iyer, 2002; Riketta & Nienaber, 2007). These loci are connected to two different levels of identities, i.e., low and high-order identities, and individuals tend to identify more strongly with lower-order than higher-order identities (Reade, 2001; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Lower-order identities are the most salient, being more likely to constitute the individual's primary group. They are more exclusive and concrete and, as a consequence, there is a high probability that they are shared with other individuals (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). For these reasons, they have a greater impact on cognition, affect, and behaviors which lead to a reinforcement of the psychological engagement. By contrast, higher-order identities become more salient only in specific situations and are more specific only to some individuals (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Johnson, Morgeson, Ilgen, Meyer, & Lloyd, 2006). However, lower and higher-order identities and their related identifications may conflict. Individuals in organizations routinely deal with them, even though most of these conflicts are latent or minor and thus not problematic (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In case these conflicts become complicated, individuals cope with them through different

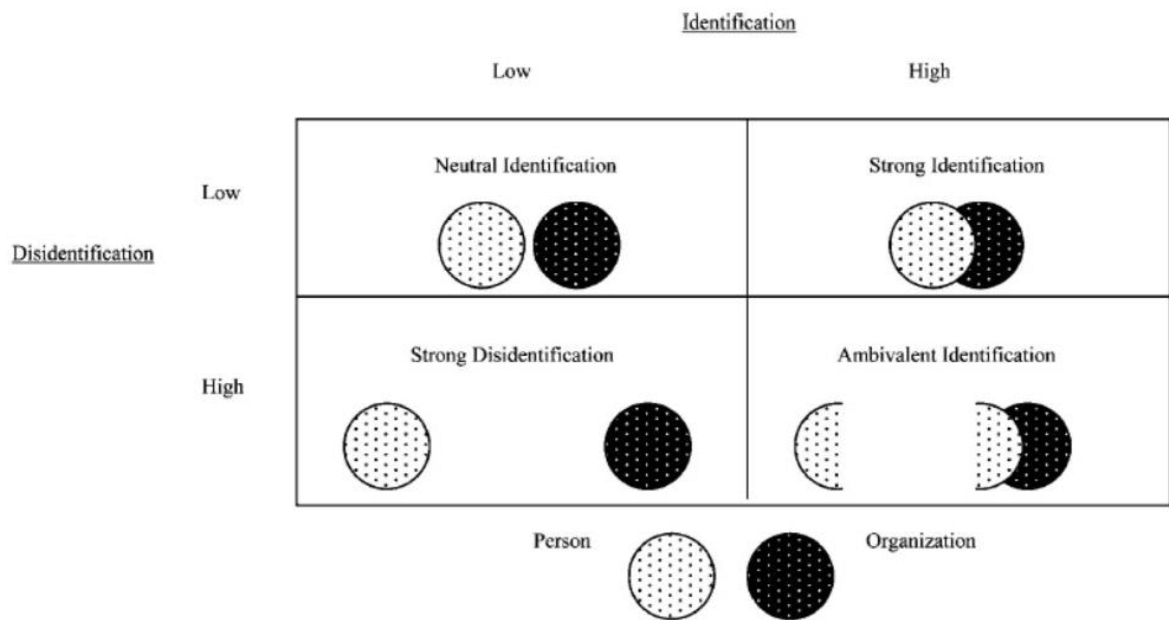
strategies like renegotiating, decoupling, sequential enacting, ordering by importance, doing nothing, or doing an “identicide”, i.e., suppressing of an identity (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt & Doucet, 2000). However, despite the potential arising of conflicts, researchers have demonstrated that individuals’ multiple identifications in the organizational context tend to converge (Bamber & Iyer, 2002; Riketta, 2005; Riketta & Nienaber, 2007). They identified different processes of identification convergence, such as the anthropomorphization of higher-order identities, the affect transfer between one identity and the other, and the behavioral sense-making (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Moreover, another approach is through combination, which is based on the idea that when individuals perceive identities as similar they tend to focus on similarities, rather than on differences, and thus they identify with different loci that are part of the same context (e.g., of the organization) simultaneously and without big issues (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

The last topic that is important to cover about identification is related to the existent alternative forms of individuals’ attachment to the organization. The first form is in net contrast with identification and it is called *disidentification*. Disidentification is when an individual defines his/her identity by “not being identified” with the entity or the organization. In other words, the individual does not perceive to have the same characteristics or values that (s)he believes are the organization ones (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). It is fundamental to underly that disidentification is different from not identifying: it is identifying as not (Dukerich, Kramer, & McLean Parks, 1998). Moreover, disidentification is seen as an active distancing and differentiation of the individual’s self from the entity or the organization, not just a coincidental or a benign mismatch of features (Elsbach, 1999). In the organizational context, members’ disidentification may lead to negative consequences such as the rejection of some central and defining aspects of the organization (e.g., mission, culture), or having behaviors that are detrimental or counterproductive. However, although organizations tend to see members’ disidentification as negative and undesirable because it embodies the conflicts perceived between identities, this is not always harmful since it may lead to potentially helpful behaviors (e.g., innovation, creativity, and conscientious dissent).

Depending on the level of identification and disidentification, two additional forms can occur, namely neutral identification and ambivalent identification. Neutral identification

is when there is an explicit absence of both identification and disidentification with an organization (Elsbach, 1999). It can be considered a mode of individuals' self-defining as their own right, simply something different from the organization. This situation may be not optimal for the organization, since an employee who is neutral toward the core organizational values, mission and vision tends to feel less committed and to provide a lower contribution to the organizational wealth. Differently, ambivalent identification is when individuals simultaneously identify and disidentify with an entity (Dukerich, Kramer, & McLean Parks, 1998; Elsbach, 1999; Pratt & Doucet, 2000). It is manifested through alternating between periods of activity and no engagement with an entity or an organization (Pratt, 2000). In some specific cases, individuals may be able to cognitively separate elements of the targeted entity (the organization) that are of interest, worthy of identification, from other elements that are rejected, which request a disidentification (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Pratt, 2000). This mechanism goes beyond ambivalent identification, and it is called split identification. Differently from the other forms, this is a mechanism for repairing identification because, through splitting, individuals are able to hold high levels of identification with certain aspects of the organization while entailing other aspects to be restored or reformed (Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, & Scully, 2010).

These four forms (identification, disidentification, neutral identification, and ambivalent identification) are summarized in a model developed by Kreiner and Ashforth in 2004, a matrix 2x2 based on identification, disidentification, and other previous studies' evidence. Through this model, they highlighted how the four forms are the result of high and low levels of identification and disidentification crossing (Figure 8).



Source: Kreiner, G. E., & Ashforth, B. E. (2004). Evidence toward an expanded model of organizational identification. Journal of Organizational Behavior: *The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, *25*(1), 1-27.

Figure 8: "The expanded model of identification"

By digging deeper into this topic, some authors argued that these four forms of identification can reach levels that can be defined as "pathological". In these cases, individuals are in extreme situations that can lead to harmful consequences, such as the loss of his/her individuality, in case of (over)identification; the total rejection of the central features of the organization, to the point that not being a member is the main individual's self-definition, in case of focused or over-disidentification; the total lack of interest about membership, in cases of apathetic identification or under-identification; the persistent feeling of conflict derived from an enormously ambivalent identification that results into conflicting identification or schizo-identification (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Dukerich, Kramer, & McLean Parks, 1998).

Finally, another established identification form is narcissistic organizational identification. It is a form where the individual believes that the identity of the organization is submitted to his/her identity, seeing the organization as an element or extension of him/herself (Belk, 1988; Finkelstein, 2003). As a consequence, "the individual sees his/her identity as central to the identity of the organization, with the result

that the individual perceives the organization's identity as being secondary and subsumed within the individual's identity" (Galvin, Lange, & Ashforth, 2015, p. 164). This means that, differently from traditional identification with the organization, individuals with a narcissistic organizational identification do not perceive the organizational identity as a tool to define themselves, but, conversely, they consider their identity to define what the organization is (Galvin, Lange, & Ashforth, 2015).

In management and organizational literature, some researchers conceptualize identification not only as a state but also as a process (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). From this perspective, identification is related to the action of "becoming identified with an entity" and refers to the reciprocal interaction between the individual and the organization (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Identification is thus dynamic and does not occur only in one direction ("I identify with an entity" or "the entity identifies with me"), but it is circular. In particular, this occurs when "an individual's beliefs about his/her organization become self-referential or self-defining" (Pratt, 1998, p. 172). Looking at identification as a dynamic process strictly connects it to the identity work notion (Brown, 2017), since it comprehends "the range of activities individuals (or collectives) engage to create and sustain identities that are congruent with and supportive of self-concepts" (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1348). However, this is oftentimes confusing, leading scholars to consider identification and identity work as synonyms (Brown, 2017). However, following Ashforth and Mael's (1989) definition, the two concepts can be clearly distinguished. On the one hand, by classifying as "identification" only those studies that emphasize the identification *per se* or the level of identification (e.g., Schröder, Schmitt-Rodermund, & Arnaud, 2011), i.e., the more static conceptualization presented before. On the other hand, by bringing under the "identity work" concept those studies that mostly focus on actions taken to build or to maintain an identity (e.g., Cunningham, 2020).

2.3 Conclusion

As extensively covered in this chapter, both family businesses and identity are broad and complex topics, that scholars are still trying to unravel. Thus, it is important to explain

where the research is positioned, clarifying which definitions and conceptualization will be used.

As regards the family businesses, in line with the predominance of family business scholars, in this dissertation thesis will be used the following definition: a family business is "*a business 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*" (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999, p. 25).

As regard identities, I will follow the theories that explain identity in general, considering as *identity* all the meanings that a specific entity (i.e., individual, group, or organization) internalizes as part of the self-concept, such as roles and status; *identification* as the cognitive and affective bond that leads individual members to align their personal notions of self with a role, group, or organization's identity; and *identity work* as all the actions that are engaged by an entity to "create and sustain identities that are congruent with and supportive of self-concepts" (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1348).

3. The role of identities in family businesses: a literature review

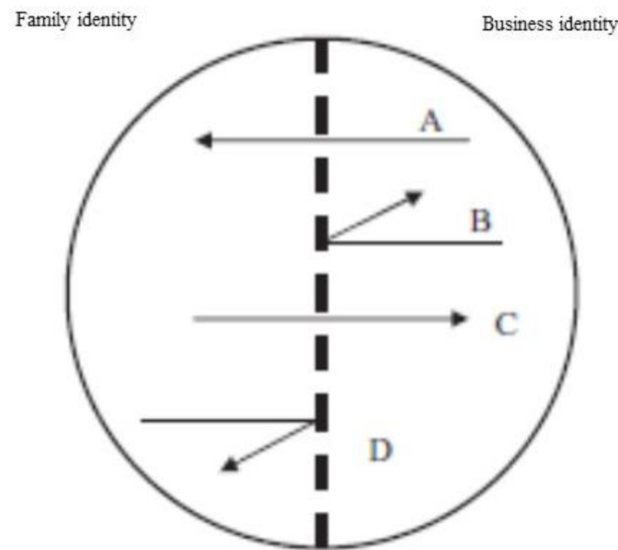
This chapter aims to embed the identity perspective in the family business context, offering an overview of the literature that analyzes the intersection of these two broad topics. Moreover, it provides some hints for future research directions, useful for the building of the next chapters.

3.1 Identities in family business

A family business is a unique context because of the interaction of two logics - the family and the business (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). As explained in the previous chapter, the family logic emphasizes the pursuing of non-economic goals and values, aiming at ensuring the wellbeing of the family and satisfying its needs. By contrast, the business logic is more focused on business growth and development. The existence of these two logics makes family businesses a type of hybrid-identity-organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 95), in the sense that this kind of business is an "intentional amalgamation of two organizational forms or types which would normally be considered mutually exclusive" (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2013, p. 480). Here, the family and the business identities coexist, or at least they try to, with their respective rules, values, scripts, and expectations. This co-presence of identities can take place in three different combinations (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2013). The first recognizes the family identity as the modifier of the business identity, resulting in a specific type of company, where there is a strong presence of family members involved in more levels (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003). In the second case, the business identity is the extension of the family identity, expressing a different way to support the family goals, such as legacy transmission, through the involvement of the family in business activities. Finally, there is the situation where the two identities have similar importance and are balanced, and these two social categories integrate. In any of these situations, the identities of the family and the business become mutually dependent and this is often evident also from the outside, leading external audiences, such as customers, suppliers, and investors, to associate the firm with the owning/controlling family and vice versa. Indeed, the owning family can be easily identified by the community, and thus it may be straightforwardly considered responsible for the actions of the firm. This strong association is also a consequence of the firm embeddedness in

the local community it is rooted in and connected with (Berrone, Cruz, Gomez-Mejia, & Larraza-Kintana, 2010).

Over the last three decades, there has been an increasing interest in exploring identities in family firms. It began in approximately 2006, when Jones introduced this concept in the family business context as a new stream of research, followed by some more specific articles in the following years. A milestone is represented by the study of Sundaramurthy and Kreiner in 2008, who investigated the family business in the light of the identity boundary literature, aiming at unveiling the dynamics of the family and the business identity overlap. The authors argued that family businesses can be positioned on a continuum that spans from high segmentation, representing a status similar to non-family businesses and where family and business identity are completely separated, to high integration, where the family is a fundamental actor in the running of the business and the business is embedded in the family life and history. In this framework, they highlighted the main consequences of this segmentation/integration on several business aspects, such as the association between the family and business image, the culture, the personnel, ownership and governance, contractual relations with family, and the relationship between family and business finances. For example, in terms of image, the name of the company can be an indicator of the firm identity as it is an important "identity marker" (Ashforth, 1998, p. 220). When the family and the business identities are integrated, it is more likely that the firm would use the family name and would acknowledge the family-owned status in its marketing and advertising campaigns; conversely, in the case of identities segmentation, the firm would take the choice of concealing the family name and not mentioning its status in communications with internal and external stakeholder. The same can happen to all the business aspects aforementioned. However, there are different combinations in the middle of this continuum, in a state that the authors called "different permeability" (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008, p. 421). The visualization of this idea is represented in Figure 9.



Source: Sundaramurthy, C., & Kreiner, G. E. (2008). Governing by managing identity boundaries: The case of family businesses. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 32*(3), 415-436.

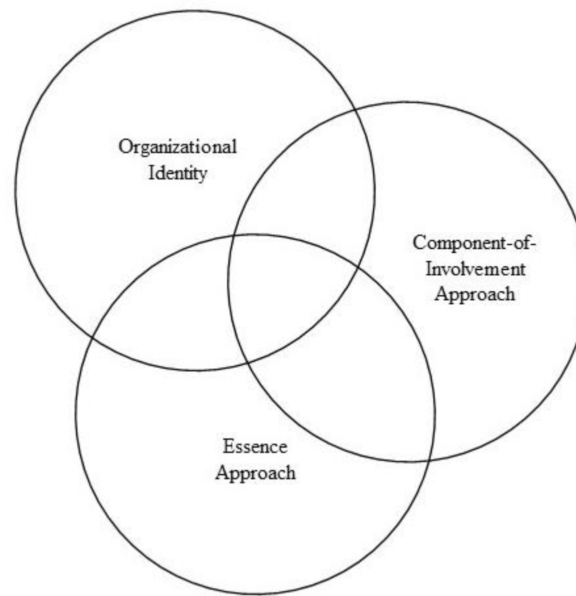
Figure 9: "Differential Permeability of Identity in Family Businesses"

According to this concept of "different permeability", a family business can have some elements of integration and some of segmentation simultaneously. Resuming the example of family business image, a family business may have a different name from the family, but it may highlight its family-owned status in its communication and marketing strategies. This is the case where permeability is *within* an aspect of identity. Differently, a family business may present permeability *between* aspects of identity, for example, being highly integrated with its image and presents itself as a family-owned one, but yet being highly segmented in its personnel policies. Moreover, there are some contingencies that can influence such integration/segmentation, and the authors divided them into individual factors (founder's belief, age, gender) and situational contexts (national cultures, rural/urban cultures, family culture, organizational life cycle).

Another fundamental contribution that marked the beginning of the literature on identities in the family business field is the establishment in 2007 of the socioemotional wealth perspective (Gómez-Mejía, Haynes, Núñez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007),

which has been defined as one of the most important developments in the family business arena (Brigham & Payne, 2019). Even though the article does not specifically focus on identity, it was one of the first studies to introduce the concept of identification in the family business context. The socioemotional wealth perspective (SEW) refers to “non-financial aspects of the firm that meet the family’s affective needs, such as identity, the ability to exercise family influence, and the perpetuation of the family dynasty” (Gómez-Mejía, Haynes, Núñez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007, p. 106), and one of its most important aspects is that “it fulfills the need for [the family members’] identification” (p. 108). Identification was thus recognized by the authors as one of the SEW focal elements, which helps explain the total stock of affect vested by the family in the firm (Gómez-Mejía, Haynes, Núñez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007). Later, identification became also one of the five elements of the SEW measurement, the FIBER scale (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012), confirming its relevance in the family business dynamics. This scale comprehends family control and influence (F); identification of family members with the firm (I); binding social ties (B); emotional attachment of family members (E); renewal of family bonds to the firm through dynastic succession (R).

One last important contribution, as already briefly described in Chapter 2, was of Zellweger and colleagues in 2010, who advanced the theory that identity would have been simultaneously a good alternative to the components-of-involvement and the essence approaches as well as an expansion of the familiness conceptualization. In their opinion, organizational identity is able to better capture the degree of the family influence on organizational behavior and culture and, in the meanwhile, to explain the dynamics related to the family members as individuals and as a group (Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010). More specifically, they propose that integrating organizational identity together with the components-of-involvement and essence approaches would result in a three-dimensional conceptualization of a family firm’s potentially able to develop familiness (Figure 10).



Source: Zellweger, T. M., Eddleston, K. A., & Kellermanns, F. W. (2010). Exploring the concept of familiness: Introducing family firm identity. *Journal of Family Business Strategy, 1*(1), 54-63.

Figure 10: "Dimensions of familiness"

In this model, the components-of-involvement approach is the part that embraces observable elements that describe the family business (e.g., ownership stake, percentage of family managers), stating the presence of the family in the firm. Then, the essence approach captures the family influence on the business through the observation of the family's transgenerational intention, focusing on behaviors. Finally, organizational identity adds to these two approaches by evaluating the degree to which family and non-family members see and perceive the company as a family business and reflecting how the family defines the company and the company's behaviors as a whole. The position the firm has in this model impacts the ability of the company to create the right synergy from the family involvement in the company (for more details, Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010).

Thanks to these works, identity concepts definitely entered the family business literature. Since then, a substantial number of family business studies have blossomed and are reaching their peak in the last couple of years.

Another reason why identity is particularly relevant in the family business setting is that, differently from other contexts, the number of roles and group memberships that are

salient is significantly higher and the ties between identities are more complex (Davis, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997; Tagiuri & Davis, 1996). For example, at the individual level, employees and executives can be family members or not, and fundamental is the presence of the next-generation family members. At the group level, there are the classic division, subdivision, and the top management team, but the family represents a stand-alone group as well.

Thus, in order to better understand identities and the related concepts presented in Chapter 2 (identity, identity work, and identification) in the specific context of a family business, the next sections will explore the three different levels, namely individual, group, and organizational and how they have been investigated over the years[1]. Many authors have emphasized the importance of identities in family businesses, thus this chapter only summarizes the most prevalent research. Indeed, the aim is not to present an exhaustive review, but rather to sensitize the main findings about this topic and present some potential gaps, upon which the next chapters will be built.

3.1.1 Identity at the individual level

In the family business context, as just mentioned, identities are of particular interest due to the co-presence of different individual roles, some more "traditional" and some more "specific". The next section will present the most prominent role identities that have been studied in family businesses which are, in order, the leader; the next-generation member; and the employee. Following the theorization of identities presented in Chapter 2, all the identities will be presented firstly as static roles (*identity*), then as a mechanism of construction (*identity work*), and finally in relation with other entities (*identification*).

The leader (and other top positions)

In the family business literature, similarly to other organizational contexts, one of the most studied is the leadership role. This specific role is the outcome of an individual's self-perception of oneness with the leadership position that (s)he holds within a firm (Burke & Stets, 2009). In particular, academics have focused on exploring whether there

[1] The idea of the division of identities in family businesses according to the level and the three-identity related concepts (i.e., identity, identification, and identity work) was born in collaboration with Professors Bettinelli Cristina, Bergamaschi Mara, and De Massis Alfredo and follows the thematic mapping we propose in our literature review "Identity in Family Firms: towards an integrative understanding", which is under review. I thank them for their contribution and insights in building this framework and analyzing the literature.

are differences between being a leader who is a lone or a family founder (Miller, Le Breton-Miller, & Lester, 2011), confronting also situations in which the family leader is the founder or an heir (Caprio, Del Giudice, & Signori, 2020; Miller & Le Breton–Miller, 2011). Moreover, differences between family vs non-family membership have also been explored in the identity of the CEO (Abdulmalik, Amran, & Che Ahmad, 2020) as well as of top managers (Kotlar & Sieger, 2019). This interest in comparing family vs non-family leadership identities is related to the fact that having close associations with the family and with its members may trigger a "family nurturer" identity of the owner/CEO/manager, which fosters conservatism in favor of the family and its goals, limiting the efforts put in more strategic and economic objectives (Gómez-Mejía, Núñez-Nickel, & Gutierrez, 2001). Comparisons were also made between leaders with different family roles, such as Yoo et al. (2014) and Schenkel et al. (2016) who studied the main differences in family business behaviors and performance depending on leaders' birth order, highlighting how first and non-first son successor identity are often intrinsically dissimilar. By focusing on whether the leader's identity is one or the other and by comparing how this influences the firm entrepreneurial orientation (Miller & Le Breton–Miller, 2011) as well as strategies such as CSR implementation (Lamb & Butler, 2018; Meier & Schier, 2020), cash holdings (Caprio, Del Giudice, & Signori, 2020), external risk assessment (Abdulmalik, Amran, & Che Ahmad, 2020), or firm performance (Miller, Le Breton-Miller, & Lester, 2011; Yoo, Schenkel, & Kim, 2014), all these studies have a functional and static perspective about leaders' identities and only concentrates on one specific time frame.

By contrast, some studies were more interested in the ways in which individuals "craft, uphold, and revise" their leadership identities, and analyze them as a process that implies a work. Researchers acknowledge two focal points in leaders' identity work, namely gender and ethnicity (Essers, Doorewaard, & Benschop, 2013). These are considered "habitats of meanings", which are the "symbolic resources for individuals to create meaning of the world around them and give both possibilities and limitations for their identity work (Golbert, 2001; Hannerz, 2002)" (Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015). As regard gender, on the one hand, family business studies concentrate on female entrepreneurs and how they deal with gender barriers when participating in the (family) business (e.g., Fernandes & Mota-Ribeiro, 2017). This is a particularly interesting topic considered that,

even though the business world is moving (or is trying to move) towards an equilibrium in social and economic opportunities, in modern society women are still not immediately recognized as real 'entrepreneurs' (Lewis, 2006) and go through long processes of identity legitimization (Fernandes & Mota-Ribeiro, 2017). On the other hand, as regard ethnicity, family business studies focused for example on migrant family business owner-mangers (e.g., Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015). This is another particularly contemporary topic, given that we live in a period called the "Age of Migration" (Castles & Miller, 2009), during which international migration has globalized and changed organizations and societies (Hajro, Caprar, Zikic, & Stahl, 2021). Migration can represent an issue for the identity formation and legitimization of a family business leader mainly because what an individual assumes in his/her "native" environment about him/her self and identity may be completely disrupted in another setting (Gupta, 2013). Thus, migrant owner-leader needs to engage in identity work to make sense of who (s)he is in relation to who (s)he is at home (native environment), at work, and within the family and keep the business intact, especially if it is a family business (Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015).

In addition to confirmation and legitimation, another mechanism that has been explored related to family business leaders' identity work is identity projection, i.e., unconscious projection of aspects of the self into others (Klein, 1946). For example, Petriglieri and Stein (2012) explored the situation in which the leader engages this process with undesirable aspects of his/herself while crafting his/her family business leadership identity. In this case, the leader projects into others unwanted characteristics of him/herself, and the recipients of such projection reacts by projecting them back into the leader or into other people. The consequences of such a process are mostly negative for both the leader, who receives a negative feedback on his/her identity, and for the family business, in which are created a persistent state of conflict and a toxic environment (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012).

The next generation member

Another identity that has been largely explored, unique to this context, is the one of the successor, namely the individual that is part of the next generation of the family and who has to take over the business. Succession is one of the most dominant topics for family business studies since the transgenerational outlook is often seen as one fundamental

characteristic of family businesses and in the next generation's hands lies the continuity and the future of the firm (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999). However, the percentages of family businesses that survive the transferring of control are critically low, and this percentage even worsens when the succession plan is not carefully prepared (Le Breton–Miller, Miller, & Steier, 2004). In order to help this process of transition and better understand which are the best situations in which a succession can take place, according to researchers one first important topic is understanding successors' identity, which type of skills they should have and what kind of resources they need. For example, Barbera, Bernhard, Nacht, and McCann (2015) stated that cognitive, emotional, and social skills are important drivers of successors' leadership identities. Additionally, depending on the source of the leadership (i.e., choice versus destiny) and on the mission of the leadership (i.e., conservation versus innovation), the next generation member may develop different future leadership identity projections, such as the protector, the reformer, the opportunist, and the rebel (Lefebvre & Lefebvre, 2016). Nevertheless, mainly because of the idiosyncrasies of individuals, families, and firms that make them unique, these sources are hardly generalizable in one-size-fits-all categories and solutions, which underlie the evident limitations of these studies (Zellweger, 2017).

Successors, entering the business with the task of leading it, have also to face a process of confirmation and legitimization of their leadership identity. Identity confirmation, which is the perception of congruence and support between individuals' self-defined identities and their social and personal context (Milton & Westphal, 2005), is particularly relevant in family businesses. In general, because it is more difficult, given the involvement of the family and thus of a large number of interacting parties who are tied together for a long period and are usually dependent on one another (Pieper & Klein, 2007), but at the same time it is more rewarding (Milton, 2008). In the specific case of successors even more, because when the next-generation family member perceives that his/her identity as successor is confirmed, it means that people around him/her in the business (i.e., other family members as well as all the stakeholders) recognize and accept him/her in that role (Klein, 2008). Thus, next-generation family members' identity confirmation represents an essential mechanism to guarantee a successful succession (Klein, 2008). Among the others, a technique implemented by next-generation family members in order to gain legitimacy in the family business and confirm their identity of

successors is to do “gender” (Byrne, Radu-Lefebvre, Fattoum, & Balachandra, 2019). This means that they enact differently masculine (entrepreneurial, authoritarian and paternalistic) and feminine (relational, individualized, and maternal) gender role identities independently from being a man or a woman, but conditional on how they plan to gain such legitimacy (Byrne, Radu-Lefebvre, Fattoum, & Balachandra, 2019).

Gender, similarly to the leadership role identities and related to the process of legitimation, is an important aspect to consider about next-generation family members’ identity. As also stated in the previous paragraph, women are taking their position beside men in the business environment. This mechanism is fostering the recognition of daughters as possible heirs of family businesses, and thus more and more girls and women are involved in succession processes (Campopiano, De Massis, Rinaldi, & Sciascia, 2017). For this reason, family business scholars have been specifically interested in mechanisms of gender identity constructions in family firms and how they deal with the related challenges. For example, recent studies are exploring how daughters build their successor identity based on the relationship they have with their father-incumbent (McAdam, Brophy, & Harrison, 2021; Mussolino, Cicellin, Iacono, Consiglio, & Martinez, 2019), or negotiate such identity making use of masculine gender scripts (Hytti, Alsos, Heinonen, & Ljunggren, 2017) and challenge conventional gender roles (Xian, Jiang, & McAdam, 2021).

However, some members of the next generation of the family business sometimes do not want to enter the business or even they feel obliged to do it (Zellweger, Sieger, & Englisch, 2012). A hint to understand the next generation family members’ attitude towards the business and their eventual willingness to succeed is their identification with the business. To foster such identification, together with the development of all the SEW aspects, early interactions between the successor and the business are necessary to create a sense of belonging to the business (Murphy, Huybrechts, & Lambrechts, 2019). Once the connection between the successor and the firm identities is established, it will be a source of affective commitment to the family business (Dawson, Sharma, Irving, Marcus, & Chirico, 2015) and will drive the successor’s intention to work in the family business (Schröder, Schmitt-Rodermund, & Arnaud, 2011). Moreover, the successors’ identification with the business may also affect their moral emotions and behaviors towards the business. Indeed, if the successor is strongly identified, it is more likely that

s(he) would accept a higher level of vicarious guilt for previous generations' past wrongdoings towards the society, leading to enacting more responsible behaviors such as reparative actions, apologies, and change in business practices (Bernhard & Labaki, 2021).

The employee

Another role of relevance in family businesses is the employee, and especially if (s)he is not part of the family. Only recently few articles have started to focus on employees and their identity work, trying to understand how they see, understand, and deal with their identity as outsiders in a close family firm, and challenging the reliance on family identity as a positive motivator and behavioral regulator (Cunningham, 2020).

Apart from a few exceptions, the primary aim of academic production about non-family employees has always been to provide useful managerial practices to family businesses, explaining how non-family employees can provide a competitive advantage. In particular, researchers have focused on how to foster their identification with the business, highlighting the importance of the relational aspects, such as employees' relational identification with the firm's owner (Medina-Craven, Cooper, Penney, & Caldas, 2020) as well as friendship ties with the owning family members (Marler & Stanley, 2018; Vardaman, Allen, & Rogers, 2018). Other relevant factors in driving employees' feeling of oneness with the business are working for a family firm rather than a non-family firm (i.e., family employer status) (Vallejo, 2008), the perception and feeling of the family commitment (Zhou, 2014), and the implementation of employee-focused stewardship practices like different types of training, events, and flexibility that create an inclusive culture (Medina-Craven, Cooper, Penney, & Caldas, 2020).

The cognitive process of employees' identification with the business aligns their perceived interests with those of the organization, increasing their likelihood to positively behave on behalf of the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). An example of such behaviors is organizational citizenship behaviors (Marler & Stanley, 2018; Medina-Craven, Cooper, Penney, & Caldas, 2020), namely "performance that supports the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place" (Organ, 1997, p. 95). Accordingly, employees identification with the business seems to reduce more damaging behaviors, such as employees' deviance (Marler & Stanley, 2018), that is the

set of dysfunctional actions that violates organizational norms and is detrimental to the business (Bennett & Robinson, 2000), and turnover (Vardaman, Allen, & Rogers, 2018).

3.1.2 Identity at the group level

Differently from the individual level, studies that explore group identities in the family business context have mainly a unique subject: the family. Only a few studies are devoted to other roles, such as the board of directors (BoD) and other shareholders, but in proportion, they represent a really small part. As in the previous section, family and other group identities will be discussed first from a static point of view (*identity*), then as a mechanism of construction/preservation (*identity work*), and lastly in relation to other entities (*identification*).

The family

The distinctive trait of the family business is, as already largely mentioned, the presence of the family. When analyzing families, it is important to notice that nowadays they have multiple structures that go far from the nuclear conception, i.e., father, mother, and children, since this latter "has been in decline in the United States and other developed countries since the 1970s" (Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017, p. 112). This structural change leads to the necessity of understanding and starting to consider the "the growing variety of other family structures that exist today" (Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017, p. 112), such as in-laws, extended families, and conjugal families, also in the family business context, with the aim to better describe the reality of the modern society. Indeed, different structures of families, and thus of group of people who own and influence the firm, lead to variations in the dynamics among members and across family types with relevant consequences for the function of the business (Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017).

In this regard, scholars have recently started to call for studies that shift the attention from the "family business" to the "business family", which is fundamental to understand the family business heterogeneity and unveil those nuances that make family businesses hardly generalizable (Kushins & Behounek, 2020).

In line with this call, also studies about identities rarely focus on exploring the identity (static or dynamic) of the family as a whole, missing the opportunity to understand "what is a family?" and what this means for the business they own or run.

Few exceptions to this trend are, for example, the exploration of the specific features of the entrepreneurial team's role identity, which highlights how different family configurations, and in particular romantic couples versus teams consisting of members with biological links (e.g., father and daughter), have different likelihood to achieve start-up success (Brannon, Wiklund, & Haynie, 2013). To complicate even more the understanding of family business heterogeneity, Kim and Marler (2020) argue that there are not only diverse configurations of families but that there are also differences between members' identities of the same family. In business families, there are thus two subgroups, the blood and the non-blood related family members, which are claimed to have separate identities. Influenced by individual factors, such as familial proximity and familial tenure as well as by societal factors (collectivism versus individualism), blood relatedness of family members is theorized to be an important determinant of the likelihood of bifurcation bias among family members, i.e., the probability of different treatments and intergroup discrimination (Kim & Marler, 2020).

As regards the development and preservation of a business family identity, again few are the attempts to unveil these identity works. Schmidts and Shepherd (2015), for example, identified six elements that influence the dynamics of development of a business family meta-identity (family identity work), which are: 1) the legacy of the business, 2) an orientation on values, 3) the family's exposure to the public, 4) the family's dependence on the business, 5) the family's community involvement and 6) the family's passion for the industry (Schmidts & Shepherd, 2015). The determination of a sound business family identity may also help in cases of events such as the family exit from an industry or firm strategic renewal, situations in which the family entrepreneurial identity needs to be preserved (Salvato, Chirico, & Sharma, 2010). However, there is still a lot to do to understand the role of families and to show how their heterogeneous identities are of fundamental relevance for the business.

Differently, more space has been given to the investigation of the family identification with the business. This topic is of particular interest for researchers because identification provides to family members shared meanings, understanding, and purposes, which are fundamental when pursuing economic and non-economic goals (Berrone, Cruz, Gomez-Mejia, & Larraza-Kintana, 2010). Identification with the business, as part of SEW, should be an element that is already intrinsic in family members. However, there are situations

in which this may not happen, or in which this identification is not particularly accentuated. Family business researchers thus concentrate on some of the factors that foster family identification with the business such as the climate, which has to be positive (Cabrera-Suárez, Déniz-Déniz, & Martín-Santana, 2014) and oriented to conformity and conversation (Prügl & Spitzley, 2020) by stressing the "homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs" as well as the need of creating a space "where all family members are encouraged to participate freely in communication about a wide array of topics" (Fitzpatrick, 2004, p. 173). Other elements that nurture family members' identification are also the family own commitment to the firm (Basly & Saunier, 2020) and high involvement in management (Neckebrouck, Manigart, & Meuleman, 2017), in particular through a high number of family meetings, family investments in the firm, and a high number of family members in the Top Management Team (Mahto, Chen, McDowell, & Ahluwalia, 2019).

The more the family identifies with the business, the more the business will be affected in terms of goals, governance, strategies, performance, behaviors, and all its other aspects. For example, family identification with the business leads to placing more importance on non-financial goals (Cabrera-Suárez, Déniz-Déniz, & Martín-Santana, 2014), such as the transgenerational outlook (Basly & Saunier, 2020), the nurturing of an entrepreneurship orientation within the family (Mahto, Chen, McDowell, & Ahluwalia, 2019), the development of a family ownership logic (Brundin, Samuelsson, & Melin, 2014), an even higher family commitment (Razzak & Jassem, 2019), and the pursuance of a better firm reputation (Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013; Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013). Furthermore, family identification affects the relationships that the business has both externally and internally. On the one hand, a family business with family members highly identified is more oriented to have interlocks with other family firms than with lone-founder or publicly traded firms (Cannella, Jones, & Withers, 2015). However, it may look for key figures that are non-family members (Déniz-Déniz, Cabrera-Suárez, & Martín-Santana, 2020). On the other hand, a high family identification with the business influences the relational dynamics inside the firm, leading to a decrease in the willingness to cede control to outside investors (Neckebrouck, Manigart, & Meuleman, 2017), but still accepting and appointing outside directors and investors that have a family business identity or background (Cannella, Jones, & Withers, 2015; Neckebrouck, Manigart, &

Meuleman, 2017). Other consequences are related to more strategic issues, such as family businesses having a higher environmental commitment (Arena & Michelon, 2018; Jain & Prakash, 2017), R&D spending (Tsao, Chang, & Koh, 2019), and a lower strategic priority for external corporate venture (Prügl & Spitzley, 2020). Moreover, firm growth (Calabrò, Campopiano, & Basco, 2017) and performance (Déniz-Déniz, Cabrera-Suárez, & Martín-Santana, 2020; Razzak & Jassem, 2019) are also affected. Finally, and more interestingly family identification with the business also has a dark side, leading family members and the organization towards negative behaviors. For example, when the identification level is higher, the family firm tends to provide less-transparent annual reports (Drago, Ginesti, Pongelli, & Sciascia, 2018) and also to have lower earnings quality, especially when the CEO is also a family member (Pazzaglia, Mengoli, & Sapienza, 2013).

BoD and other groups

In family business literature scant attention has been paid to identities of other groups than the family. Even though this may sound logical, since the family is the peculiar entity of such businesses and still the literature has explored only a really small part of it, the presence of other groups, which can be part or also in contrast with the family, can unveil interesting and informative aspects of family firms. Recently, academics have started to delve into some of these groups, such as the decision-maker group (board of directors) and in general the shareholders as a collective.

As regards the BoD, its members have a central role in all organizations, and the same happens in family businesses (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996). Depending on them being members or not of the family, as well as their inclination to pursue mere economic versus family interests, their presence and decisions affect the firm in all its aspects. A pioneering study in this regard is the one of Brinkerink and Bammens (2018), who theorized that decision-makers in family businesses make relevant choices, such as the level of R&D spending, depending on their identity and identification with the business. They theorized that the BoD members develop a family nurturer role identity, which leads them to be more concerned with familial issues such as the firm's extended preservation and the current control. At the same time, their identification with the business gives rise to other concerns more related to the firm, such as the values and traditions of the organization

along with its reputation. These two identitarian issues (nurturer role identity vs identification with the business) have been demonstrated to have opposite effects on a strategic decision and innovative efforts, such as R&D spending, that can be interpreted as the BoD acting in congruence with the salient external and internal aspects of their organization's (family) identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

In opposition to the role of the BoD members, Siebels and colleagues (2017) analyzed the role of the group of non-active shareholders. In this work, the authors borrowed the definition of Jaskiewicz et al. (2016) and defined non-active shareholders as the group who have control over certain tasks that ensure the balance of all shareholders' interests (active and non-active shareholders groups), while active shareholders, or BoD members, are directly involved and responsible for business-related decisions. In the non-active shareholders' group, four different group roles have been identified, which are based on the share-size and the (self-perceived) competence. They are the *co-entrepreneurs*, who have high identification with the business and desire for participation, and are emotionally close to the business; the *traditionalists*, who highly identify with the business, are emotionally closed to it, but have low desire for participation; the *active investors,* who are emotionally closed to the business and have a high desire for participation, but identify less with the business; and the *silent shareholders*, who have low identification with the business and low desire for participation, but still are emotionally closed to the business. Examining the goal alignment between the BoD and these groups of non-active shareholders, they theorize that group role identities of the "coentrepreneurs" and the "traditionalists" are less likely to conflict with active shareholders, while the other group role identities, which are "active investors" and "silent shareholders" are more likely to engage in conflicts with the BoD (Siebels, zu Knyphausen-Aufseß, & Schweizer, 2017).

3.1.3 Identity at the organizational level

At the organizational level, the focus is on the family business as a whole. In the next sections will be presented first the studies about the family business status (*identity*) and family business identity development/preservation (*identity work*); then, a paragraph will be devoted to how family businesses communicate their identity to internal and external audiences (i.e., corporate identity).

Being a family business

The uniqueness of the family business context is the co-presence of the family and the business identities. Once they are integrated, or at least balanced, they create a unique synergy where the business reflects and is influenced by the family characteristics and, vice versa, the family acquires some of the business features. When analyzed as a status, the "family business identity" of a firm has been interpreted in different ways and has been proxied through, for example, the percentage of family members in the owning group (e.g., Biscotti, D'Amico, & Monge, 2018; Wei, Luo, & Huang, 2020) or their presence in other leading positions (e.g., Magistretti, Dell'Era, Frattini, & Petruzzelli, 2020; Thiele & Wendt, 2017), the concept of familiness (e.g., McGrath & O'Toole, 2018; Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010), and the usage of the family name for the business (Berent-Braun, Flören, & den Ouden, 2018; Uhlaner, Matser, Berent-Braun, & Flören, 2015; Wielsma & Brunninge, 2019). More specifically, being a family business has been associated with the development of certain business features, that comprehend more relational aspects, as well as with strategic choices and also performance. For example, the family business identity is demonstrated to impact relational and social aspects both inside the company, through the development of bonding and bridging ownership social capital (Uhlaner, Matser, Berent-Braun, & Flören, 2015), and outside the company, through the development of relational capabilities, such as the ability to partner or to coordinate competencies and knowledge across organizational boundaries (McGrath & O'Toole, 2018). Organizations with a family business identity are also demonstrated to be more attentive and to put more efforts into positive social initiatives (Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011; Cruz, Larraza–Kintana, Garcés–Galdeano, & Berrone, 2014) and in specific aspects of CSR (Block & Wagner, 2014), such as implementing proactive environmental strategies (Dou, Su, & Wang, 2019) and investing in sustainable certifications (Richards, Zellweger, & Gond, 2017). The attention devoted to these aspects underlies the fact that family businesses pursuance of non-economic goals is not related uniquely to family interests, but also to the society in which they are embedded (Berrone, Cruz, Gomez-Mejia, & Larraza-Kintana, 2010). As regards the business organizational setting, the family business identity affects the management of human resource issues, such as the implementation and development of efficient human capital training and programs that stimulate the employees' knowledge advancement,

highlighting the higher inclination of family businesses in fostering the knowledge management process compared to non-family businesses (Biscotti, D'Amico, & Monge, 2018). Moreover, being a family business is a driver of the type of management control techniques that the firm implements (El Masri, Tekathen, Magnan, & Boulianne, 2017) and it also affects the choice of new directors, revealing the family business preference of appointing directors that had previous experiences in other family contexts (Dibrell, Marshall, Palar, & Gentry, 2019). In terms of strategies, family businesses have often been theorized to engage in less international activities due to their bond with the territory and traditions, and the likelihood of doing a foreign direct investment (FDI) is lower compared to their non-family counterparts (Wei, Luo, & Huang, 2020). However, a unique study demonstrates that the family business identity mitigates the risks related to the speed of FDIs implementation and it increases, until a certain point, the probability of the business survival (Cho & Lee, 2020). By contrast, the relationship between family businesses and innovation is still ambiguous, being sometimes positive and others negative, depending on which organizational features are considered (Berent-Braun, Flören, & den Ouden, 2018; De Massis, Frattini, & Lichtenthaler, 2013). When focusing on family business identity it seems that, similarly to the relationship it has with internationalization, there is a certain point until which being a family business is positively related to innovation and then becomes negative (García-García, Alonso-Buenaposada, Romero-Merino, & Santamaria-Mariscal, 2020). Probably due to the fact that it is negatively related to the likelihood of greater financial investments in innovation but positively related to the results of innovative activities (Ingram, Kraśnicka, & Głód, 2020), the result is an inverted-U shaped general relationship. However, more efforts should be placed by family business scholars to unveil the relationship between the family business identity and both internationalization and innovation strategies. Finally, the family business identity has also an impact on economic aspects, such as the organizational capital structure, leading to the preference of family businesses for long-term debts (Thiele & Wendt, 2017), which is in line with their more long-term perspective and also with the power of the family business identity to potentially moderate relationships with stakeholders like banks.

However, the family business identity is not just a matter of "being" but also of "becoming" and "maintaining", since the mere presence of the family is sometimes not enough to state that the organization has a "family business identity" (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2013; Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010). For this reason, as individuals and groups, organizational identities engage in a work, which is defined as the process through which they "interpret, shape, and reify the content of identity" (Kreiner & Murphy, 2016, p. 280). Fundamental in this process are narratives (McKenny, Short, Zachary, & Payne, 2012; Parada & Dawson, 2017; Parada & Viladás, 2010), which are powerful tools for transmitting values within the family and through generations. Family business identities are thus built by telling stories and sharing meanings (Parada & Viladás, 2010), firstly by the founder, as a way to grow the business (fictionality), and then by the following generations of the family, in a continuous process of identities shaping and being shaped (reflexibility) (Parada & Dawson, 2017). Over the years, the family business identity is thus maintained by the following generations (Boers & Ljungkvist, 2019) as well as by non-family members working in the organization (Ponroy, Lê, & Pradies, 2019) through a mechanism that leverages the business founder's identity and legacy (Boers & Ljungkvist, 2019; Ponroy, Lê, & Pradies, 2019). However, especially for long-lived family firms, narratives linked to the past of the family and of the business, e.g., mottos and other identity statements, can also pose a challenge when aiming at strategic changes due to the risk of breaking the "continuity" with the past (Sasaki, Kotlar, Ravasi, & Vaara, 2020). In this stance, strategies used by family businesses to overcome this risk imply different organizational identity works that are linked to narratives, such as elaborating, i.e., "transferring part of the content of the historical statement into a new one", recovering, i.e., "forging a new statement based on the retrieval and re-use of historical references", and decoupling, i.e., "allowing the co-existence of the historical statement and a contemporary one" (Sasaki, Kotlar, Ravasi, & Vaara, 2020, p. 590). More in general, strategic organizational renewal is one of the main triggers of organizational identity work, since it assumes changes that will affect, even if in a small part, the organization and its identity (Gioia D. A., Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013; Wenzel, Cornelissen, Koch, Hartmann, & Rauch, 2020). In the context of a disruptive innovation change, for example, organizational identity work is considered as the actions aimed at integrating new aspects emerging from the adaptation of the

business (i.e., what we do) in the actual organizational identity (i.e., who we are) (Brinkerink, Rondi, Benedetti, & Arzubiaga, 2020). Additionally, organizational identity work for strategic renewal can also be linked to more intrinsic organizational values such as religion, where this latter drives the development of different configurations of spiritual capital and influences activities such as conflict resolution and resource allocation (Abdelgawad & Zahra, 2020). The result is that the organizational identity is enduring but dynamic, modeled by internal stakeholders but also by the external environment (Parada & Dawson, 2017).

Communicating the family business identity

The identity of the family owners is inextricably tied to the identity of the organization, to the point that the company may also carry the family's name. This makes family members rather sensitive about what others think about the company, and thus careful about what they project to their customers, suppliers, and other external stakeholders (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011). Thus, the family usually aims at creating a unique corporate identity, i.e., "the intentional projection of a family business identity to external audiences" (Zellweger, Kellermanns, Eddleston, & Memili, 2012, p. 239), and at acquiring a good reputation (Sageder, Mitter, & Feldbauer-Durstmüller, 2018; Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013). However, some firms do not explicitly disclose their identity as family-owned, or even some other firms claim to be family-owned when they are not, trying to gain the competitive advantages derived from such status. Researchers identified different strategies that family businesses adopt when deciding whether and how to disclose their identity (Blombäck & Ramírez-Pasillas, 2012; Micelotta & Raynard, 2011). Depending on the connotative meanings that they provide to the three relevant aspects, i.e., carrier of identity, temporality, and family identity there are three different strategies: family preservation, which implies a corporate identity rooted in the family to the point that "the family is personified in the company itself"; family enrichment, in which corporate identity is portrayed as a "symbiotic intermeshing" of the family and business; and family subordination, which crafts a corporate identity "distinct from and largely dissociated with" the family (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011). The considerations behind this strategic choice are part of a process that accounts for both self-perceptions of people inside the company and external stakeholders' opinions (Blombäck & Ramírez-Pasillas, 2012). Moreover, several factors influence whether and

how to communicate the family business identity, some more related to the family owners and some others more structural. On the one hand, elements such as family pride (Zellweger, Kellermanns, Eddleston, & Memili, 2012), long-term orientation (Zellweger, Kellermanns, Eddleston, & Memili, 2012), family identification with the business (Astrachan & Botero, 2018), pursuing family-centered non-economic goals (Van Gils, Huybrechts, Minola, & Cassia, 2019), and the expected benefits of having a family business brand (Astrachan & Botero, 2018) are linked to a higher probability of communicating the family business identity. On the other hand, it also depends on the industry (Botero, Thomas, Graves, & Fediuk, 2013; Chen, Zhu, Zou, & Chen, 2019), being a business to consumer (B2C) firm (Botero, Thomas, Graves, & Fediuk, 2013), being private or public, the firm age, and the culture in which the company is embedded (Chen, Zhu, Zou, & Chen, 2019). In any case, when the family business decides to communicate its identity is often through different forms of storytelling (McKenny, Short, Zachary, & Payne, 2012), where the family members, in a process of preserving and/or adapting the founder-based brand identity (Casprini, Melanthiou, Pucci, & Zanni, 2020), illustrate and share the family, the business, and the family business history with consumers (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013; Canziani, Welsh, Dana, & Ramadani, 2020).

The communication of the family business identity is of particular relevance because it can provide several competitive advantages, specifically in the relationship with customers (Astrachan & Botero, 2018) by increasing their perceived brand authenticity (Zanon, Scholl-Grissemann, Kallmuenzer, Kleinhansl, & Peters, 2019), attitude and trust towards the business and the product (Alonso-Dos-Santos, Llanos-Contreras, & Farías, 2019; Alonso-Dos-Santos, Llanos-Contreras, Moreno, & Felicio, 2020; Bednarz & Nikodemska-Wołowik, 2017; Shen & Tikoo, 2020), and intention to buy (Alonso-Dos-Santos, Llanos-Contreras, & Farías, 2019; Alonso-Dos-Santos, Llanos-Contreras, Moreno, & Felicio, 2020; Nikodemska-Wołowik, Bednarz, Wach, Little, & Kubik, 2020). Moreover, it is positively related to behavioral outcomes such as organizational corporate citizenship and customer orientation (Astrachan & Botero, 2018) as well as higher rates of growth (Gallucci, Santulli, & Calabrò, 2015) and firm performance (Astrachan & Botero, 2018; Craig, Dibrell, & Davis, 2008; Zellweger, Kellermanns, Eddleston, & Memili, 2012).

3.1.4 Identity at multiple levels

The presence of such a plethora of identities in family businesses leads to situations where they inevitably and continuously influence each other, making multilevel perspectives intrinsic in the idiosyncratic nature of family firms (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2014). Firstly, individuals, people who work in the organization independently of their affiliation with the owning family, have to deal with the co-presence of family and business identities along with their integration (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). To do so, researchers have revealed that organizational members implement different types of identity work tactics, which can help them in the management of such social boundaries (Knapp, Smith, Kreiner, Sundaramurthy, & Barton, 2013). In this situation, individuals may also experience multiple identifications (Foreman & Whetten, 2002), i.e., identification with the family and the business simultaneously, which can arise from different psychological needs (Elsbach & Pieper, 2019) and lead to greater levels of stewardship orientation of individuals as well as of the family business itself (Matherne, Kirk Ring, & McKee, 2011). For these reasons, the identity of individuals who work inside the family business is often radically linked to the organizational identity, to the point of acting as an agent of institutional preservation, helping in the building and maintenance of the organizational identity even in moments of crisis (Lingo & Elmes, 2019).

If a generic individual who works in the family business may decide not to create a bond with the organization, for the owning family this link is essential. Accordingly, some studies theorize the emergence of the "meta-identity", a higher-level identity that reconciles "who we are as a family" with "who we are as a business", thus defining "who we are as a family business" (Reay, 2009; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). This meta-identity is helpful in resolving conflicts at the intersection of the family and the business identities, which can be effective especially when able to adjust to a changing environment over time (Reay, 2009). Moreover, it emphasized the presence of circular processes that link the family business identity formation to the one of the family, both as a group and as individuals, revealing how the three identity levels continuously interact and influence each other (Wielsma & Brunninge, 2019). A meaningful example of this dynamic mutual influence of identities and of their work is how family business values are articulated

(Dieleman & Koning, 2020). The synergy arisen by the comparison between the underpinning values of the leader, the family, and the business identities consequently influences the mutual work of the three identity levels, which can be harmonized, when core values are mentioned together and explicitly integrated; double, when core values are complementary and articulated at the same time; or detached, when there is no indication of values occurring together (Dieleman & Koning, 2020). The result will be a (re)presentation of the family business values that depends on the synergic identity works of the three identity levels and evolves with time and with the context in which it is embedded (Dieleman & Koning, 2020). Finally, the external environment represents another element of relevance in family businesses identity work, since sociocultural dynamics contribute to create the organizational identity and culture (Jones, 2006; Sasaki, Ravasi, & Micelotta, 2019). On the one hand, they enable the reproduction of the social order in the organization through the exchange of values between the family firm and the community (Sasaki, Ravasi, & Micelotta, 2019). On the other hand, they participate in affirming the cultural identity of the family firm's employees through the mutual confirmation of the cultural context with the organizational historical values (Jones, 2006).

3.2 Research Gaps

Despite the blossoming of studies that focused on identities in family businesses, as also identified in the previous sections, there are still some important gaps in the literature that need to be filled. For example, at the individual level, rarely studies have explored how the leader's identity, from his/her position of power over the BoD, can influence the decision-making process and, in this way, the whole organizational strategic directions and behavior. Moreover, the leader's identification has almost never been explored. A future interesting direction can be to understand how and to what extent the leader identifies with the family and the business, independently on whether (s)he is a family member, and observe what are the main consequences at different levels (at his/her personal, at the BoD, and at the firm levels). As regards other individual identities, more emphasis should be placed on the exploration of the next-generation family members, given the importance of their role in the family business continuity. For instance, it would

be fascinating to understand how they make sense of their role as successors, and how this changes their approach in general to work and life, and more specifically to their family. As regard employees, most of the studies are concentrated on how to foster their identification with the family and what are the consequences, while it is likewise important to understand what happens in cases of ambivalent identification or disidentification, and if these conditions are actually detrimental for family businesses (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). In general, given the specificities of the family business environment and culture, another interesting path would be understanding whether the (over)identification of individuals with the business or with the family influences their behaviors, leading for example to negative outcomes such as unethical pro-organizational behaviors or pro-social rule breaking (Irshad & Bashir, 2020).

Another considerable gap is about studies that investigate group identities. For example, it is still not clear which are the main characteristics of (business) families and what differentiates them from "normal" families. Furthermore, there is a big discussion about their heterogeneity, which could benefit from taking into consideration and exploring more deeply different family identities, how they are developed and maintained in unique and different ways by family members (Combs, Shanine, Burrows, Allen, & Pounds, 2020). For instance, researchers could focus on the exploration of the contextual, cultural, and traditional factors that influence the family's identity and entrepreneurial orientation. Looking more at the structure of the family, some potential future research avenues are related to the exploration of family in-laws' role inside the family and the business as well as how different family configurations (e.g., blended families, single or divorced parents) can create different synergies that affect the organization as a whole (Baù, Pittino, Sieger, & Eddleston, 2020). Moreover, it would be fundamental to understand more what is the role of the family, and in particular of its identification and dominance inside the business, in explaining different behaviors and strategic decisions that are taken in family firms. According to the strength of the feeling of oneness with the business, for example, the family may impose some general guidelines for the organization or, if it has enough power in the BoD, directly implement strategies that reflect its own will and interests, such as engaging socially responsible actions to promote an appealing corporate identity and preserve the family name and identity (Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013).

At the organizational level, the first important issue is related to how the family business identity is observed and measured. Studies often try to capture the family business identity characteristics by comparing them to the ones of non-family businesses, without really considering that differences are also *among* family businesses. Thus, fundamental is to unveil family business heterogeneity (Daspit, Chrisman, Ashton, & Evangelopoulos, 2021), also in terms of their identity. Indeed, if families are heterogeneous, as a consequence also their business should be rather heterogeneous, being often a "direct extension" of the family itself (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012). However, there are also controlling families that are not so involved in the business and treat the company as something separate from their personal sphere. Thus, family businesses may also be heterogeneous depending on how much the family and the business identities are connected. In this stance, future research can use Sundaramurthy and Kreiner's (2008) conceptualization and divide family business identities according to the level of integration or segmentation of the underlying family and the business identities, which the authors suggested can be unveiled by looking at different elements (e.g., name or culture). In this way, heterogeneity in family businesses based on identities may help in explaining different strategic outcomes such as the management of ethical issues, the engagement in socially responsible actions, or even the R&D spending level. The most important contribution, however, may be theorizing and finding a proper measurement tool, also by adapting already existing scales, that assess the family business identity and is able to capture all its different configurations and types.

Furthermore, really few studies consider multiple levels of identity simultaneously. Nonetheless, in a family business context where there are different identities at different levels that are often strongly intertwined, there is the urgency to further explore both conceptually and empirically identities interaction, influence, and conflicts. For example, understanding how identification with different entities simultaneously, i.e., with the family and the business, may be useful to capture the optimum level at which individuals are more prone to favorable behaviors toward the family business and more efficient strategic decision-making, instead of more opportunistic and detrimental ones. Similarly, it would be interesting to uncover micro-foundations of management in family businesses, describing how macro-level phenomena are molded by actions and interactions of lower-level identities and comprehending how individual identities and

characteristics influence the organizational one (Picone, De Massis, Tang, & Piccolo, 2021). Finally, it is essential to further explore the relationship between identities at different levels (individual, the family, and the business) how influence each other over time, how they preserve each other, and how their respective identification (family identification with the business and business identification with the family) are related and which kind of relationship they have (e.g., circular relationship). Indeed, oftentimes studies focus on a single identity, while it would be important to consider identities at different levels simultaneously, e.g., individual-organization or even individual-group(family)-organization, and investigate their potentiality in shaping the family firm features and characteristics. For example, the interaction of the leader's and the business identities may provide some additional insights about why some issues in family businesses are managed in a unique way, such as specific organizational behaviors or marketing strategies, identifying additional aspects that may further highlight family business heterogeneity.

Lastly, some topics deserve to be explored more in the family business context and identities may represent an optimal lens of observation. For example, themes such as CSR, internationalization, and innovation are starting to gain the interest of family business scholars but they are rarely observed from an identity perspective. However, some primary studies have demonstrated how identities can be useful to highlight some additional insights about how family businesses differently manage these issues (Brinkerink & Bammens, 2018; Mariani, Al-Sultan, & De Massis, 2021; Wei, Luo, & Huang, 2020). To this end, some of the potential future research questions presented in this section are particularly suitable. Nonetheless, due to the breadth of these topics and the actual shortage of studies with an identity perspective, the opportunities are almost limitless. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will specifically focus on CSR, but the same approach may also be applied to internationalization and innovation topics.

To provide some examples, CSR strategies may be explored as an outcome of the leader's family identity because, as a family member, (s)he is supposed to be interested in providing to internal and external audiences the perception of a company that is a "good corporate citizen" (Izzo & Ciaburri, 2018). The importance given to the implementation of CSR activities may also derive from a strong identification of the leader or of the whole family with the business, which may increase their concern about reputation (Deephouse

& Jaskiewicz, 2013). Additionally, another interesting direction is to analyze the amount of socially responsible actions engaged by considering more identities simultaneously. Indeed, CSR implementation requires additional resources that may be taken off from the family (and the pursuance of its own interests) and actors with different identities may disagree with this removal. Thus, by observing their joint effect, additional insights about how family businesses differently engage in socially responsible actions may be grasped. Moreover, CSR can also be studied as an antecedent by exploring, for example, the effects of socially responsible actions on successors' identities or on non-family employees, customers, and investors' identification with the family business.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter proposes an overview of the studies at the intersection between the family business and identity literatures. With the objective of presenting the main topics about identities in family businesses, and not to extensively cover all the findings offered by academics so far, identities are described at different levels, i.e., individual, group, organizational, and multilevel along with their main characteristics. At the individual level, the characters of the leader, the next generation member, and the employees are presented, unveiling their identities in a more static condition, the work they undertake to form and maintain such identities, and their identification with other entities. At the group level, this chapter reveals that researchers have focused principally on the family without really considering other groups. Here, really few studies investigate the more static and dynamic forms of the family identity, while most of the (little) literature has been devoted to the study of their identification. Then, a section has been dedicated to the family business identity, i.e., the organizational level, pointing out that studies are focused on uncovering its main characteristics and how it can be built and preserved over the years. Additionally, part of the section covers how and why family businesses communicate their identity to external audiences, namely how they manage their corporate identity. Aiming at not missing any peculiarity of identities in family businesses, an additional paragraph explores some of the relationships that have been investigated at multiple levels, where individual, family, and organizational identities are involved simultaneously and influence each other.

Nonetheless, as argued in the last section, there are some gaps in the literature about identities in family businesses that may represent potential directions for future researches. Building upon some of them, the next two chapters of this dissertation will focus on the identity-CSR nexus with two main objectives. The first is to start digging deeper into this specific issue and understand which is the role of identities in defining family businesses' socially responsible actions, a gap that has been identified in this chapter. The second, and likewise important, is to investigate how family businesses can be heterogeneous depending on their identities as well as on the identities of the individuals and groups, including the family, that are part of it, considering them both alone and simultaneously. By addressing these points, this dissertation will also respond to recent calls for more attention to CSR in general (Mariani, Al-Sultan, & De Massis, 2021), a topic now at the center of the organizational and strategic academic debate as it represents an important contemporary issue (Randerson, 2022).

More in detail, the next two chapters will investigate how specific identities in family businesses foster or hinder the implementation of socially responsible actions. On the one hand, Chapter 4 will analyze multiple levels of identities simultaneously, i.e., the family business identity and the CEO identity, and their impact on the level of CSR action implemented in large listed family businesses. Chapter 5, on the other hand, will delve into the family identification, highlighting how the strength of their bond with the business will impact significantly the level of socially responsible actions engaged in medium-large Italian family businesses.

4. Study 1 - Multilevel identities as a source of family business heterogeneity: the effects on CSR

Among the future research directions provided in Chapter 3, this chapter is the first that will dig deeper into the identities in family firms and their relationship with CSR. In particular, it will consider multilevel identities, namely the family business identity and the CEO identity, as a source of family business heterogeneity that foster the CSR strategies implementation in large and listed family businesses.

4.1 Corporate Social Responsibility in family businesses

The importance of the family presence in family businesses has as a main consequence the concern for aspects beyond financial ones, such as the transgenerational outlook, the family wealth (Gómez-Mejía, Haynes, Núñez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007), but also more ethical objectives and behaviors (Blodgett, Dumas, & Zanzi, 2011). In particular, the pursuance of a more rigid ethical and moral infrastructure is often a consequence of the family visibility in the firm (Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013). Indeed, when there is a direct and publicly claimed link between the family and the business, how one is perceived and acts is reflected on the other (Kashmiri & Mahajan, 2010). For this reason, the link between the family and the business identities, their shared history and embeddedness in the local society all contribute in explaining why the family is oftentimes particularly concerned for how the company, its products, services, and strategic choices are perceived by the external audiences (Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013; Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013). Hence, family firms often put a lot of effort into maintaining a good reputation and being seen as a "good corporate citizen" while feeling "good about who they are and what they do" (Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). To this end, they tend to be more committed to socially responsible actions (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013) and to provide additional value to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance (Lamb & Butler, 2018). The set of actions that are deemed as socially responsible is also called corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is, according to the European Commission, "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their firm operations and in their interaction with their

stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (European Commission, 2001). Even though this is not a globally accepted definition, CSR is generally defined as the company's activities, processes, and status in response to a wide range of stakeholder interests (Hsu & Cheng, 2012; Tang, Li, & Yang, 2015). Therefore, CSR elements consist of policies and practices that are clearly articulated and communicated by the firm, with the aim of reflecting the business responsibility for some of the wider societal good (McWilliams & Siegel, 2000). Similarly, ESG is the set of actions related to the environment, society, and governance that a firm implements. In particular, ESG is a score that is rated by external companies and assesses the firm added value of CSR performance derived from some specific activities in these three areas (Duque-Grisales & Aguilera-Caracuel, 2021). Most of these activities are also embedded in firm corporate governance (Matten & Moon, 2008) and they include a pretty wide range of actions that span from employee safety to social security to the community or regional charitable activities, supplier ethics, environmental protection, consumer protection, investor protection, anti-corruption measures, and so on (European Commission, 2001).

In the family business literature, studies that explore CSR are mainly focused on explaining how they differ from their non-family counterparts, arguing that family firms are more likely to implement such practices and behave ethically due to their identity, image, reputation, and also identification (e.g., Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011; Cruz, Larraza–Kintana, Garcés–Galdeano, & Berrone, 2014; Dyer & Whetten, 2006). However, some other works found how they also engage in less responsible behaviors compared to nonfamily firms, due to their high self-interest and willingness to merely protect their own interests (e.g., (Morck & Yeung, 2004). Therefore, previous evidence regarding CSR in family firms compared to nonfamily ones are rather mixed, but some different potential reasons behind these contradictory results have been theorized. First, almost all the studies that explore the relationship between family firms and CSR are concentrated on a unique CSR dimension, i.e., the environment, while when other dimensions, such as the employees, the society, or the community, have been hardly taken into account (Dyer & Whetten, 2006). Second, and perhaps more importantly, these works look for differences between family and non-family firms, assuming that all family businesses have similar outcomes. However, depending on several factors (Bergamaschi & Randerson, 2016; Déniz & Suárez, 2005), family firms can be socially responsible or

irresponsible at the same time depending on the specific actions considered, some other family firms can be completely irresponsible while others may be fully committed (Block & Wagner, 2014; Cruz, Larraza–Kintana, Garcés–Galdeano, & Berrone, 2014). Indeed, family firms are rather heterogeneous, and almost thirty years of family business research demonstrated that the "family business" stereotype does not really exist (Chua, Chrisman, Steier, & Rau, 2012; Daspit, Chrisman, Ashton, & Evangelopoulos, 2021; García-Álvarez & López-Sintas, 2001; Memili & Dibrell, 2019). In this regard, few scholars reviewed how some broad aspects of family firm heterogeneity affect CSR, such as heterogeneity in family values (Marques, Presas, & Simon, 2014), in the family (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016) and the governance structures (Samara & Berbegal-Mirabent, 2018), in women's boardroom representation (Samara, Jamali, & Lapeira, 2019), or in the attitudes of family business employees (Samara & Arenas, 2017). However, despite the great interest in identities in family businesses and their potentiality to explain CSR, scarce are the attempts to unveil differences in socially responsible actions implementation as the result of family business heterogeneity in this specific regard. Hence, in this study, the heterogeneity of family businesses will be explained according to two different identities, namely the family business identity and the CEO identity. On the one hand, to capture different family business identities, the conceptualization of Sundaramurthy and Kreiner (2008) will be followed by taking the extremes of the continuum they propose (see Chapter 3 for further details). Indeed, the family business identity, which is and hybrid organizational identity in which the family and the business identities co-exist (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2013), will be categorized depending on whether the family and business identity are integrated or segmented. To capture this integration/segmentation, the name of the business will be observed and compared to the name of the family. On the other hand, the different CEO identities will be assessed by considering whether the CEO is a member of the owning family or not.

To my knowledge, only two studies examined CSR strategies through an identity perspective and as a consequence of the family business carrying the name of the family (even they do not directly refer to the name as a proxy of the family business identity). Kashmiri and Mahajan (2014) emphasized that, in the US, having the family name positively influences a product-related trustworthy behavior. Similarly, Zeng (2021) analyzed Canadian family firms and considered, among the others, the effects of the

family name on CSR and found a positive relationship with some CSR measures. As regards the CEO family identity, few studies explored more in detail whether and how it influences the implementation of CSR practices (e.g., Laguir & Elbaz, 2014; Meier & Schier, 2020; Zeng, 2021), but their results are rather mixed. However, no study considers both these identities together as a joint effect, missing an opportunity to unveil family business heterogeneity according to multilevel identities and how this is reflected on CSR strategies.

Therefore, following the future research avenues presented in Chapter 3 as well as the recent call for more studies that explore CSR within family businesses (Mariani, Al-Sultan, & De Massis, 2021), the objective of this chapter is to address the following research question: How do multilevel identities (the family business identity, the CEO identity, and their interaction) affect CSR strategies? To fill this gap, differences between family firms' level of CSR engagement will be investigated by considering a wide range of socially responsible actions that goes beyond the sole environmental practices, i.e., all the ones reported in the Eikon ESG report.

4.2 Theoretical framework and hypotheses

4.2.1 Family business identity and CSR

The close relationship between the family and the business is what makes family businesses a unique context, in particular when studying CSR. This is specifically related to the family business identity, where the family and the business identities need to co-exist and integrate (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). However, such co-existence may take different configurations, leading to family businesses being heterogeneous also in terms of their own identity (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2013). An effort to understand how the family and the business identities relate one to the other is provided by Sundaramurthy and Kreiner (2008), who theorized that family businesses can be placed on a continuum. At the extremes of this continuum, there are, on the one side, family businesses in which the family and the business identity are "integrated". Here, the family is a fundamental actor in business and the business is strongly connected to the family life and history. Thus, the business has a strong, unique, integrated "family business identity". On the other side, there are family businesses in which the family and the

business identities are “segmented”, meaning those situations in which the family and the business identities respond to different needs and values. In cases of a “family business identity” segmented, the organization tends to act more similarly to a non-family business (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008).

When the family business identity is integrated, according to the organizational identity theory, the family becomes one of the central, enduring, and distinctive elements of the business (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2013). Consequently, the family and the business identities become mutually dependent and, over the years, the family history, as well as its values, culture, goals, and also reputation, become highly interwoven with the company’s ones (Zellweger, 2017). Among the others, one of the main interests of the family is its preservation, both in terms of economic welfare but also of its identity, which is necessary to ensure the family business continuity (Block, 2010; Wiklund, 2006). Reflecting this family-related need, family firms are particularly careful about their corporate identity and reputation (Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013) and, to this end, the most effective strategy is to avoid reputation-damaging practices and to excel at addressing societal (stakeholder) demands (Block & Wagner, 2014). Indeed, any damage to the reputation of the firm is also a damage to the family’s reputation and unfortunately, some damages can be irreversible and outsiders will continue to associate the family with the firm due to its name, even in the case of the family exit from the firm.

Therefore, with the aim of reinforcing “their self-professed desires” and preserving their and also the family identities from external criticisms (Cruz, Larraza–Kintana, Garcés–Galdeano, & Berrone, 2014, p. 1297), family businesses are expected to avoid more risky activities and to engage in higher levels CSR as a manifestation of an integrated family business identity.

To divide the family businesses according to whether its identity is “integrated” and “segmented” and to clearly display this aspect of the family businesses identity heterogeneity, a useful indicator is to look at the name of the company which is considered an important “identity marker” (Ashforth, 1998, p. 220). Indeed, deciding to include the family name in the name of the company is a sign of a strong tie between the business and the family identities, since the firm explicitly communicates and carries an important part of the family’s identity. Here, the family members involved may see the

business as an extension of themselves, of their identity, and of their self-view (Dyer Jr, 1992; Schein, 1983) and, in addition, the family name of the firm provides them even higher visibility. Therefore, when the name of the company has an explicit reference to the name of the family, the family business identity will be considered integrated, while, if the name of the company does not refer to the family name the family business identity will be considered segmented (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008).

Therefore:

Hypothesis 1: *A family business that has a family business identity integrated, proxied by the firm carrying the family name, implements a higher level of CSR strategies compared to those having a family business identity segmented, i.e., do not refer to the family name in the company's name.*

4.2.2 CEO identity and CSR

Another important characteristic of family firms is leadership. In particular, as seen more in detail in Chapter 3, the identity of the leader is particularly relevant when looking at the organizational behaviors and strategies (e.g., Abdulmalik, Amran, & Che Ahmad, 2020; Caprio, Del Giudice, & Signori, 2020; Miller & Le Breton–Miller, 2011). According to the stewardship theory and SEW, a CEO who is a member of the owning family tends to have a more "family nurturer" identity and to see him/herself as a steward of both the firm and the family. This often leads to CEOs who use their position of power as "final decision-maker" to pursue the family goals and to promote conservatism that protects the family (Gómez-Mejia, Nunez-Nickel, & Gutierrez, 2001). In this stance, family CEOs often exercise their influence and push the company towards investments in activities that preserve the family identity and reputation, such as, among the others, CSR activities (Lamb & Butler, 2018). However, the pursuance of social and emotional goals can be expensive and sometimes finds the resistance of other stakeholders, especially non-family stakeholders, which are more concerned about economic and financial returns (Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013; Gómez-Mejia, Cruz, Berrone, & De Castro, 2011). In these cases, the ability of the family CEO to control the decision-making process and to shape the family firm policies in his/her favor, and therefore in favor of the family, is fundamental (Berrone, Cruz, Gómez-Mejia, & Larraza-Kintana, 2010). By doing so, the CEO helps the firm and the family to build a better relationship with the

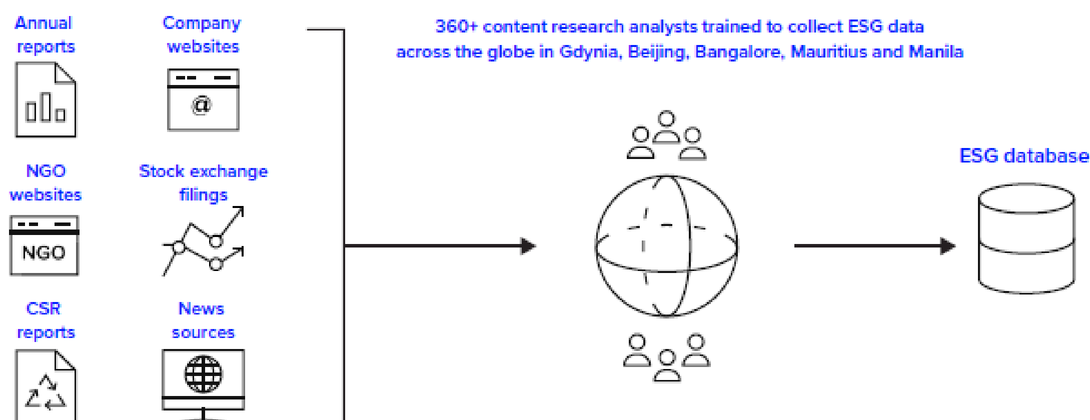
society in which the business is embedded, to gain a better reputation, and to acquire more SEW. Therefore, family firms with a CEO that have a family identity are expected to implement a higher level of CRS.

Hypothesis 2: *A family business that has a CEO with a family identity implements a higher level of CSR strategies compared to those having a CEO with a non-family identity.*

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Sample

The starting point of the data collection was the 'The Global Family Business Index', which describes the largest 500 family firms around the world. This index is compiled by the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland) and its Center for Family Business in collaboration with EY's Global Family Business Center of Excellence every two years. It includes family firms from 45 jurisdictions, even though half of all the firms are based in Europe. Additionally, most of these family firms are over 50 years old, and almost one-third are over 100 years old. This Index also describes a wide range of these firms' characteristics, such as their status (i.e., private or public), funding year, family share, name of the owning family, and others. Then, these data were combined with ESG data provided by Refinitiv (Thomson Reuters Eikon), a report that recollects information about Environmental, Social, and Governance aspects of a huge number of firms worldwide. These data come from different sources (e.g., annual reports, NGO websites, CSR reports, news sources, etc., see Figure 11), and they have been processed in over 450 ESG measures that converge in 10 main themes. Among the others, the themes included are emissions, environmental product innovation, corporate social responsibility, human rights, and so on.



Source: Environmental, Social and Governance Scores from Refinitiv, February 2021.

Figure 11: ESG data collection by Refinitive

Given that the ESG report is only available for public companies and is not mandatory, the final sample is limited to 219 public family firms in 35 countries and 7 industrial sectors. The sample main characteristics are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of the sample by age, size, industry, and jurisdiction groups

Age	
1-30 years	24
30-75 years old	105
75-100 years old	30
100-150 years old	39
150-200 years old	14
More than 200 years old	7
Total number of firms	***219***
Size	
0-5.000 employees	12
5.000-10.000 employees	30
10.000-15.000 employees	26
15.000-30.000 employees	53
30.000-60.000 employees	37
>60.000 employees	61
Total number of firms	***219***
Industry	
Advanced Manufacturing & Mobility	50

Consumer	75
Energy	20
Financial Services	18
Government & Infrastructure	17
Health Sciences & Wellness	12
Telecom, Media, and Technology	27
Total number of firms	***219***
Jurisdiction	
Australia	1
Belgium	8
Brazil	9
Canada	12
Chile	3
Colombia	1
Denmark	1
Finland	1
France	16
Germany	12
Greece	1
Hong Kong	14
India	11
Indonesia	2
Italy	5
Japan	6
Luxembourg	1
Mainland China	6
Malaysia	2
Mexico	12
Netherlands	3
Norway	1
Philippines	4
Portugal	2
Russia	3
Singapore	2
South Africa	1
South Korea	7
Spain	8
Sweden	3
Switzerland	8
Taiwan	2

Thailand	3
Turkey	3
United States	45
Total number of firms	***219***

Source: personal elaboration.

4.3.2 Measures

Dependent Variable

To measure the *CSR strategies* variable, the category “CSR strategy” of the Governance section of the ESG report has been considered, which reflects the “company’s practices to communicate that it integrates economic (financial), social and environmental dimensions into its day-to-day decision-making processes”. This category contains questions about 26 different CSR strategy practices and their detailed definitions are provided in Table 3. Using a scoring system, the presence of each practice counts as 1, and the final CSR strategy score is the sum of all the 26 measures.

Table 3: Definition of CSR strategies (dummy variable, coded based on the firm’s answer: TRUE=1; FALSE=0)

Variable	Description	Mean	SD
1. CSR Sustainability Committee	Does the company have a CSR committee or team?	0,676	0,469
2. Integrated Strategy in MD&A [2]	Does the company explicitly integrate financial and extra-financial factors in its management discussion and analysis (MD&A) section in the annual report?	0,215	0,411
3. Global Impact Signatory	Has the company signed the UN Global Compact?	0,384	0,487
4. Stakeholder Engagement	Does the company explain how it engages with its stakeholders?	0,671	0,471
5. CSR Sustainability Reporting	Does the company publish a separate CSR/H&S/Sustainability report or publish a section in its annual report on CSR/H&S/Sustainability?	0,813	0,391

[2] MD&A is the management's discussion and analysis, which is a report from the organization management to the shareholders that follows the financial statements in the firm’s annual report. It enables the discussion of topics that may not be evident in the financial statements in the annual report.

6. GRI Report Guidelines [3]	Is the company's CSR report published in accordance with the GRI guidelines?	0,630	0,484
7. CSR Sustainability Report Global Activities	Does the company's extra-financial report take into account the global activities of the company?	0,712	0,454
8. CSR Sustainability External Audit	Does the company have an external auditor of its CSR/H&S/Sustainability report?	0,466	0,500
9. UNPRI[4] Signatory	Has the company signed the United Nation Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI)?	0,009	0,095
10. SDG[5] 1: No Poverty	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG 1) No Poverty?	0,151	0,359
11. SDG 2: Zero Hungry	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) Zero Hunger?	0,164	0,371
12. SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) Good Health and Well-being?	0,356	0,480
13. SDG 4: Quality Education	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) Quality Education?	0,361	0,481
14. SDG 5: Gender Equality	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) Gender Equality?	0,306	0,462
15. SGD 6: Clean Water Sanitation	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) Clean Water and Sanitation?	0,288	0,454
16. SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7) Affordable and Clean Energy?	0,333	0,472
17. SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) Decent Work and Economic Growth?	0,461	0,500

[3] GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) is an independent organization that helps businesses and other organizations worldwide to “take responsibility for their impacts, by providing them with the global common language to communicate those impacts”, which are standards for sustainability reporting – the GRI Standards. GRI - About GRI (globalreporting.org)

[4] By signing the internationally-recognized Principles for Responsible Investment of the UN, the firms are allowed to publicly demonstrate their commitment to responsible investment, highlighting the importance they place in building a more sustainable financial system. Signatories | PRI (unpri.org)

[5] SDG are the Sustainable Development Goals, 17 objectives developed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. It provides “a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future”. THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development (un.org)

18. SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 9 (SDG 9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure? -	0,324	0,469
19. SDG 10: Reduced Inequality	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10) Reduced Inequality?	0,247	0,432
20. SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) Sustainable Cities and Communities?	0,274	0,447
21. SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) Responsible Consumption and Production?	0,416	0,494
22. SDG 13: Climate Action	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG 13) Climate Action?	0,438	0,497
23. SDG 14: Life below Water	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) Life Below Water?	0,178	0,383
24. SDG 15: Life on Land	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG 15) Life on Land?	0,265	0,442
25. SDG 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) Peace and Justice Strong Institutions?	0,224	0,418
26. SDG 17: Partnerships to Achieve the Goal	Does the company support the UN Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG 17) Partnerships to achieve the Goal?	0,279	0,449
CSR strategies	Sum of the 26 items	**9,639**	**7,074**

Independent variables

The family business identity, which can result integrated or segmented depending on how the family and the business identities are related, is measured through the *family name* variable. It is coded as a dummy variable equal to 1 if the name of the firm is the same or contains a direct reference to the name of the family, e.g., Dell Technologies Inc. of the Dell family, Metalúrgica Gerdau SA of Gerdau Johannpeter family, 0 otherwise. The name of the owning family is inferred from The Global Family Business Index.

The identity of the CEO (*CEO identity*) is coded based on information extracted from the Global Family Business Index. It takes the value of 1 when the CEO is a family member and 0 if is not. As a further confirmation, this data was matched with the board information held by Eikon.

Control variables

Several factors were also incorporated as control variables since they might influence CSR strategies in family firms. To capture the *family involvement*, the percentage of the family members who are part of the firm board of directors (BoD) has been calculated (Chrisman, Chua, Pearson, & Barnett, 2012). Both the number of the family members in the BoD and the total number of BoD members are recollected from the Global Family Business Index. Similar to the CEO, these numbers were double-checked with the information contained in Eikon and the ESG Refinitiv report. Then there is *industry*, which follows the categorization of the Global Family Business Index. *Age* was computed based on the year of the firm foundation. Finally, firm *size* was assessed through the number of employees provided by the Global Family Index, which has been matched with the Eikon database to ensure validity. To normalize their distribution, for age and size their natural logarithm will be considered.

4.4 Data analysis and results

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for all measures, collected over the period of observation.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients.

		Mean	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5
1	CSR strategies	9,639	7,074	0	24	1,000				
2	Family name	0,279	0,449	0	1	0,013	1,000			
3	CEO identity	0,411	0,493	0	1	-0,130*	-0,022	1,000		
4	Family involvement	0,210	0,120	0	0,580	0,050	0,015	0,200**	1,000	
5	Age	4,193	0,632	2,398	5,861	0,173**	0,348***	-0,153**	-0,129*	1,000
6	Size	10,310	1,230	6,820	14,6548	0,174***	-0,013	0,003	-0,115*	0,043

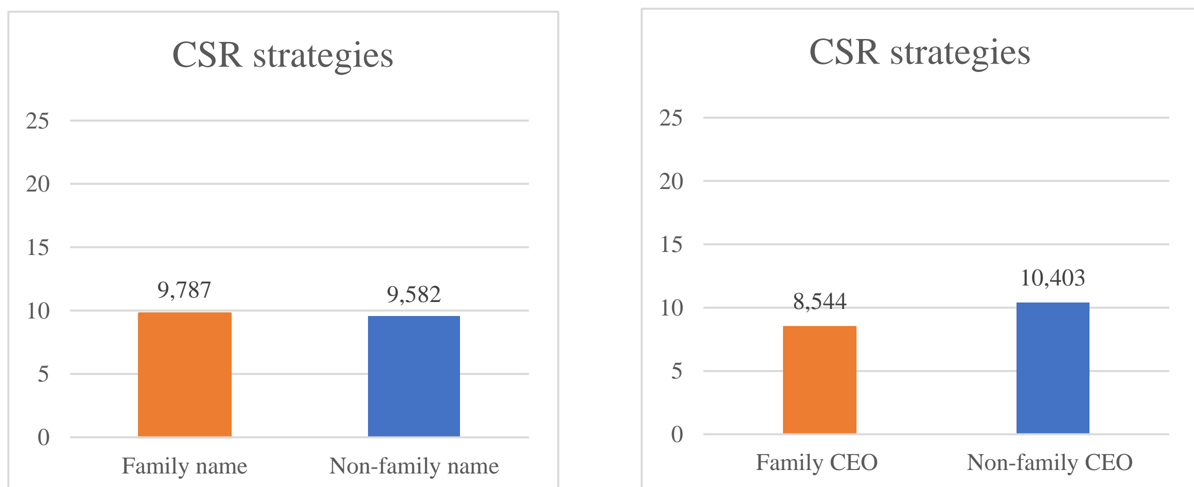
Notes: *$p<0,1$; **$p<0,05$; ***$p<0,01$. Observations: 219 listed family firms.
Source: personal elaboration.

First, Table 4 shows that the average of the firms' CSR strategies score is 9,639, and surprisingly none of the family firms implements all the items listed, being the maximum at 24, two less than the total. By contrast, some firms do not implement any CSR strategy

at all, registering a score equal to 0. As regards the information about family firms, it reveals that about one-third of the family firms in the sample carry the family's name (27,97%). Moreover, almost half of the firms have a family member serving as CEOs (41,09%), while the average involvement of family members in the BoD is less notable (20,93%). Lastly, it illustrates that, on average, the age of the sample family firms is around 80 years old (4,193 as logarithm), and the average size is around 70.320 employees (10,310 for its logarithm).

As regards the Pearson correlations, Table 4 shows that carrying a family name, has a minimum positive correlation with the CSR strategies score, something that deserves to be better understood but that probably is a sign of no significant relationship between the two variables. Differently, having a CEO with a family identity is negatively correlated with the CSR strategies score, while the firm size and age have instead a positive correlation with CSR strategy. The correlation between CSR strategies and age was the highest registered, which suggests that older family firms are more attentive in terms of CSR strategies.

To understand more in detail what is the relationship between CSR strategies and the firm's family name and the CEO identity, initial empirical evidence was analyzed looking at the mean differences, which are computed and displayed in Figure 12 and Table 5.



Source: personal elaboration.

Figure 12: CSR strategies means depending on the family firm carrying the family name and the presence of a CEO who is a member of the family

As regards the CEO, when (s)he has a family identity, the score of CSR strategies is consistently lower than in family firms where the CEO is an outsider (8,544 vs 10,403). As reported in Table 5, the mean difference is 1,859 and statistically significant (p<0,05).

Table 5: Mean differences in CSR strategies between family firms depending on the family firm carrying the family name and the presence of a CEO who is a member of the family

	Family name (1)		Family name (0)		Mean differences	
CSR strategies	N	Mean	N	Mean	(0)-(1)	t-stat
	61	9,787	158	9,582	-0,205	-0,199
	CEO identity (1)		CEO identity (0)		Mean differences	
CSR strategies	N	Mean	N	Mean	(0)-(1)	t-stat
	90	8,544	129	10,403	1,859*	1,903

Notes: *p<0,1; **p<0,05; ***p<0,01.
Source: personal elaboration.

In sum, the analysis of mean CSR strategy suggests that family firms that carry a family name may engage a little more in CSR strategies compared to their non-family counterparts. However, the presence of a family CEO has a negative impact on the implementation of such strategies, which is in contrast with what was expected.

According to the literature, both the presence of the family name and of a family CEO should be positively related to CSR strategies, since these latter provide a better reputation to the firm, one of the main non-financial objectives of family firms (Gómez-Mejia, Cruz, Berrone, & De Castro, 2011). Thus, to better unveil these relationships, further analyses were developed considering also the joined effect of the family name and the CEO identity on CSR strategies. Again, first empirical evidence was gained looking at differences in CSR strategies score means, dividing the sample into four different groups according to both the name and the CEO identity (see Figure 13 and Table 6).

Source: personal elaboration.

Figure 13: CSR strategies means depending on both the firm carrying family name and the presence of a CEO who is a member of the family

When looking simultaneously at the family name and the CEO identity, it is possible to notice some interesting changes in the CSR strategies means. While the presence of a family name should be positively correlated to the score of CSR strategies, it seems that the highest average score (10,598) is reached in the situation where the family firm does not carry the family name and does not have a family CEO. Then, it is followed by those firms that carry the family name when they do not have a family leadership (9,919), while if they have a CEO who is part of the family the score of CSR drops a little more (9,583). Finally, the lowest average score of CSR strategies seems to be of those family firms that have a name independent from the family one but do have a family CEO (8,167).

Table 6: CSR strategies means depending on both the firm carrying family name and the presence of a CEO who is a member of the family

	Family name (1)					
	CEO identity (1)		CEO identity (0)		Mean differences	
CSR strategies	N	Mean	N	Mean	(0)-(1)	t-stat
	24	9,583	37	9,919	0,336	0,190
	Family name (0)					
	CEO identity (1)		CEO identity (0)		Mean differences	
CSR strategies	N	Mean	N	Mean	(0)-(1)	t-stat
	66	8,167	92	10,598	2,431	2,075

Source: personal elaboration.

Unfortunately, none of these differences of means are significant, but a possible explanation is in the small and unbalanced groups that emerged from the further division of the sample.

In general, these results suggest the presence of an interaction effect between having a family name and the CEO identity. Therefore, to estimate whether there is a significant relationship between the determinants identified and CSR strategies as well as to control for other variables, two regressions are performed. The first model estimates the effect of the family name and the CEO identity on CSR strategies, while the second comprehends also their joint effect (Family name*CEO identity). In particular, the Poisson regression has been adopted since the chosen dependent variable is a count one (Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2014).

Table 7: Poisson regressions

CSR strategies	**Model 1**				**Model 2**		
	Coefficient	Std. err.	z		Coefficient	Std. err.	z
Family name	-0,046	0,053	-0,87		-0,147**	0,066	-2,23
CEO identity	-0,219***	0,047	-4,69		-0,293***	0,0545	-5,35
Family name*CEO identity					0,268***	0,101	2,66
Family involvement	0,552***	0,189	2,93		0,542***	0,189	2,88
Age	0,169***	0,040	4,23		0,175***	0,040	4,36
Size	0,129***	0,018	7,13		0,128***	0,018	7,10
i1	0,002	0,108	0,02		0,039	0,109	0,36
i2	0,492***	0,113	4,33		0,520***	0,114	4,56
i3	0,215*	0,122	1,77		0,246**	0,122	2,01
i4	-0,165	0,121	-1,36		-0,138	0,122	-1,13
i5	-0,137	0,106	-1,29		-0,110	0,107	-1,03
i6	-0,048	0,124	-0,39		-0,023	0,124	-0,18
Constant	0,180	0,272	0,66		0,169	0,271	0,62
R2	0,085				0,088		
Observations	219				219		

Notes: **p*<0,1; ***p*<0,05; ****p*<0,01.
Source: personal elaboration.

Table 7 reports the results of the two regressions. The first model results show that that carrying a family name may have a small but negative effect on CSR strategy implementation of family businesses (β= -0,046), however, it is still not statistically

significant ($p>0,1$). This leads to rejecting the idea that the family name alone influences the CSR strategies implementation in family firms. As regards the leadership, family firms that have a CEO that has a family identity tend to engage in less CSR strategies ($\beta=$ - 0,219; $p<0,01$). By contrast, the presence of a higher percentage of family members in the BoD implies higher levels of CSR strategies ($\beta=0,552$; $p<0,01$). This is particularly true for bigger and older firms (Age $\beta=0,169$; $p<0,01$; Size $\beta=0,129$; $p<0,01$) that operate in the energy ($\beta=0,492$; $p<0,01$) or in the government and infrastructure sector ($\beta=0,215$; $p<0,1$).

The second model (see Table 7), which includes the interaction effect, confirms that the presence of a CEO with a family identity negatively influences the family business CSR strategies ($\beta=-0,293$; $p<0,01$). Moreover, the relationship between carrying a family name and CSR strategies is confirmed to be negative, and in this model, it turns out to be also statistically significant ($\beta=-0,147$; $p<0,05$), thanks to the introduction of the interaction effect. Therefore, to understand better the implementation of CSR strategies in family firms, whether the name and the CEO are related to the family need to be considered simultaneously, and their interaction has a positive and statistically significant effect ($\beta=0,268$; $p<0,001$). As in Model 1, the higher the family involvement, the higher the CSR strategies score ($\beta=0,542$; $p<0,01$). Also confirmed is that older and bigger firms engage in more CSR strategies (Age $\beta=0,175$; $p<0,01$; Size $\beta=0,128$; $p<0,01$).

In summary, the results of the Poisson regressions suggest that considering the influence of carrying the family name on CSR strategies is not particularly relevant, but it becomes relevant when it is considered together with the CEO identity. When there is a family CEO, whether the family firm carries the family name mitigates the negative effect of the family leadership. This means that having a family CEO in a family business that carries the family name predicts a slightly higher level of CSR strategy compared to family firms where the CEO is a family member but the business does not carry the family name. Therefore, simultaneously having a name that is different from the family name and a CEO that is not a family member is the situation when the higher score of CSR strategies is predicted, while the worst scenario is when the firm does not carry the family name but has a CEO with a family identity. Interestingly, these findings are not aligned when generally considering the involvement of family members in the BoD, since in both models it has a positive and statistically significant effect on CSR strategies. In addition,

it seems that family firms that are older and with a higher number of employees are more proactive in terms of CSR strategies, and particularly in the energy and in the government and infrastructure sectors.

4.5 Discussion, contributions, and limitations

Motivated by the increasing pressures on businesses in response to climate change and other crises (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014), this chapter has examined the largely neglected topic of identities' influence on CSR by addressing the following question: How do multilevel identities affect CSR strategies? To this end, the relationships between different family business and CEO identities with CSR strategies were explored by using a sample of the biggest listed family firms worldwide.

The empirical analyses developed in this chapter offer new ways of understanding the role of identities in the adoption of socially responsible practices by family businesses in order to respond to different stakeholder demands, which are here defined as CSR practices. Thus, it provides several theoretical contributions.

First, this study contributes to the family business literature by further addressing the heterogeneity of family firms in general, and more specifically by enriching the literature about the identity–CSR nexus (Fehre & Weber, 2019; Mariani, Al-Sultan, & De Massis, 2021; Marques, Presas, & Simon, 2014). To this end, family firms were not analyzed as a homogeneous group but were divided according to their family business identity, i.e., the integration/segmentation between the family and the business identities, and the identity of their CEO. In particular, family firms were categorized depending on their family business identity according to the company name: on the one hand, family businesses where the family and the business identities are integrated were identified in those family businesses that carry the family name (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008); on the other hand, there were family firms with a segmented family business identity, namely a separation between the family and the business identities, were identified in those that have a name independent from the family name. Furthermore, family firms were categorized according to the CEO identity, who can be a member of the owning family or an outsider. The empirical analyses conducted in this chapter highlighted how family

firms implement different levels of CSR strategies according to these two factors, expanding the knowledge about family firms heterogeneity and demonstrating the necessity to scrutinize more differences within family businesses (Daspit, Chrisman, Ashton, & Evangelopoulos, 2021), in particular as regard identities.

Second, these findings also contribute to the literature about identities in family businesses in two different ways. On the one hand, by looking at the family business identity as the integration or segmentation of the family and the business identities, this study contributes to organizational identity theory. Even though the relationship between the family business identity (proxied by the family name) and the CSR strategies score resulted not statistically significant, when considered together with other factors it sheds light on the importance of the co-existence and equilibrium of multilevel identities in organizations and it helps to explain organizational behaviors and decision making (Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010). On the other hand, these results also contribute to the SEW literature. Contrary to what theoretically hypothesized, family CEOs, regardless of their SEW and their "nurturer" role, tends to push and implement fewer CSR strategies, actions that are often highlighted as the easiest way to protect the reputation and improve a social position of both the family and the business (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Lamb & Butler, 2018). Indeed, evidence highlighted that higher levels of CSR are registered in family firms with an outsider CEO, and in particular when the family business identity is segmented (i.e., no reference to the family name). This may be explained by the fact that without the competitive advantage provided by explicitly being a "family business", non-family CEOs may try to substitute it with something that represents a similar competitive advantage, thus pushing for the implementation of CSR actions with the aim of gaining a good reputation and increasing the market share for being "a good company". By contrast, the negative effect of the presence of a family CEO over the CSR strategy score may be explained by the opportunistic behaviors that family CEOs may engage in and which can be detrimental to the family business sustainability (Schulze, Lubatkin, & Dino, 2003). As final decision-makers, CEOs decide or at least can influence the BoD on how to distribute the resources. The perception of a shortage in resources designated to the family may hence encourage a family CEO to reallocate those that are typically devolved to the implementation of CSR and other practices to the family (Gersick, Davis, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997;

Miller, Le Breton-Miller, & Scholnick, 2008). Consequently, due to a less evident CEOs' stewardship inclination (Le Breton-Miller, Miller, & Lester, 2011) and to the prevalence of an inwardly looking and more opportunistic logic (Dunn, 1996), the willingness of the CEO and of the family to be attentive to stakeholders' needs and CSR strategies may be inhibited (Campopiano, De Massis, & Chirico, 2014). What is more interesting, however, is that the negative effect on CSR strategies of the family CEO results to be "mitigated" when the family and the business identities are integrated, namely when the firm carries the family name. This means that, even though this happens still with a lower impact compared to when non-family CEOs are at the business lead, when the family has a strong bond with the business and it is directly exposed to the public due to the company's name, the family CEO is a little more inclined to invest in CSR activities and maybe engage less in opportunistic behaviors as a way to protect the family reputation and SEW, as well as their corporate identity.

Even though it was just for additional control, these findings are not reflected in the general involvement of the family in the BoD, which resulted to have a positive and significant effect on CSR. Indeed, the stronger the presence of the family in the BoD (higher number of family members over the total number of BoD members), the higher the level of CSR strategies implemented. This suggests that the general involvement of the family in the decision-making process, as BoD members, follows the SEW perspective and predicts a higher interest of family businesses in social actions, fostering the accumulation of SEW and supporting a durable and stable family control (Eddleston, Otondo, & Kellermanns, 2008; Goel, He, & Karri, 2011; Le Breton–Miller & Miller, 2013). However, a further and more specific analysis may better uncover this relationship.

Similar to other studies, these findings highlight the necessity to consider a gray side, not a bright nor a dark side, of SEW (e.g., Fehre & Weber, 2019). While SEW may be an important reference point for some family businesses, this does not automatically imply positive outcomes in terms of social behaviors. Indeed, it may represent a burden that leads to behaviors that have less emphasis on the preservation of SEW itself and, as a consequence, less emphasis on CSR. In this stance, this study helps to refine the understanding of this perspective by empirically demonstrating differences in the valence of the SEW concept when considering the family firm heterogeneity.

These findings can serve as a starting point for future research to reveal the particularities of family firms and their CSR strategies as well as to overcome the limitations in this study.

First, the sample used in this study is focused on listed family businesses ranked by the Global Family Business Index, and thus the results found may not be generalized to smaller and private firms. Future research could expand the sample and collect data in a different set of firms to disentangle whether the relationship between family firms and CSR strategies changes. Moreover, the sample was small, and this represented a potential issue in terms of the statistical significance of certain relations (e.g., differences in means).

Second, data were collected only in a specific time frame, while using a longitudinal data collection approach could help to empirically establish causal effects and better understand how the relationship between the family business and CSR strategies changes over time.

Third, in this study, the presence of the family name in the firm name was used to measure the heterogeneity of family business identities (e.g., Berent-Braun, Flören, & den Ouden, 2018; Uhlaner, Matser, Berent-Braun, & Flören, 2015; Wielsma & Brunninge, 2019), and in particular the integration/segmentation between the family and the business identities. However, some see the presence of the family name in the firm's name as signaling family identification (e.g., Arena & Michelon, 2018; Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013), or as a direct representation of the corporate identity or image (e.g., Arzubiaga, Maseda, & Iturralde, 2019; Memili, Eddleston, Kellermanns, Zellweger, & Barnett, 2010), meaning that this construct can be subject of different interpretations. Future research may use a different measure of the family business identity, for example, the I(dentification) element of the FIBER scale, which measures the organizational SEW, or even develop a scale that better captures this concept.

Fourth, there are many different definitions and measures for CSR (Mariani, Al-Sultan, & De Massis, 2021). In this study the ESG report has been used, a commonly used measure in management research due to its availability and the great amount of data (e.g., Li, Gong, Zhang, & Koh, 2018; Miroshnychenko & De Massis, 2022). However, future research could investigate CSR in family firms through different tools, also differentiating

CSR strategies according to different beneficiaries of such initiatives (e.g., Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011) or distinguishing between CSR communication and practices (e.g., Parra-Domínguez, David, & Azevedo, 2021).

4.6 Conclusion

Affordable and clean energy usage, responsible consumption and production, zero hunger, gender equality are only a part of the most important sustainability goals that modern society is pursuing nowadays. Accordingly, many companies worldwide have begun to integrate the sustainability dimension into their daily operations, and family firms are not an exception (Dick, Wagner, & Pernsteiner, 2021; Parra-Domínguez, David, & Azevedo, 2021; Venturelli, Principale, Ligorio, & Cosma, 2021). This study has revealed how heterogeneity in terms of identities is a good lens to understand why family firms implement different levels of CSR strategies. More specifically, it observed the role of the multilevel identities (i.e., the family business identity, the CEO identity, and their interaction) in influencing the CSR strategies of the biggest family firms in the world. The results highlight that family firms with a CEO who is part of the owning family engage less in CSR strategies than family firms with a non-family CEO. However, if the family firm has the family business identity integrated, i.e., it carries the family name as its own name, this negative effect is less pronounced.

5. Study 2 - Family identification with the business and CSR towards different stakeholders

Similar to Chapter 4, this chapter will explore another future research question among the ones presented in Chapter 3. More specifically, a deeper focus on the family and its identification with the business will be presented, highlighting its relationship with CSR strategies towards different stakeholders.

5.1 Family identification with the business and CSR

As argued in the previous chapters, little is known about the relationship between identities and CSR implementation in family businesses. However, in a few studies and in Chapter 4 it has been proved the importance to dig deeper within these connections (e.g., Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011; Block & Wagner, 2014; Lamb & Butler, 2018) and how multilevel identities (i.e., the family business identity, the CEO identity, and their interaction) can determine distinct approaches towards socially responsible actions employed family business.

In particular, Chapter 4 has highlighted how the (family or non-family) identity of the CEO that leads a family business has different effects on CSR. More specifically, evidence showed that a CEO with a family identity negatively influences the implementation of CSR activities, but that this negative effect is mitigated when the family firm has an integrated family business identity, i.e., carries the family name. By contrast, the family's general involvement in the business, proxied by the percentage of family members in the BoD (Chrisman, Chua, Pearson, & Barnett, 2012), predicts a higher level of CSR strategies. Concentrating on this last finding, the focus of this second empirical study will be on the specific role of the family in shaping the organizational CSR, aiming at addressing another gap among the ones presented in Chapter 3 and further unveiling family business heterogeneity in terms of identities.

The positive relationship between family involvement and CSR may be explained by borrowing some insights from the Social Identity Theory and the SEW perspective. These two lenses, taken together, explain the family identification with the business, arguing that the more the family identifies with the business, the more it will act on behalf of it in

the same way they would act on behalf of itself (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008) as the family sees the business as its natural extension (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012). However, how much the family identifies with the business significantly differs among families, representing another form of family business heterogeneity (Cabrera-Suárez, Déniz-Déniz, & Martín-Santana, 2014; Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013). Indeed, the sole family ownership is not a sign of identification since there are families that do not define themselves through their company even though they are the biggest shareholders, while there are other families that feel a strong emotional bond despite not having total control over the firm (Westhead & Cowling, 1998; Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013). In this stance, several behaviors and strategies of family businesses have been linked and demonstrated to directly come from a high family identification with the business. Some examples are the higher importance the business place to nonfinancial goals (Cabrera-Suárez, Déniz-Déniz, & Martín-Santana, 2014), the nurturing of an entrepreneurial orientation within the family itself (Mahto, Chen, McDowell, & Ahluwalia, 2019), or the organizational strategic focus on external corporate ventures (Prügl & Spitzley, 2020). However, among the family identification with the business outcomes, less importance has been given to socially responsible actions, even though those allow the firm to easily achieve the preservation of a good reputation and the exhibition of a more suitable corporate identity to external audiences (Lamb & Butler, 2018), objectives at the top of the family's priorities (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013).

In the current literature, only a few studies have focused on how a family that is identified with the business may influence CSR. Moreover, they present two limits: on the one hand, they are mostly focused on a single aspect of CSR, such as the environmental commitment (e.g., Arena & Michelon, 2018; Jain & Prakash, 2017). On the other hand, these studies just theorized the family identification with the business-CSR relationship (e.g., Cruz, Larraza–Kintana, Garcés–Galdeano, & Berrone, 2014; Dyer & Whetten, 2006; Izzo & Ciaburri, 2018), or, when empirically inferred, never considered the family identification as a stand-alone concept but always as part of the more comprehensive family SEW (Diéguez-Soto, Campos-Valenzuela, Callejón-Gil, & Aldeanueva-Fernández, 2021; Marques, Presas, & Simon, 2014).

Thus, the objective of this chapter is to shed light on how the family identification with the business is related to the socially responsible actions implemented by family businesses towards different stakeholders (i.e., the employees, the customers, the society). Through the analysis of survey data coming from 115 Italian medium-large family businesses, this study further explores family business heterogeneity by unveiling the central role of the family and the level of its identification with the business in influencing CSR implementation.

5.2 Theoretical framework and hypotheses

5.2.1 Family identification with the business and CSR

In a general organizational context, according to the Social Identity Theory, identifying with the business for an individual means having a sense of membership and perceiving an emotional bond with the business (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In such a situation, individuals who identify with the business should assume those behaviors that they suppose would preserve the identity of their referent group, acting on behalf of it as it was themselves (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Indeed, it has been demonstrated to increase, for example, their organizational citizenship behavior (Matherne, Waterwall, Ring, & Credo, 2017; Medina-Craven, Cooper, Penney, & Caldas, 2020), and their stewardship behavior (Matherne III, Ring, & D'Lisa, 2011; Medina-Craven, Cooper, Penney, & Caldas, 2020).

In the more specific family business context, identification, and more specifically the family identification with the business, has been widely studied through the SEW perspective (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012). According to this point of view, family identification with the business refers to the family's "sense of oneness" with the business, to the feeling of the organizational success as its own success, to its perception of the firm as a great deal of personal meaning, to the family defining itself in relation to the family business, and to its pride in being part of the system (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012). More in general, SEW is considered by the family the key factor to evaluate the consequences of strategic decisions on its affective endowment (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012). This leads the family to shape the values, goals, and culture of the family business to reflect its own ones since the organization is often perceived as a family

direct “extension” (Hogg, 2003). Thus, the identification that the family perceives with the family business should lead it to be concerned about the reputation and corporate identity of the family business (Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013), since social disapproval could stain the family’s name and be detrimental for family itself (Gómez-Mejia, Cruz, Berrone, & De Castro, 2011). For these reasons, a family who identifies more with the family business should push the family business to be more socially responsible due to its desire to remain in and to preserve the organization (and its own) identity while, at the same time, fostering its SEW (Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013).

H1: *In a family business, the more the family identifies with the business, the higher the level of CSR actions implemented.*

5.2.2 CSR towards different stakeholders

Following the more exhaustive definitions, CSR actions may be divided according to three different stakeholders, which are employees, customers, and the general society (e.g., Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011; De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012; Turker, 2009; Úbeda-García, Claver-Cortés, Marco-Lajara, & Zaragoza-Sáez, 2021). The family identification with the business and thus willingness of the family to be perceived as a “good corporate citizen” suggests that they may push for having a similar orientation both toward their internal stakeholders (i.e., employees) and their external stakeholders (i.e., consumers and society) (Uhlaner, Goor-Balk, & Masurel, 2004). Nevertheless, the rather mixed findings about CSR in family firms suggest that they may be socially responsible and irresponsible at the same time (Cruz, Larraza–Kintana, Garcés–Galdeano, & Berrone, 2014). Additional to identities heterogeneity of family businesses, this may be also due to the family interest in satisfying more the needs of some stakeholders over the others (Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011). Thus, differentiating CSR actions according to who are the recipients may provide supplementary insights on how family identification with the business may have different effects on organizational CSR employment.

H2a: *In a family business, how much a family identifies with the business is related to different levels of CSR actions towards the employees.*

H2b: *In a family business, how much a family identifies with the business is related to different levels of CSR actions towards the customers.*

H2c: *In a family business, how much a family identifies with the business is related to different levels of CSR actions towards society.*

5.3 Methodology

5.3.1 Sample

Survey data from the family firms to test the hypotheses were collected from July 2021 to December 2021, and the data collection is still proceeding[6]. Data included in this study are part of a wider project that aims at recollecting information about Italian companies (family and non-family firms) of different sizes and from different sectors. The surveys are conducted by an external specialized company that is interviewing CEOs and other members of the BoD by phone.

Within the scope of this study, a family business is defined as "a business 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" (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999, p. 25). Family firms comprehended in this sample were selected according to the interviewees' agreement of such definition as representative of their firm. Moreover, another formal criterion was observed, considering only self-defined family firms that have at least 50 percent of the ownership within the family. The final sample is of 115 Italian family firms, and their main characteristics are depicted in Table 8.

Table 8: Distribution of the sample by family name, CEO identity, family generation, age, size, revenues, industry, and jurisdiction groups

Family firms	n
Family name	
Family name	51
No-family name	64
Total number of firms	***115***
CEO identity	

[6] The data used in this chapter are part of a broader project conducted by a research team of the Management Department of the University of Bergamo.

Family CEO	102
Non-family CEO	13
Total number of firms	***115***
Family generation	
1°	15
2°	52
3°	38
4°	6
5°	4
Total number of firms	***115***
Age	
0-10 years old	5
10-25 years old	20
25-50 years old	69
50-75 years old	14
More than 75 years old	7
Total number of firms	***115***
Size	
50-249 employees	
250-499 employees	
>500 employees	
Total number of firms	***115***
Revenues	
0-20.000€	61
20.000€-50.000€	36
50.000€-75.000€	3
>75.000€	15
Total number of firms	***115***
Industry	
Manufacturing	90
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	12
Transporting and storage	7
Information and communication	1
Professional, scientific and technical activities	1
Administrative and support service activities	4
Total number of firms	***115***

Jurisdiction (Italian region)	
Basilicata	1
Campania	2
Emilia-Romagna	8
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	3
Lazio	3
Liguria	1
Lombardia	45
Marche	5
Molise	1
Piemonte	11
Puglia	3
Sardegna	1
Sicilia	1
Toscana	4
Trentino-Alto Adige	3
Umbria	2
Veneto	21
Total number of firms	***115***

Source: personal elaboration.

5.3.2 Measures

The measures used in the survey are well-established, validated, and reliable scales. Since the survey was conducted in Italian, the scales were translated into Italian and then back-translated by a bilingual professional translator to ensure accuracy (Brislin, 1970). The survey model items were mainly reflective. Reflective measurement scales were assessed through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha, which computes the internal consistency of constructs (Churchill Jr, 1979; Cronbach, 1951). The applied items and the respective coefficient alphas are reported in Table 9.

Table 9: Items and variables.

Constructs	**Cronbach alphas**
CSR	0,852
CSR to employees	0,779
1. Our company supports employees who want to acquire additional education.	

2. Our company policies encourage the employees to develop their skills and careers.	
3. Our company implements flexible policies to provide a good work & life balance for its employees.	
4. The management of our company is primarily concerned with employees' needs and wants.	
5. The managerial decisions related with the employees are usually fair.	
CSR to customers	0,780
6. Our company provides full and accurate information about its products to its customers.	
7. Our company respects consumer rights beyond the legal requirements.	
8. Customer satisfaction is highly important for our company.	
CSR to society	0,837
9. Our company contributes to campaigns and projects that promote the well-being of the society.	
10. Our company endeavors to create employment opportunities.	
11. Our company implements special programs to minimize its negative impact on the natural environment.	
12. Our company participates in activities which aim to protect and improve the quality of the natural environment.	
13. Our company targets sustainable growth which considers future generations.	
14. Our company makes investment to create a better life for future generations.	
15. Our company encourages its employees to participate in voluntarily activities.	
16. Our company supports nongovernmental organizations working in problematic areas.	
Family dentification with the business	0,837
1. Family members have a strong sense of belonging to my family business.	
2. Family members feel that the family business's success is their own success.	
3. My family business has a great deal of personal meaning for family members.	
4. Being a member of the family business helps define who we are.	

5. Family members are proud to tell others that we are part of the family business.	
6. Customers often associate the family name with the family business's products and services.	

Source: personal elaboration.

Dependent Variable

The *CSR* scale was developed by Turker (2009) and adapted to measure corporate social responsibility practices towards three primary stakeholders: employees, customers, and society (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Therefore, the CSR variable appears as a second-order reflective construct built upon three first-order reflective constructs, i.e., CSR to employees, CSR to customers, and CSR to society, and allows to measure the effects according to different recipients of such initiatives (e.g., De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012; Úbeda-García, Claver-Cortés, Marco-Lajara, & Zaragoza-Sáez, 2021). For each item, a 5-point Likert scale was used, from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree".

Independent variables

Family identification with the business is measured using the I(dentification) subsection of the FIBER scale developed by Berrone and colleagues in 2012. For each item, a 5-point Likert scale was used, from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree".

Control variables

Since other elements might influence the family identification-CSR nexus, the following control variables were added to the model. First, controlling for the same variable investigated in Chapter 4, the *family name* is coded as a dummy variable equal to 1 if the name of the firm is the same or contains a direct reference to the name of the family, 0 otherwise. The name of the owning family is inferred from the surname of the family CEO if available. When the name has a reference to a surname different from the one of the CEO (e.g., when the CEO is the spouse of a family member or the child of a female family member) or this latter is not available, the name of the business has been manually compared with the surname of all the BoD members, information recollected in the AIDA database. Similarly, *CEO identity* takes the value of 1 when the CEO is a family member and 0 if is not, information asked directly during the interviews. Then, a control variable reporting the *family generation*, i.e., since how many generations the business is owned

and managed by the family, was added to grasp eventual differences in CSR according to the family history length in the business. Furthermore, the percentage of the family members in the BoD was controlled (*family involvement*). Finally, the logarithm of *Age* and *Size* (proxied by the number of employees) were added to control whether they significantly affect CSR. All the data were collected in the survey, but information as the CEO identity, the number of BoD members, age, and size were double-checked in the AIDA database.

5.4 Data analysis and results

Table 10 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for all measures, collected over the period of observation.

First, Table 10 shows that, in general, the family business interviewed claims to implement a fairly high level of CSR, with an average of 4,132 on a scale where the maximum level of all its items is 5. Interesting is to notice that while the minimum is 2,561, which is a considerably high minimum, the maximum is 5, which means that all items of the scale were answered with "strongly agree". More specifically, more attention is given, on average, to socially responsible actions towards customers (4,481), followed by the ones towards the employees (4,17) and lastly towards the society (3,745). As regards the family identification with the business, the minimum is 2,667 demonstrating that, when at its lowest points, the family to some extent still identifies with the business. The average is 4,361, showing that most of the answers to the statements about the strong bond between the family and the business are between "I agree" and "I strongly agree". Again, some of the respondents answer 5 to all the items of this scale. As regards the organizational characteristics, 44% of the family businesses in the sample carry the family name, while 89% have a CEO who is a member of the family. Moreover, they are managed by families that are from the first to the fifth-generation (between the second and the third on average), and its average involvement in the BoD is notable (81% on average), even though there are rather various situations (from 11% to 100%). Finally, the average age is 40 years (3,549 the logarithm) and the size is 130 employees (4,621 its logarithm).

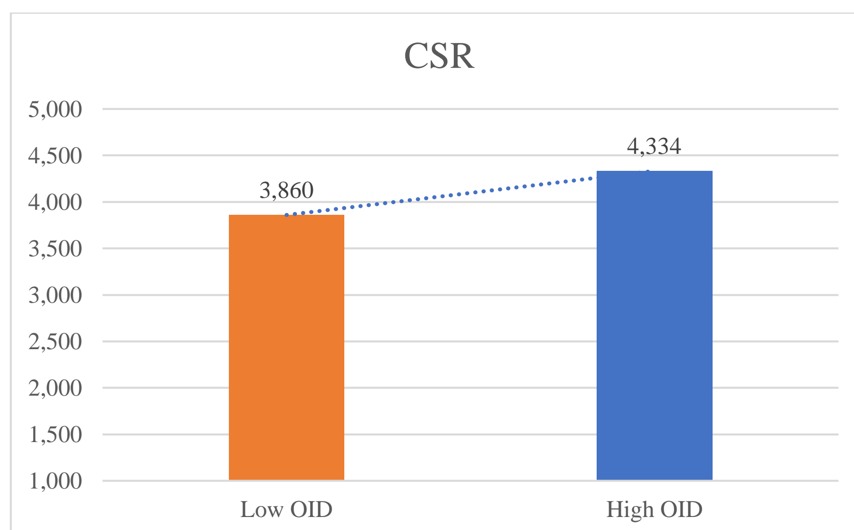
Table 10: Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients

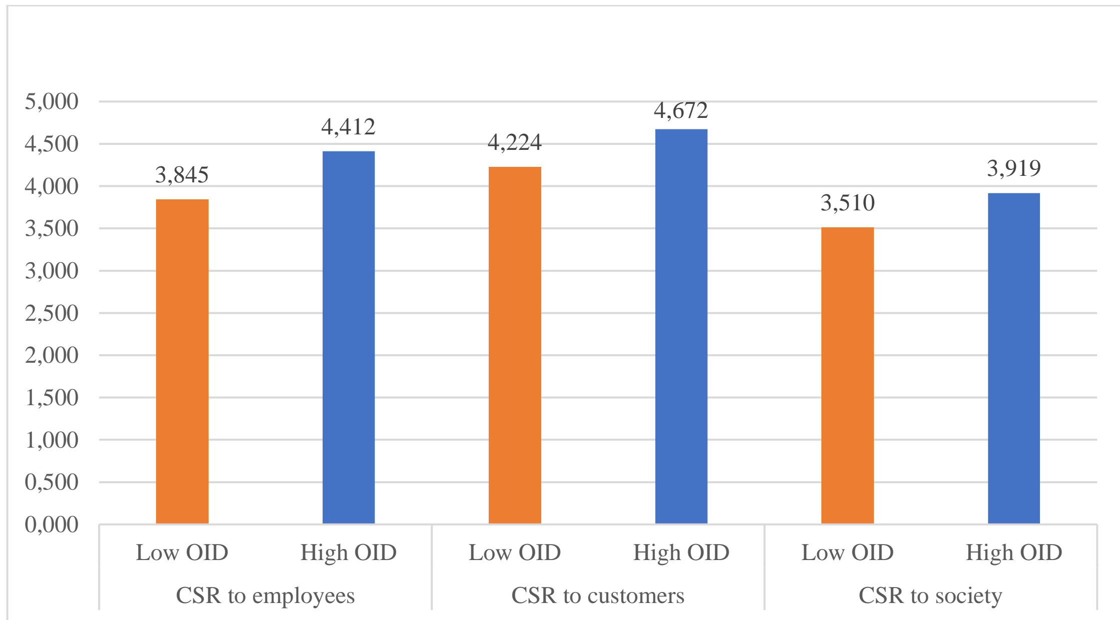
		Mean	SD	Min	max	1	1a	1b	1c	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	CSR	4,132	0,451	2,561	5	1,000									
1a	*CSR to employees*	*4,170*	*0,533*	*2,600*	*5*	-	1,000								
1b	*CSR to customers*	*4,481*	*0,562*	*2,333*	*5*	-	-	1,000							
1c	*CSR to society*	*3,745*	*0,689*	*1,500*	*5*	-	-	-	1,000						
2	Family identification with the business	4,361	0,609	2,667	5	0,510***	0,546***	0,374***	0,273***	1,000					
3	Family name	0,443	0,499	0	1	0,045	0,069	0,087	-0,038	0,248***	1,000				
4	CEO identity	0,887	0,318	0	1	-0,033	-0,092	-0,086	0,077	-0,022	-0,124	1,000			
5	Family generation	2,409	0,907	1	5	-0,066	-0,109	-0,039	-0,012	-0,137	0,158*	0,040	1,000		
6	Family involvement	0,809	0,254	0,111	1	-0,002	0,020	0,030	-0,012	-0,009	-0,071	0,162	0,165*	1,000	
7	Age	3,549	0,551	1,792	4,804	0,066	-0,010	-0,010	0,155*	0,017	0,099	0,034	0,284***	0,084	1,000
8	Size	4,621	0,566	3,932	7,312	0,062	-0,052	-0,052	0,006	0,185**	0,059	-0,119	0,012	0,021	0,136

Notes: *p<0,1; **p<0,05; ***p<0,01. Observations: 115 family firms.
Source: personal elaboration.

In terms of Pearson correlations, CSR is positively and significantly correlated with the family identification with the business. As regards the CSR subcategories, all three have a positive and statistically significant relationship with the family identification with the business. In order, the highest correlation regards the socially responsible actions towards the employees, followed by the actions towards customers and finally to the society. CSR towards society has also a positive and statistically significant correlation with the family firm age. The family identification with the business has also a positive and statically strong relationship with the presence of the family name as well as with the firm size (i.e., number of employees).

To understand more in detail what is the connection between the family identification with the business and CSR, considering also the subcategories of socially responsible actions towards different stakeholders, initial empirical evidence was analyzed looking at the mean differences. To this end, the sampled firms are divided into two groups, according to the degree of the family identification with the business. In one group, there are family businesses where the family identifies with the business in a lower measure than the average family identification of the total sample ("low OID"). The other group, by contrast, comprehends those family businesses in which the family identifies more strongly than the average level of family identification ("high OID"). This division has been used to compute the differences in means of CSR in general and of CSR towards employees, customers, and society in particular, which are displayed in Figure 14 and Table 11.





Source: personal elaboration.

Figure 14: CSR means, as a single construct and divided according to its subcategories, depending on the level of the family identification with the business.

In general, the mean differences show that to a family higher identification with the business corresponds a higher level of CSR, and this is true also for all the CSR subcategories. Differences in the degree of CSR implementation between the family that identifies more compared to when it identifies less are all around 0,5, which can be considered high given that the scale of measurement goes only from 1 to 5. Moreover, all of them are strongly significant ($p < 0,01$).

Table 11: CSR means, as a single construct and divided according to its subcategories, depending on the level of the family identification with the business.

	Low OID (0)		High OID (1)		Mean differences	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	(0)-(1)	t-stat
CSR	49	3,860	66	4,334	-0,474***	-6,520
	Low OID (0)		High OID (1)		Mean differences	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	(0)-(1)	t-stat
CSR to employees	49	3,845	66	4,412	-0,567***	-6,614
	Low OID (0)		High OID (1)		Mean differences	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	(0)-(1)	t-stat
CSR to customers	49	4,224	66	4,671	-0,447***	-4,571

CSR to society	Low OID (0)		High OID (1)		Mean differences	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	(0)-(1)	t-stat
	49	3,510	66	3,919	-0,408***	-3,274

Notes: *p<0,1; **p<0,05; ***p<0,01.
Source: personal elaboration.

More in detail, the family business that implements more CSR are those in which the family is highly identified with the business (4,334), and in particular, when the beneficiaries of such actions are the customers with a mean of 4,672, really close to the maximum possible score of 5. Then, it is followed by CSR towards the employees (4,412) and in the end, towards the society (3,919). The same trends are followed by firms in which the family has a low degree of identification with the business (towards the customers, the employees, and finally the society; see Figure 14 and Table 11 for all the details).

To estimate whether there is a significant relationship between the degree of the family identification with the business and CSR, and the in meanwhile also to control for other variables, an OLS regression is performed (Table 12). Then, three other regressions are performed to estimate the effect of the family identification with the business (and the control variables) on CSR when different stakeholders are taken into account (Table 13).

Table 12: Regression on CSR (as a unique variable)

CSR	Coefficient	Std. err.
High OID (high family identification with the business)	0,501***	0,079
Family name	-0,083	0,078
CEO identity	-0,054	0,119
Family generation	-0,009	0,044
Family involvement	0,016	0,149
Age	0,061	0,070
Size	-0,047	0,067
Constant	3,937***	0,392
R2	0,288	
Observations	115	

Source: personal elaboration.

The general model results show that the high identification of family with the business has a positive (β= 0,501) and significant effect (p<0,01) on CSR, confirming the idea that

to a higher level of family identification with the business corresponds higher levels of CSR actions employed by the family firm. Similar to the previous chapter, family name and CEO identity are suggested to decrease the CRS implementation (β= -0,083 and β= -0,054 respectively), but unfortunately, none of them is statistically significant. As regards the other control variables, quite surprisingly, none of them resulted to have a significant impact on CSR neither.

Table 13: Regressions on CSR according to CSR subcategories (i.e., to employees, to customers, and to society)

	CSR to employees			**CSR to customers**			**CSR to society**	
	Coefficient	Std. err.		Coefficient	Std. err.		Coefficient	Std. err.
High OID (high family identification with the business)	0,555***	0,092		0,484***	0,105		0,464***	0,132
Family name	-0,062	0,092		-0,016	0,104		-0,171	0,132
CEO identity	-0,118	0,139		-0,180	0,159		0,138	0,201
Family generation	-0,023	0,051		0,000	0,058		0,004	0,074
Family involvement	0,013	0,175		0,131	0,199		-0,096	0,252
Age	-0,030	0,083		-0,000	0,094		0,214*	0,119
Size	0,095	0,079		-0,150*	0,090		-0,085	0,114
Constant	3,700	0,460		4,959	0,523		3,152	0,661
R2	0,301			0,186			0,135	
Observations	115			115			115	

Source: personal elaboration.

As regards the single CSR subcategories, the results are quite similar. Family identification with the business significantly predicts the socially responsible actions towards all the stakeholders. More specifically, it has the strongest positive effects on CSR towards the employees (β= 0,555; $p<0{,}01$), but it is the only variable that significantly impacts this subcategory. The effect it has on CSR towards the customers and the society is less strong (β= 0,484 and β= 0,464), but still positive and highly significant ($p<0{,}01$). The only two control variable that resulted to have a weak but significant impact are size (β= 0,150; $p<0{,}1$) but only on CSR towards the customers and age (β= 0,214; $p<0{,}1$) on CSR actions towards the society.

In summary, the results of the regressions suggest that family businesses in which the family identifies more strongly with the business are predicted to implement a higher

level of CSR compared to family firms in which the family identifies less. This consideration is true for socially responsible actions towards all the three different stakeholders considered. More specifically, employees are the stakeholders that benefit more when the family is strongly identified, while customers and society are a little less impacted. Interestingly, regards additional variables controlled, these findings are not aligned with the results of Chapter 4. Indeed, it seems that Italian family firm CSR implementation does not differ depending on the CEO identity nor on the family involvement in the BoD. Moreover, it seems not to be affected by the name, age, and size of the firms with only two exceptions. First that the bigger the family firms, the higher the focus on socially responsible actions towards the customers, and second, the older the family firm, the higher the focus on socially responsible actions towards the society. The main reason why these results are significantly different from the findings of the previous chapter can be found in the completely diverse sample analyzed. Indeed, Chapter 4 analyzed the biggest listed family firms in the world while Chapter 5 medium-large Italian (listed and non-listed) family businesses. Therefore, according to the results, differences in the drivers of CSR implementation depend also on the specific context considered and in which the family businesses are embedded.

5.5 Discussion, contributions, and limitations

In an attempt to extend previous work and to highlight further differences *among* family businesses when exploring identitarian issues and their effects on organizational socially responsible actions, this study investigates the following question: how does family identification with the business affect CSR towards different stakeholders? To this end, data from 115 Italian family firms were analyzed to understand how the strength of the family identification with the business may predict the family firm CSR in general and more in particular towards specific stakeholders.

The results of this study reveal an additional way of understanding the role of identities and identification in the CSR employment by family businesses towards specific categories of stakeholders. Thus, it provides some theoretical contributions.

First, following the lead of Chapter 4, this study further enriches the literature about the identity–CSR nexus (Fehre & Weber, 2019; Mariani, Al-Sultan, & De Massis, 2021; Marques, Presas, & Simon, 2014) by emphasizing how family identification with the business is another important concept that may explain different behaviors of family businesses as regard their CSR strategy implementation. Moreover, this study contributes to explaining an additional nuance of how this category of companies may be heterogeneous by leveraging on its unique characteristics, i.e., the family and its identification. In this regard, family businesses in the sample have been divided according to the level of their family identification with the business since not all the families necessarily equally identify with their businesses. This is because a family may own the business but do not really feel connected with it or, by contrast, the family may do not be involved directly but defines its own self through the business (Westhead & Cowling, 1998; Zellweger, Nason, Nordqvist, & Brush, 2013). By demonstrating that different degrees of family identification with the business imply different degrees of CSR employed by the business, this study highlights another important aspect of family business heterogeneity but also remark the necessity of digging deeper into families and their characteristics, having a fundamental role in shaping the business management (Combs, Shanine, Burrows, Allen, & Pounds, 2020).

Second, these findings also contribute to the literature about identities in family businesses, particularly when observed through to the SEW perspective. According to SEW, families are expected to identify with their business and, for this reason, they should engage in more responsible actions compared to their non-family counterparts (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012). However, no study explores and tests whether there are differences *within* family businesses. Indeed, this study demonstrated that not all families equally identify with their business and this, in turn, predicts different levels of organizational CSR. Again, this highlights the importance of analyzing identities and their related concepts to understand better how and why family businesses behave and shape their strategic decision-making in certain ways.

Third, this study contributes to the literature on CSR by highlighting the importance to divide the wide variety of actions that are considered under this "umbrella concept" according to who is the beneficiary, which allows to better grasps eventual preference towards different stakeholders (Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011). Even though

the results show that a higher family identification with the business predicts a positive trend towards all the three categories considered, it is possible to infer that families in our sample tend to focus more on socially responsible actions towards the employees first, then to customers and finally to the society. This order may be explained by the fact that, in the first place, the more the family sees the organization as its natural extension, the more significant the attitude it has to people inside the organization due to the willingness of creating an internal culture that fosters employees' attachment and loyalty (Vallejo, 2008). This may lead the employees to be at the top of the CSR beneficiaries' list. Right after that, family firms may focus their concerns toward internal process as well as on the quality of the products and services they provide (Carrigan & Buckley, 2008; Teal, Upton, & Seaman, 2003), being particularly sensitive to customers' opinions (Craig, Dibrell, & Davis, 2008). Finally, socially responsible actions in general towards the society, which comprehend for example environmental sustainability, future generations, and volunteering, are a little less related to the family identification with the business, probably due to the fact they are identified as less "urgent" compared to the closer relationships with the employees and customers. However, in general, the more the family identifies the higher the socially responsible actions implemented both towards internal and external stakeholders, remarking the family awareness about the business corporate identity that is projected (Astrachan & Botero, 2018).

Like all studies, this work has some limitations, mostly associated with survey-related data collection and analysis. However, from these arise multiple future opportunities.

First, the geographical area of the family businesses in the sample is limited to Italy, potentially leading to a cultural bias that minimizes the generalizability of the results. In particular, the family identification with the business may differ according to the cultural context. Therefore, future research could explore how the degree of the family identification with the business may differently affect CSR in other cultural contexts, such as more individualistic societies.

Second, the sample is limited and collected only in a specific time frame. Using a wider sample and also gathering data in different waves (longitudinal data collection approach) may help to better uncover how the family identification with the business affects CSR towards different stakeholders. For example, it would be interesting to replicate the

analysis after a specific event, e.g., a succession or an external CEO appointment, and assess whether the relationship has changed due to eventual changes in the level of identification.

Third, this study uses the I(dentification) subscale of the wider FIBER scale (Berrone, Cruz, & Gomez-Mejia, 2012). However, over the years there have been controversial opinions about its general validity (Hauck, Suess-Reyes, Beck, Prügl, & Frank, 2016). Indeed, an interesting future avenue may be to use the more established scale developed by Mael and Ashforth in 1992 and, being a scale created to evaluate the individual identification, compute a mean of the identification of all the family members involved in the company or the BoD to assess the whole family identification with the business.

5.6 Conclusion

In sum, by examining the heterogeneity of family firms according to their family identification with the business, this study uncovers important determinants of family firms' CSR activities towards different stakeholders, namely the employees, the customers, and the society. Based on Italian medium-large family firms, the results reveal that the higher the level of the family identification with the business, the greater the efforts put in CSR implementation. In particular, socially responsible actions towards the employees are at the top of the highly identified families, followed by actions towards the customers and finally, to society. Furthermore, while in general there are no differences in CSR implementation of Italian family firms as regards the name of the company, the CEO identity, the family involvement, the family generation, and the firm age and size when looking into the specific CSR recipients, it can be noticed that older family firms are more prone to engage in socially responsible actions towards society, while bigger family firms towards the customers. Interestingly, these results add insights to the relationship between identities and CSR by demonstrating that, depending on the sample analyzed, the same factors can have different (or no) weight in explaining the family businesses' socially responsible behaviors.

6. Conclusions

The final chapter of this dissertation thesis has the aim of presenting its overall contributions along with a brief summary of the opportunities for future research and the limitations. In the end, a conclusive section will close the dissertation.

6.1 Overall theoretical contributions

This dissertation provides three general contributions.

First, it contributes to the literature on identities in family businesses. On the one hand, following the upcoming literature review of Bettinelli and colleagues (under review), Chapter 3 reorganized the literature and presented it according to the level of the identity. First, the leader, the successor, and the employee's identities, namely the most (unique and) important individual identities in family businesses, were presented. These were followed by studies about group identities, where most of them were focused on the family and only a few on other groups, i.e., the BoD and the general shareholders' group. Then, the organizational level highlighted the peculiarities of the family business identity and how family businesses communicate it. Finally, an additional paragraph explored studies that consider together multiple levels of identity. Each study was categorized according to three principal concepts, which are *identity*, that is more focused on static roles and status; *identity work*, which considers the mechanisms of construction, confirmation or preservation; and *identification*, that defines identity in relation to other entities. By reviewing the literature, some gaps were spotted and highlighted, providing a good amount of (hopefully) interesting future research directions. On the other hand, building on some of the research avenues identified, this dissertation contributes to the literature about identities in family business by demonstrating how identities can be a useful theoretic lens to explore and empirically predict family businesses behaviors and strategic decision-making. More specifically, different identities (CEO identity and the family business identity) taken both alone and simultaneously, as well as the family identification with the business have been used to explain differences in socially responsible actions engaged by family businesses, as these latter represent one understudied and among the most debated topics in the last years in the family business field (Randerson, 2022).

This directly leads to the second major contribution of this dissertation, which is to the growing literature about family firms heterogeneity. While most of the previous studies, including the ones exploring CSR, have implicitly assumed that family businesses represent a homogeneous group (Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011; Cruz, Larraza–Kintana, Garcés–Galdeano, & Berrone, 2014; Dyer & Whetten, 2006), family firms have been demonstrated to be widely heterogeneous (Chua, Chrisman, Steier, & Rau, 2012; Daspit, Chrisman, Ashton, & Evangelopoulos, 2021; García-Álvarez & López-Sintas, 2001; Memili & Dibrell, 2019). In the empirical studies of this dissertation, it has been emphasized how family businesses strongly differ according to some specific identities and to the degree in which the family identifies with its business, and connected such differences to the socially responsible actions implemented. In particular, the family business identity, which is here defined as the integration or segmentation of the family and the business identities, together with the CEO identity (family or non-family) in Chapter 4, as well as the level of the family identification with the business in Chapter 5 have been demonstrated to effectively explain family business' different behaviors in terms of CSR actions, providing an additional interpretation to why previous studies often present controversial results on this topic (Cruz, Larraza–Kintana, Garcés–Galdeano, & Berrone, 2014).

The third overall contribution is to CSR literature. In particular, by considering two different samples in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, it is possible to see how behaviors deemed as socially responsible and the reasons why they are employed varies among organizations and families (Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011). Indeed, it is interesting to notice how the biggest listed family businesses in the world compared to medium-large Italian family businesses place more (or less) importance on CSR depending on different features. In the first case, family firms put more efforts towards socially responsible actions when they have a non-family CEO and a segmented family business identity, i.e., no recall of the family name in the business name, together with a higher involvement of the family in the BoD. Moreover, an older age and a bigger size imply a higher effort towards socially responsible actions. By contrast, within medium-large but only Italian family businesses no huge differences are found depending on the size or age, except when CSR actions are divided according to the recipient stakeholders. In that case, the bigger the firm, the higher the attention to socially responsible actions

towards customers, while the older the firm, the higher the socially responsible actions towards society. Unfortunately, these relations are only weakly significant. Furthermore, the CEO identity and the family business identity, as well as the family involvement in the business were found as not significantly relevant, while the family identification with the business is the most important predictor of the level of CSR actions implemented. In summary, dissimilar samples highlighted how in diverse contexts the elements that foster CRS are different, further reflecting the heterogeneity of family businesses. Moreover, these results also unveil the importance of using psychometric scales created ad-hoc to explain specific identity aspects. Dichotomic variables, such as the family business identity proxied by the name of the business or the CEO identity divided in family vs non-family, are often useful to describe specific organizational outcomes. However, they often grasp only partially the real underlying constructs of identities. Indeed, to better interpret the identities' effects on organizational behaviors and strategies, such as CSR, deeper analyses are needed and, to this end, using ad-hoc scales such as the I(dentification) subscale of Berrone and colleagues (2012) is a good starting point.

6.2 Suggestions for future research and limitations

This dissertation offers multiple future research suggestions that will contribute to the literature about identities in family businesses as highlighted in Chapter 3. Briefly summarizing them, at the identity level further work is needed to understand, for example, how the leader's identity is able to influence the whole business. Fundamental is also to dig deeper into the identity of the successors, how they make sense of their role and how this affects their approach to their family and in general to their life inside and outside the business. At the group level, most of the articles explored the family identity, but rarely they explain how it differs from the "normal" families' one and how different configurations (blended families or in-laws' involvement) can affect its relationship with the organization. Furthermore, other group-related identities deserve to be taken into consideration, such as the BoD or the general shareholders' group. At the organizational level, the biggest issue is related to the family business heterogeneity and the importance of further studying differences *among* family businesses. In this stance, this dissertation added a little insight into this complex topic. Finally, from a multilevel point of view, a

few studies considered identities at different levels simultaneously, while it is urgent to understand how individuals, groups, and organizational identities mutually shape each other.

Moreover, this dissertation presents different first research insights into the role of identities family businesses and in particular in shaping the socially responsible actions employed by the organization. As with any empirical study, it has several limitations which, however, light the way towards additional and more specific future research avenues.

First, as aforementioned, the use of dichotomic variables does not fully capture the essence of identities, in particular when it comes to the family business identity. While using the family name to measure whether the family and the business identities, underlying the more comprehensive family business identity, are integrated or segmented is a good gimmick (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008), it is still limited. Therefore, a fundamental point is to theorize and develop an ad-hoc scale that better captures the family business identity and is able to fully disclose its heterogeneity and its specific (and unique) features. Then, it would be interesting to use it to repeat the analyses of this dissertation to observe whether the results are replicated or different insights are gained. The same could be done to all the studies that use a dichotomic variable to assess the family business identity.

Second, both the studies of this dissertation used cross-sectional data, which capture the identity/identification-CSR relations only in a specific time frame. However, to empirically establish causal effects and better understand how these relationships may change over time, more longitudinal data are needed. Indeed, specific events such as the acquisition of shares by external investors or a change in the family configuration may affect the family business identity. Similarly, the entering of the following generation or change in the product after an innovation may change the level of the family identification with the business. In this stance, it would be interesting to capture these changes and assess whether and how the relationships between identities/identification and CSR change accordingly.

Third, in Chapters 4 and 5, the studies mostly relied on the organizational extension of Identity Theory, the SEW perspective, and the Social Identity Theory. However, in

addition to these more “classic” theoretical lenses, others may be used to disentangle how identities affect the implementation of CSR actions in family businesses. One example is the Stakeholder Theory, which can highlight how families, as the most important stakeholder in family firms, through their social identities may have diverse impacts on some family business features (Signori & Fassin, 2021). Another example is the Stewardship Theory, which views managerial choices as a way to advance the collective benefit of the organization and its stakeholders (Donaldson & Davis, 1991) and can explain the more altruistic motivation behind the link between identities-CSR implementation.

Fourth, in Chapter 5 all the control variables, which were related to the family business more general characteristics such as the family generation and involvement, the name of the business, age, and size, resulted as not significant or to have a little effect but only in specific situations. If this implies that Italian family firms implement the same amount of socially responsible actions independently by those elements, it would be interesting to understand what other additional factors stand behind their choice to implement more (or less) CSR.

Finally, and more in general, there are other future research avenues that are highlighted in the literature and are close to this dissertation. Among the others, it would be interesting to understand whether and which are some possible moderators and mediators of the identity/identification-CSR relationship. For example, the family firm psychological capital may help in explaining how family firms are able to maintain and develop a competitive strategy such as CSR without sacrificing broader family-based identities or objectives (Memili, Welsh, & Luthans, 2013). Another interesting future research focus would be to explore more in-depth the reasons behind CSR implementation, unveiling whether and in which circumstances it is a matter of identity or a matter of corporate identity. As already mentioned, the aim of being a “good corporate citizen” may come from the actual values and beliefs of the family or it may derive purely from the company’s willingness to gain a competitive advantage in the market. Furthermore, the implementation of socially responsible actions may derive from the expectations that the external stakeholders have about the family business, thus encouraging the family and the management to invest more in it or even declaring to do it improperly. Understanding which of the three is the real “motivator” may add other insights to solve the controversial

results about CSR implementation in family businesses. More in general, identity, its communication (corporate identity or image), and reputation are three correlated elements that taken together provide a full picture about the family business brand, i.e., all the associations that internal and external stakeholders attribute to the company (Astrachan, Botero, Astrachan, & Prügl, 2018). Thus, another interesting future venue may be to analyze CSR strategies in relation to the broader concept of brand and highlight how these actions may become the "major differentiator in consumers' mind" (Golob & Podnar, 2019, p. 1), as they provide to the family business an element of uniqueness that may distinguish it from the competitors and gain market shares.

In closing, I really hope that this dissertation study encourages further work at the crossroads of identity and family business and fosters new research ideas in the CSR arena.

6.3 Concluding remarks

To conclude, this dissertation is built upon four interconnected chapters. After an initial introduction of the field, Chapters 2 and 3 present the literature about the family business definition, identity, and then the studies at the intersection of these two fields, demonstrating the importance of considering identities in family businesses and proposing some future research avenues. Building on some of the research topics proposed, Chapters 4 and 5 found that, among family businesses, there are different elements that affect the level of CSR actions implemented and that these vary according to the sample used. Indeed, among the biggest listed family businesses in the world, family businesses with a CEO with a non-family identity and a segmented family business identity, as well as higher family involvement in the BoD, an older age and a bigger size, implement a higher level of CSR strategies. By contrast, among Italian medium-large family businesses, the higher the family identification with the business, the higher the level of CSR actions implemented, and this is true almost independently from all the other factors and for actions towards all the stakeholders considered. However, the highest interest is devolved to customers, then to employees, and finally to society.

Overall, my goal with this dissertation was to understand how identities are a relevant element of family businesses and how they can explain some family businesses' strategic choices and behaviors. In doing so, I extended the knowledge on an area that deserves more attention and is important to develop further, due to its relevance in unveiling the heterogeneity of family businesses.

7. References

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