CALL FOR PAPERS

Interactive Research Conference

Internationalization of Small and Medium-sized Family Firms – What's Special About It?

Free University of Bozen–Bolzano, Italy
April 28-30, 2020

Submission Deadline: December 22, 2019

Why is this topic of special interest?

Globalization and digitalization have offered recently many new opportunities for firms of any size to expand the boundaries of their business activities beyond domestic markets, i.e. to internationalize on both ends of the value chain. Beyond providing opportunities, however, internationalization exposes firms to several threats, particularly for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). While suffering from liability of smallness and foreignness, SMEs are forced to redesign their international operations by dealing with a variety of entry modes, new business models and new configurations of global value chains. On the other hand, however, the rapid development of new digital technologies enables SMEs to bridge geographic distance barriers at low costs and combine sets of globally dispersed resources, hence, to overcome their strategic disadvantage of limited financial and managerial resources compared to their larger competitors and create sustainable competitive advantage (Enderwick & Buckley, 2017).

Family-owned SMEs, representing the majority of firms worldwide, are equally affected by this fast-changing environment. Internationalization at large is a crucial determinant for family firms that need to sustain their competitiveness in order to survive and thrive in the long run (Arregle, Duran, Hitt, & Van Essen, 2017; Hennart, Majocchi, & Forlani, 2019). Not surprisingly, scholars are increasingly devoting attention toward the process of internationalization of family firms, mostly comparing their
attitude and behavior with those of their nonfamily counterparts (De Massis, Frattini, Majocchi, & Piscitello, 2018; Eddleston, Sarathy, & Banalieva, 2019). In fact, family SMEs’ specific idiosyncrasies such as their centralized administrative power, their patient capital and decision-making processes based on the coexistence of financial and non-financial considerations (Kotlar, Signori, De Massis, & Vismara, 2018) are shaping their approach to internationalization. Moreover, the presence of strong relationships, not only among family members but also with their employees and local communities, keeps them seemingly more attached to their domestic market as to protect their socioemotional wealth, i.e. affective endowments of family members toward the firm, including social ties with stakeholders, emotional attachment, and self-identification (Gomez-Mejia, Haynes, Nuñez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007; Schulze & Kellermanns, 2015). Finally, family SMEs may suffer from limited financial and managerial resources, aversion to accept non-family expertise and fear of losing firm control (Kontinen & Ojala, 2010) all of which may limit their international growth options. Despite these assumptions, family SMEs are found to increasingly grow internationally most likely due to characteristics such as long-term orientation, stronger social capital and better communication constituting a source of competitive advantage in international markets (Pukall & Calabrò, 2014).

What research perspectives and opportunities emerge?

Scholars have deployed commendable effort to investigate the internationalization process of family firms. However, most of the studies have analyzed the process focusing merely on exports of final products. Although interesting findings have been published regarding the launch of products on foreign markets, various areas of entry modes beyond export have been left scantly understood. As an example, further research could explore the use of collaborative strategies, strategic alliances, and joint ventures (Nippa & Reuer, 2019) in the course of internationalization process of family SMEs. Considering that internationalization involves various types of knowledge and expertise embodied in human capital as well as social capital embedded in relationships with foreign partners (Buckley & Strange, 2011), the understanding of how family SMEs idiosyncrasies affect international governance structure differently from conventional organizations is worth of further investigation. A focus on the entire value chain and the adoption of other international business theories, such as internalization theory (Buckley & Casson, 1976; Banalieva & Dhanaraj, 2019; Benito, Petersen, & Welch, 2019), in the family SMEs context, may open new ventures on family firms’ internationalization research. Moreover, as not all families are the same, the characteristics of the family that owns and/or manages the business are likely to shape the governance mechanisms through which the business operates internationally. Furthermore, the development of a multidisciplinary understanding of family business internationalization through the adoption of psychological and sociological approaches is encouraged in order to grasp the individual and relational implications of expanding the business in foreign countries. The characteristics of families, such as kin, blood-related relationships and clans, are likely to exert strong influences on the way family firms manage their relationships with foreign stakeholders as their suppliers and customers. Finally, undertaking internationalization activities does not always lead to benefits. It would therefore be interesting if scholars explore the process of de-internationalization of family businesses and its implications not only on the business but also on the family, as well as if they more rigorously assess the economic and non-economics (e.g., family-centered) benefits and detriments associated with internationalization activities.
In the light of a number of interesting studies and publications, our conference aims at developing further understanding of a wide range of areas, which offer manifold opportunities for future inquiry, particularly in relation to family SMEs. Important research questions that may be explored are, for example, the following:

- Does the strength of family ties influence the process of internationalization? Does generational transition affect the intent of family firms to internationalize?
- What is the potential of new digital technologies for reshaping business functions and global value chains of family SMEs? Do family SMEs’ characteristics affect the global value chain governance differently from large MNEs and how do they decide for example on internalization and outsourcing of activities?
- To what extent do new digital technologies trigger off new governance and coordination mechanisms of family SMEs?
- How can family SMEs in craft industries leverage digitalization to internationalize as a means to survive?
- Do family SMEs bridge the cultural distance in a different way than non-family SMEs through building personal relationships with foreign partners? Are family SMEs more willing to build collaborations with foreign family SMEs? Why/why not?
- Is there any risk of tradition/heritage dilution/loss in externalizing operations abroad for family SMEs and how can they prevent or mitigate such risks?
- What are the socioemotional drivers that shape the location on international operations of family SMEs? Do family SMEs de-internationalize differently from other types of business (e.g. large firms, small nonfamily firms)?
- To what extent do internationalization strategies and processes of family-firm SMEs from different institutional contexts (e.g., developed economies, emerging economies) similar?
- What are the economic and non-economic (e.g., family-centered) benefits and detriments associated with internationalization in the family business context?

**Whom we target?**

We invite international scholars including senior PhDs and Post-Docs interested in the field of internationalization of SMEs particularly family SMEs to submit their related research and work-in-progress to our highly interactive conference. While family SMEs is the core theme of the 3rd ISME conference at the University of Bolzano, we are open as well for new research that addresses the formulation and implementation process of internationalization strategies of SMEs, antecedents and success factors, or the impact of different institutional regimes (tax, intellectual property rights, financial support) preferably based on comparative samples (family versus non-family; SME versus large firms; multinational versus domestic enterprises). As interdisciplinary research is repeatedly called for, we explicitly invite researchers from different (sub)disciplines such as organizational behavior, human resource management, entrepreneurship, marketing, innovation management, sociology, psychology, economics as well as accounting to share their approaches and insights with colleagues.

We are particularly interested in empirical and conceptual papers that advance existing knowledge about the internationalization of family SMEs. Although we encourage to submit work-in-progress deriving from current research projects as well as controversial and provocative essays that addresses innovative
research questions, we need to emphasize that submissions must comply to scientific standards and have to be of high quality regarding application of theories, appropriate methods, comprehensive analyses, as well as formal requirements in order to be accepted for the conference and for possible inclusion in the conference proceedings.

**How to apply and submit your work?**

At first stage, we ask for submitting brief summaries (extended abstracts) that must not exceed 1,600 words (excluding reference lists) and address a specific SME-related internationalization topic preferably combined with family business. All submission will undergo a review process and those authors whose papers are accepted are invited and expected to present their research at the conference in spring 2020.

**Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submission of extended abstracts</td>
<td>December 22, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance Notifications:</td>
<td>January 31, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Program published:</td>
<td>February 29, 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Keynote Speakers**

- **Peter Buckley**  
  Professor of International Business  
  Leeds University Business School

- **Bill Schulze**  
  David Eccles Professor and Chair of the Management Department  
  David Eccles School of Business, University of Utah

**Program Committee**

- **Gaetano Aiello**  
  (University of Florence)

- **Marjaana Gunkel**  
  (Free University of Bozen)

- **Jean-François Hennart**  
  (Tilburg University)

- **Thomas Hutzschenreuther**  
  (TU Munich)

- **Nadine Kammerlander**  
  (WHU Koblenz)

- **Elko Klijn**  
  (Old Dominion University)

- **Josip Kotlar**  
  (Politecnico di Milano)

- **Antonio Majocchi**  
  (University of Pavia)

- **Lucia Piscitello**  
  (Henley Business School)

**Conference Program Chairs**

- **Alfredo De Massis**  
  (Free University of Bozen)  
  alfredo.demassis@unibz.it

- **Michael Nippa**  
  (Free University of Bozen)  
  michael.nippa@unibz.it

**Conference Organizing Committee**

- **Emanuela Rondi**  
  (Free University of Bozen)  
  emanuela.rondi@unibz.it

- **Valerio Veglio**  
  (Free University of Bozen)  
  valerio.veglio@unibz.it
Interested scholars may contact Prof. Alfredo De Massis or Prof. Michael Nippa or any other member of the conference organizers for any kind of request and may already attach a draft of their research idea. Additional information will be soon available on our website: https://ios.events.unibz.it/

We are looking forward to your submission and participation!

About ISME

This year - the 3rd ISME Conference / Developmental Workshop is held in collaboration with the Centre for Family Business Management at the Free University of Bolzano. Our primary goal is to bring together international scholars, who are conducting research on the internationalization of SMEs and especially family firms (e.g. success factors, governance, processes) or are planning to do so.

REFERENCES
