

Longitudinal Family Business Research – Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Purpose: Cross-sectional research methods are not able to grasp the special characteristics and unique operation modes of family businesses. The aim of the study is to map the type of topics examined and methodologies used in longitudinal empirical studies in family business research. The study examines the topics and methodologies covered in the literature and the advantages and challenges of each methodological approach.

Design/methodology/approach: We conducted a literature review and drew conclusions based on a detailed analysis of 99 articles. The paper presents the distribution of topics, the applied methodology, and evaluates quantitative and qualitative methods.

Findings: Within seven topics identified, most studies were published on family business governance, operation, succession, and the internationalization of family firms. The majority of longitudinal family business research is based on quantitative methodologies, but the proportion of studies using qualitative approaches is also gaining momentum, while the use of mixed-method approaches is negligible.

Limitations: We collected the data from the Web of Science database and our study may reflect the limitations of this database. Two of our researchers conducted the article selection process manually and, despite the greatest care, it is possible that valuable articles were left out of the analysis. Due to the applied selection and analysis methods, the comparability of our results with more comprehensive literature reviews on family businesses is limited. The results relate to longitudinal, empirical research papers only. The time span covered by our research is narrow, there are more comprehensive and up-to-date literature reviews available.

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Originality/value: The study contributes to longitudinal family business research.

Keywords: family business, longitudinal approach, literature review.

JEL: L26

Badanie podłużne przedsiębiorstw rodzinnych – przegląd literatury

Streszczenie

Cel: przekrojowe metody badawcze nie pozwalają na uchwycenie szczególnych cech i unikalnych sposobów działania przedsiębiorstw rodzinnych. Celem prezentowanego badania jest identyfikacja rodzaju tematów i metodologii stosowanych w longitudinalnych badaniach empirycznych nad firmami rodzinnymi. W artykule przeanalizowano tematy i metodologie omawiane w literaturze oraz zalety i wyzwania każdego z podejść metodologicznych.

Metodologia: wnioski wyciągnięto na podstawie przeprowadzonego przeglądu literatury obejmującego szczegółową analizę 99 artykułów. W artykule przedstawiono rozkład tematów i stosowaną metodologię oraz oceniono metody ilościowe i jakościowe.

Wyniki: w przypadku siedmiu zidentyfikowanych obszarów tematycznych większość opublikowanych badań dotyczyło zarządzania przedsiębiorstwami rodzinnymi, ich działalności, sukcesji i internacjonalizacji. Gros longitudinalnych badań przedsiębiorstw rodzinnych opiera się na metodologiach ilościowych, lecz powiększa się również odsetek badań wykorzystujących jakościowe sposoby podejścia, natomiast stosowanie metod mieszanych jest znikome.

Ograniczenia: dane pochodzą z bazy danych Web of Science i prezentowane badanie może odzwierciedlać jej ograniczenia. Dwóch badaczy przeprowadziło proces wyboru artykułów ręcznie i mimo największej staranności możliwe jest, że w analizie pominięto wartościowe artykuły. Ze względu na zastosowane metody selekcji i analizy porównywalność wyników z bardziej wszechstronnymi przeglądami literatury na temat przedsiębiorstw rodzinnych jest ograniczona. Wyniki odnoszą się wyłącznie do artykułów przedstawiających longitudinalne badania empiryczne. Zakres czasowy badania jest wąski, istnieją bardziej wszechstronne i aktualne przeglądy literatury.

Originalność/wartość: artykuł stanowi wkład w longitudinalne badania przedsiębiorstw rodzinnych.

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorstwo rodzinne, podejście longitudinalne, przegląd literatury.

1. Introduction

Several international studies highlighted the high proportion of family businesses within business organizations and their uniqueness (Hernandez-Perlines et al., 2019; Araya-Castillo et al., 2021), nevertheless there are many obstacles to identifying their specific characteristics.

The uniqueness of family firms – especially in areas such as governance and succession – unfolds over time, which is almost impossible to detect through cross-sectional surveys. Longitudinal research methods are better suited to explore the phenomena through change, but studies covering a longer time span with more data have their difficulties too, such as attrition and cost (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Evert et al. (2015) point to the prevalence of the longitudinal approach based on empirical research in articles on family businesses published between 1988 and 2015.

In our study, we have attempted to map the methodological achievements of longitudinal family business research published in English and indexed on the Web of Science. In our work, we searched for answers to the following research question: what are the examined topics, and what are the methodologies used in longitudinal empirical studies in family business research?

2. Methodology of the Literature Review

In the course of our work, we followed Snyder's (2019) guidelines. A literature review is a systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research. Snyder (2019) differentiates three approaches to literature reviews: (1) systematic, (2) semi-systematic, and (3) integrative. To answer our research question, we considered the semi-systematic approach – which Snyder (2019, p. 225) describes with the following question: “What is it and how should it be used?” – to be the most fitting. We were interested in the extent to which the longitudinal approach is used in family business research, which topics are touched on and what methodological lessons can be learned from it. In our analysis, we solely focused on English language articles which present longitudinal empirical research. Although systematic reviews are more accurate and rigorous, they require a narrow research question. As our research question was quite complex, a semi-structured approach seemed more appropriate. With a semi-systematic approach, we conducted a focused literature review (also known as a targeted literature review). This type of literature review concentrates on a few aspects of the previous research, such as methodology (Frederiksen et al., 2018). As part of the data analysis, we applied qualitative and quantitative methods (Czakov et al., 2022).

To create the initial database, we used the Web of Science database. We carried out the research in June 2019 and updated it in November 2022. Based on the guidelines of Paul and Criado (2020), we covered a 10-year period. Table 1 contains a detailed description of the search criteria and conditions. The chosen time frame overlaps with the expansion phase of family business research of Rovelli et al. (2021). The authors labeled the 1988–2009 period as “emergence” when family business research started to attract scholarly attention and the 2010–2020 period as “expansion” when the field consolidated its relevance and gained legitimacy. Our work focuses on the expansion period with the aim to summarize the experience gained so far in applying the longitudinal approach in family business research. The results may contribute to the further development of the field as Rovelli et al. (2021, p. 12) predict that the third phase of family business research will be the “‘differentiation’ phase (...) where the field can dive much deeper into the detailed exploration of in-depth topics and methods.” To achieve the third phase, they highlight the importance of advancing family business

research through methodologies, and among several other suggestions for further research, they mention the exploration of the use of longitudinal case studies as a method that may allow us to capture the evolution of family firms.

Table 1
Search Criteria and Conditions (Empirical and Longitudinal Articles)

Search Aspects	Search Criteria
Boolean operator	TS=(„famil* firm*” OR „famil* business*” OR „famil* entrepr*” OR „familin*” OR „famil* control*” „famil* led*” OR „famil* own*” OR „business* famil*” OR „firm* famil*” OR „entrepr* famil*” OR „famil* sme*”) AND TS=(„longitud*” OR „year*”)
Search domain	all fields
Database	Web of Science Core Collection (Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)
Date of query	2019.06.24 and updated 2022.11.22
Period	2009–2021
Language	English
Document type	Article

During the first and the updated search, the selection method of the articles was identical. We narrowed the list of primary hits in three steps. As a first step, one of our researchers excluded clearly irrelevant articles (false hits, not related to the research topic, non-empirical research) based on their titles and keywords. Next, two researchers independently reviewed the remaining articles based on their titles, keywords, and abstracts and eliminated papers using the cross-sectional method. Finally, we compared the two lists and examined the debatable items in context. Using this method, we narrowed the original 596 hits down to 94 articles and supplemented the list with 5 previously written studies after reviewing the reference lists, which resulted in a set of 99 articles. We analyzed the full texts of the selected 99 articles in detail using predefined codes (title, author(s), date of publication, journal, topic, keywords, page number, methodology, data collection method, theoretical approach, method of analysis, sample size in each examined period, strengths, weaknesses, research questions, results). Two researchers conducted data analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) guidelines in order to ensure investigator triangulation.

3. Findings

3.1. Distribution by Topic Area

We organized the presentation of our findings in line with the analysis of the themes identified, and the methodologies used. After presenting the topics covered by the sampled articles, we discussed the methodologies used and how they relate to the topics.

Literature review articles on family business research often highlight the most frequent and promising research topics. Based on Rovelli et al. (2021), the keywords used most often are: comprehensive study, succession, corporate governance, socioemotional wealth, family ownership, firm performance, familiness, family dynamics and innovation. As future research directions, they indicate the reconsideration of the definition of family, crisis management in family businesses and the shift from cross-sectional to longitudinal case studies. Evert et al. (2016) mention management of the firm, business performance and growth, characteristics and attributes, interpersonal dynamics, governance, and succession as the main research areas. In addition to the most popular research directions, literature review studies map such promising future research topics as trust and reputation in family businesses (Chaudhary et al., 2021), internationalization (Debellis et al., 2021; Alayo et al., 2021; Arregle et al., 2021), leadership styles and leadership behaviors in family businesses (Fries et al., 2021), and conflicts (Kubicek & Machek, 2020).

As part of our research, we grouped the 99 selected longitudinal family business publications by topic. After familiarizing ourselves with the collected database, we generated initial topic codes. We supplemented the initial topic codes and implemented the classification of the articles according to the final topic codes in the analysis process. Table 2 shows the distribution of selected articles by topic areas and methodology.

Table 2
Distribution of Articles by Topic and Methodology (Empirical and Longitudinal Articles)

Topic / Methodology	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed	Total
Family business governance	17	10		27
Operation	15	7	1	23
Succession	6	9		15
Internationalization	9	2	1	12
Innovation	8	3		11
Finance	6			6
Identity	2	3		5
Total	63	34	2	99

Family business governance, operation, succession and internationalization are the most frequently studied topics applying the longitudinal approach which is in line with the article mapping of the field (Rovelli et al., 2021; Evert et al., 2016). Governance and succession are evergreen issues that have been studied since the beginning of family business research, so it is not surprising that there is a high number of related longitudinal studies. Singh & Deloitte (2017) examined the effect of family ownership on the company growth strategy, while Odehnalová & Pirožek (2018) examined the importance of the board of directors of family businesses. Among the articles classified under the succession topic, papers which explore transgenerational aspects of family firms are particularly interesting (Clinton et al., 2018; Chirico & Nordqvist, 2010). We used in our research the topic area ‘operation’ as a kind of catch-all category, in which we included diverse issues related to the operation of the business, such as performance (Terlaak et al., 2018), efficiency (Camisón et al., 2016), and social capital (Matzek et al., 2010). This categorization explains the high number of studies included in this group. Among articles categorized under the topic of internationalization, empirical research conducted by Evert et al. (2018) proves the hindering role of family ownership in the initial period of internationalization. This result gives special importance to articles reviewing the literature on the topic (Debellis et al., 2021; Alayo et al., 2021; Arregle et al., 2021).

Not only were the topics covered in the study diverse, but so were the places where the articles were published. The 99 articles included in the study were published in 60 journals. Out of the selected articles, three or more appeared in the *Journal of Family Business Strategy* (11 articles), *Family Business Review* (6 articles) and *Journal of Business Research* (5 articles), *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* (4 articles), *Journal of Business Venturing* (3 articles).

3.2. Distribution by Applied Methodology

When analyzing the articles in the sample, we also examined their distribution according to the methodology used, which is illustrated in Table 3. In their work, Evert et al. (2016) report the dominance of quantitative approaches in family business research. In contrast, Rovelli et al.’s (2021) more recent work shows that case study, literature review, qualitative research, and content analysis emerge as the most currently used methods and approaches. In our sample, most longitudinal family business research studies were based on quantitative methodology (64%), but the proportion of studies using qualitative approaches (34%) is also significant in perspective, while only two articles (2%) used mixed methodological approaches. The use of mixed methodologies in family business research is still in its infancy; however, Reilly and Jones (2017), in an in-depth article on the topic, point out that mixed methodologies, which are primarily suited to answering ‘why’ questions, are well suited to family business research, where the researchers

of a phenomenon are not only interested in ‘what’ happened, but also in ‘why’ the family and the business behaved in a particular way. We expect qualitative methodologies to gain more ground also in the longitudinal research of family businesses.

Table 3
Distribution of Articles by Methodology

Methodology	Types of methods	Number of articles	Distribution
quantitative	negative binomial regression, logistic regression, Cox regression model, multilevel mixed-effects maximum likelihood model, OLS regression, pyramid analysis, vulnerability-stress adaptation model, panel corrected standard error model, longitudinal regression analysis, factor analysis, principal component analysis, parametric survival models, the general method of moments (GMM), ordinary least squares regression methods	63	64%
qualitative	case study, longitudinal multiple case study methodology, content analysis, action research, narrative method, comparative method, prosopography	34	34%
mixed	triangulation of logistic regression analysis and case study methods, mixture of literature review, its critical analysis and empirical research (survey method, interviews, and case studies)	2	2%
Total		99	100%

We can conclude that most of the topics can be studied using both quantitative and qualitative tools by looking at the relationship between the topics covered and the methodology used. The exception is the finance topic, which was only examined using a quantitative approach. Mixed methodologies were used to answer questions on operation and internationalization. There is a predominance of articles based on quantitative methodologies among articles on family business governance, operation, internationalization, and innovation, in line with the methodological distribution of all the papers examined. The exception is the succession and identity topic, where 12 out of the 20 articles sampled apply a qualitative approach (Table 2). The importance of the topic of generational transition within family business research may explain the predominance of qualitative methodologies in the longitudinal study of the succession process in family businesses, as shown by the high number of relevant articles. With the development of this topic,

the need for a deeper and more comprehensive study of the phenomena and trends identified naturally arises, and qualitative methodologies are the best way to support this. Moreover, in the case of studies covering a longer time span, the use of qualitative methods (also because of closer links with the enterprises involved in the analysis) reduces the attrition rate in the sample, while the retrospective approach allows the time span to be extended and the phenomena under study to be assessed in a more complex way (Csákné Filep & Radácsi, 2021).

4. Evaluation of Quantitative and Qualitative Methodological Approaches

When examining the articles presenting the results of longitudinal research on family firms, we found that the analyses of family business topics are primarily quantitative and qualitative, and rarely use mixed methodologies. In family business research, the most currently used approaches are the qualitative ones (Rovelli et al., 2021). In our sample which contains longitudinal empirical studies, quantitative research is in the majority. Although the presence of qualitative research is not negligible either, its use is more common than that of the quantitative approach in studies concerning succession. As in family business research in general, in the case of research using a longitudinal approach, we expect qualitative methodologies to gain ground. The advantages and challenges of using each methodology in longitudinal studies is therefore worth considering.

4.1. Quantitative Studies

Large sample sizes used in quantitative studies increase reliability, provide a wide range of possibilities for analyses, and allow for the use of specific statistical methodologies (Chung, 2014; Chung & Dahms, 2018; Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2018; Singh & Delios, 2017; Wiklund et al., 2013; Xiang et al., 2013; Xiang & Worthington, 2015).

Large sample surveys also provide the opportunity to compare family and non-family businesses (Camisón et al., 2016; Thomas & Graves, 2005; Graves & Thomas, 2004; Graves & Thomas, 2006; Zheng et al., 2018; Kotlar et al., 2013; Diéguez-Soto et al., 2018; Memili et al., 2015; Singal & Gerde, 2015).

One strength of longitudinal quantitative studies is that they can be used to examine groups of firms, i.e., they can take into account that entrepreneurial families rarely have a single firm but operate a group of firms, which are worth investigating comprehensively (Karaevli & Yurtoglu, 2018). Table 4 presents the sample size by methodology.

Table 4
Sample Size by Methodology

Methodology	Number of articles	Average sample item number	Minimum sample item number	Maximum sample item number
quantitative	63	3 886	21	114 837
qualitative	34	18	1	456
mixed	2	821	361	1 280
with reference to all articles	99	2 507	1	114 837

The articles under review provide interesting methodological examples for compiling databases covering periods of several years, which we can use to perform valuable analyses even without primary data collection, relying solely on public data. Karaevli and Yurtoglu (2018) investigated Turkish family business groups using a manually compiled dataset from public databases. Luan et al. (2018) conducted analyses using datasets from the Taiwan Stock Exchange and the Taiwan Economic Journal. Chadwick and Dawson (2018), in their study on the impact of female family business managers on firm performance, supplemented data from S&P's Compustat database with non-financial information from the research firm Sustainalytics, while they obtained data on firm managers from Compustat's ExecComp database. Zheng et al. (2018) compared information retrieved from the Thomson Reuters Eikon database with stock market indices. Wiklund et.al. (2013) created a new database by combining 5 longitudinal databases managed by Statistics Sweden.

Reliable surveys with a solid methodological basis, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics Business Longitudinal Database, are the basis for a wide range of research and publications (Graves & Thomas, 2004; Graves & Thomas, 2006; Xiang et al., 2013; Barbera & Hasso, 2013; Xiang & Worthington, 2015).

The advantages of quantitative studies include the ability to examine groups of firms and to compare family and non-family businesses. A large sample size, stable data coverage, and a long time span increase the reliability and value of research and provide a wide range of analytical possibilities; nonetheless, valuable analyses can be carried out even without primary data collection, relying only on public data.

In quantitative analyses, databases, even manually compiled ones from historically available data, allow for extremely wide time spans, although the range and quality of the available data are limitations.

Among the weaknesses of longitudinal quantitative studies, we can mention that an insufficient sample size and short time spans reduce the

validity and reliability of research results. However, small sample sizes in qualitative research do not necessarily mean inadequacy. Collecting dense, contextual data about a company in family business research can yield deep and novel findings. The use of templates (Gioia et al., 2013; Köhler et al., 2019) or strategies such as prolonged engagement, observation, thick description, triangulation, development of a coding system and inter-rater reliability, researcher bias, negative case analysis, peer review debriefing, member checking and external audits can guarantee the validity and reliability of qualitative research (Morse, 2015). Attrition is also a problem, as exemplified by the work of Sanchez-Ruiz et al. (2018), where the sample of family businesses was 2,495 in the first survey and only 583 in the survey five years later.

Researchers often use specific sampling criteria (e.g., firms available in certain databases, listed companies, etc.) to ensure data availability and reduce the risk of attrition, and therefore the limitation of the usefulness of the results may be that the results cannot be generalized.

Longitudinal quantitative studies tend to focus on large firms (listed companies) because of the sampling and data collection methodology and often use secondary data sources that include only the largest or otherwise top-performing firms. It is common to conduct analyses without undertaking original research work, making them poorly suited for understanding micro and small firms (Luan et al., 2018; Evert et al., 2018; Chung, 2014; Elosge et al. 2018; Cho et al., 2018; Singh & Delios, 2017; Singh & Gaur, 2013).

A further criticism of longitudinal quantitative studies is that the data collection methodology is firmly embedded in the cultural specificities of the country under study, and the sample selection and data collection are country specific. Most of the surveys cannot be replicated in other country contexts, so while these methods provide valuable results for individual countries, they cannot be used for reliable international comparisons. The database manually compiled by Karaevli and Yurtoglu (2018) for their Turkish Family Business Groups survey cannot be reconstructed in other national contexts, and it would be similarly difficult to replicate Chung's (2014) analysis of the data from the China Credit Information Service database in other countries. The problem typically arises in studies that are not based on original empirical data collection (but rather on the supplementing and secondary analysis of existing databases) (Chung, 2014; Chung & Dahms, 2018; Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2018; Singh & Delios, 2017; Wiklund et al. 2013; Xiang et al., 2013; Xiang & Worthington, 2015).

4.2. Qualitative Studies

Practical problems in the lives of family businesses can be examined in a complex and in-depth way using a longitudinal approach and qualitative methods, which provide an opportunity to understand certain phenomena and problems more thoroughly and explore the interrelationships within

them. Researchers of entrepreneurship and family business typically argue that in-depth qualitative studies provide an opportunity to understand the contribution of family businesses to social and economic value creation (Anderson et al., 2005; Litz et al., 2012).

Researchers have used qualitative methodologies to make international comparisons, though these methodologies are very focused and can capture cultural specificities. Chirico and Nordqvist (2010) investigated how elements of the family business culture such as paternalism and entrepreneurial orientation influence dynamic capabilities in Swiss and Italian family businesses; they also identified variations arising from the cultural differences in family businesses of the two countries.

The transgenerational view of family business innovation activities sheds light on unfolding innovation patterns such as conserving, persisting and legacy-building through a longer time period (Diaz-Morina et al., 2020).

Perhaps the greatest advantage of longitudinal qualitative studies is that they allow researchers to retrospectively reconstruct the history of a business from its foundation and the most important milestones in the life of the firm and the family. Graves and Thomas (2008) investigated the factors influencing internationalization from the time of foundation to that of the survey of 8 family firms. The interviews conducted as part of the research explored past events and supplemented their findings with company documents, archival press materials and other documents starting from the time of foundation. Chirico and Nordqvist (2010), Sieger et al. (2011) and Marchisio et al. (2010) used a similar methodology, giving a nice arc to their research.

The advantages of longitudinal qualitative studies include the ability to examine practical problems in the operation of family businesses, the possibility to gain a deeper understanding of certain phenomena and problems, to shed light on their interrelationships and to cover a long time span in retrospect.

In qualitative research, triangulation plays a key role in uncovering deeper content and possible contradictions, both in the choice of data sources and in the selection of research participants. Michael-Tsabari et al. (2014) studied the entrepreneurial behavior of an international family business across generations. In their analysis, they concluded that entrepreneurial behavior is determined to a greater extent by reactions to family challenges than by business hardships. In their research, they placed great emphasis on the triangulation of data sources: when collecting their data, they relied on the company website, press articles, mass media coverage, external and internal company documents and interviews. The triangulation of data allowed a broader perspective on the development of the family business portfolio and the role of the family in its development. Dieleman's (2019) work also placed a strong emphasis on data triangulation.

Half of the studies based on qualitative methodology included in the analysis (17 articles) focused on a single-family business. A small sample size may weaken credibility even in the case of qualitative research. To overcome this problem, researchers typically use triangulation, which can refer to data sources but can also be personal triangulation. To improve the reliability of research focusing on a single enterprise, researchers often make use of the possibility of taking a retrospective look at the firm. They do not necessarily go back to the foundation, as did Jones and Le (2017), but may cover a shorter period of time retrospectively (Rautiainen et al., 2012; Wielsma & Brunninge, 2019; Schwab et al., 2017).

A challenge qualitative surveys face in general, is the difficulty of generalization, and this limitation is also evident in family business surveys. In the case of retrospective research, which relies heavily on archival data and documents, even the credibility and adequacy of the data sources may be questioned.

With reference to longitudinal qualitative research, short time spans, small sample sizes as mentioned above (if not handled properly) and the exclusion of key respondents from the interviews can be further factors that reduce its value. An example of this is the research conducted by Wielsma and Brunninge (2019) on individual and family entrepreneurial identity, where it was not possible to interview the brother of the successor, although his opinion would have been very important for a comprehensive study of the topic.

In qualitative studies, researchers face a number of difficulties: in extreme cases, the validity of studies based on a single case may be questioned, it may be difficult to draw generalized conclusions from the results, and if the research is retrospective and relies heavily on archival data and documents, the validity of the data sources may be questioned. A brief time span, a small sample size, and the possible omission of key stakeholders from those interviewed can significantly reduce the value of the research results.

Table 5 summarizes the opportunities and challenges of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Table 5
Opportunities and Challenges of Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

Quantitative approach	
Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suitable for studying groups of firms, it can consider the fact that entrepreneurial families rarely have a single firm but operate a group of firms, • a large sample size allows the use of specific statistical methodologies, • allows comparisons between family and non-family businesses, • interesting methodological examples of supplementing questionnaire surveys with historical, archival data, • reliable surveys based on sound methodological foundations can form the basis for a wide range of research, • large sample sizes, stable data coverage and long periods increase the reliability and value of research and provide a wide range of analytical possibilities, • valuable analyses can be carried out even without primary data collection, using public data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the data collection methodology can rely heavily on the cultural specificities of the country under study and there can be difficulties in sample selection and data collection, which is why most surveys cannot be replicated in the context of other countries, • country-specific results, lack of international comparison, • specificities of sample selection often mean that results cannot be generalized, • inadequate sample size and short period reduce the validity and reliability of research results, • attrition, • due to the sample selection and data collection methodology, it tends to focus on large enterprises (listed companies) and is less suitable for micro and small enterprises, • frequent use of secondary data sources, lack of original research.
Qualitative approach	
Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examines practical problems of family businesses in real life, • provides an opportunity for a better understanding of certain phenomena and problems and their interrelationships, • provides an opportunity for international comparison, • retrospectively, can cover a long period, • templates and strategies to improve validity and reliability offer many possibilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • validity and reliability of single case studies are questionable, • generalization of results may be difficult, • if the research is retrospective and relies heavily on archival data and documents, the credibility of the data sources may be questionable, • short period, small sample size (if templates or strategies to improve validity and reliability are not applied), and omission of key stakeholders during interviews may significantly reduce the value of research findings.

5. Conclusions and Limitations

Cross-sectional family business research studies yield interesting outcomes but rarely seem to capture the deep layers of family firms' operation. They only rely on information collected at the moment of data collection, while the situation, due to the changes in family dynamics, may significantly change over time. Future family business research methods should handle the problem raised by Hoy and Pu (2012), according to whom current methods and models have failed to address the variations caused by national context, ethnic, religious, and other external influences. Our study aimed to map the topics examined and the methodologies used in longitudinal studies in family business research. We examined the topics and methodologies covered in the literature and the advantages and challenges of each methodological approach. We concluded that among the seven topics we identified, most studies were published on family business governance, operation, succession, and the internationalization of family firms. Most longitudinal family business research was based on quantitative methodologies, but the proportion of studies using qualitative approaches is also gaining momentum, while the use of mixed-method approaches is negligible.

Looking at the methodological approach of longitudinal studies by topic areas, the quantitative methodology seems to be typical. The exception is the topic of succession, where 9 out of the 15 papers sampled are qualitative. While qualitative methods help to understand a process, the strength of quantitative methods lies in verification. The dominance of qualitative methods in longitudinal family business succession research may suggest that we still need to understand this process and examine its components in more depth. The importance of the topic of generational transition within family business research may also explain the predominance of qualitative methodologies in the longitudinal study of the succession process in family businesses, as indicated by the high number of relevant studies. With the expansion of this topic area, the need for a deeper, more comprehensive study of the phenomena and trends identified naturally arises, and qualitative methodologies are particularly useful in this respect. Van Burg et al. (2020) encourage qualitative approaches in entrepreneurship research. They recommend using different methods, including less conventional ones.

The peculiarity of qualitative research is a smaller sample size compared to quantitative surveys, which carries the risk of attrition (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Careful sample selection and the involvement of stable companies, the plan to maintain family ownership and leadership in the future, and commitment to scientific endeavors may help to avoid this difficulty in longitudinal research.

Case study-based research is an increasingly accepted and popular method in entrepreneurship research and is also gaining momentum in

family business studies (De Massis & Kammerlander, 2020; Rovelli et al., 2021). In the methodology proposed by De Massis and Kotlar (2014), researchers are encouraged to build case study databases on the examined family businesses, which include interviews with the family members and key non-family employees, company documents collected during the fieldwork, media appearances concerning the business and the owner's family, and financial reports. Examining the data systematically collected over the years with the case study methodology creates an opportunity for in-depth analysis of the development trajectory of family businesses.

We consider that the qualitative longitudinal case study approach is a promising future method in family business research. We hope that our study will contribute to the perspective longitudinal research stream of family businesses.

Our study bears some limitations. We collected our data from the Web of Science database and the limitations of this database may be reflected in our study. Two of our researchers conducted the article selection process manually and, despite the greatest care, it is possible that valuable articles were left out of the analysis. The article selection and analysis process limited the comparability of our results with more comprehensive literature reviews on family businesses. The results relate only to longitudinal, empirical research papers. The period covered by our research is narrow, there are more comprehensive and up-to-date literature reviews available (e.g., Rovelli et al., 2021).

Even with its limitations, our research shows that the longitudinal study of family businesses is an internationally accepted research practice, covering a wide range of topics and using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

We hope that despite its limitations, our analysis will provide useful information and inspiration for scholars planning to conduct longitudinal family business research.

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