

Review

Practical implications of women's participation in family businesses: A systematic review

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Abstract: Presently, there exists a burgeoning trend of female entrepreneurs worldwide, notably within the realm of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), many of which manifest as family-run enterprises. The systematic literature review endeavors to construct an integrative framework concerning the practical ramifications of female involvement in family businesses by amalgamating extant global studies. The findings elucidate the practical implications inherent in female participation across global family businesses, concurrently furnishing a reservoir of prospects for prospective investigations. The deduction posits the imperative eradication of gender disparities, cognizant that gender parity underpins economic and financial advancement and is contingent upon female involvement. Furthermore, familial enterprises are urged to acknowledge and integrate women's contributions in entrepreneurial decision-making processes.

Keywords: gender studies; family enterprise; practical implications

1. Introduction

Currently, there is a growing trend of female entrepreneurs worldwide, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), many of which are family businesses (Bäckvall and Bjursell, 2011; Castillo Castillo et al., 2022). Moreover, studies on the attitudes of men and women regarding the management of a family business are in vogue, highlighting differences based on gender roles (Vadnjaj and Zupan, 2011). It is evident that family enterprises must encourage and support women who seek to start, manage, and establish businesses, recognizing that gender equity alone is insufficient for their integration into organizational structures (Maseda et al., 2022). This Systematic Literature Review significantly contributes to identifying the relationship between gender perspective and family business. Consequently, researchers can comprehend the limitations affecting women's access to and advancement within institutions. Therefore, to harness the generated insights and address potential deficiencies, this review aims to develop an integrative framework on the practical implications of women's participation in family businesses by synthesizing available studies globally.

This systematic literature review (SLR) provides a comprehensive analysis of the global literature on the involvement of women in family businesses. Although gender equality has been a focus in various business disciplines, there are gaps in understanding how women's roles influence leadership, ownership, and succession in family businesses. The SLR aims to bridge this gap by synthesizing key findings from

international studies. This review contributes to ongoing discussions about gender parity, leadership dynamics, and the practical implications for future research.

2. Materials and methods

In the present research, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted on women’s participation in family businesses. For its development, the guidelines of the PRISMA statement were followed (Kitchenham, 2004, 2007; Moher et al., 2009; Pardal-Peláez and Pardal-Refoyo, 2020).

The systematic search was conducted on 30 July 2023, aiming to retrieve the maximum number of documents related to the study’s theme. The review process began with the selection of abstracts that met the initial criteria of addressing women’s roles in family businesses. Full texts were then assessed for inclusion based on relevance, research methods, and geographic diversity. Studies were included only if they provided empirical data on women’s participation in management, ownership, or succession within family businesses. This process followed strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the highest quality of data. **Table 1** displays the specific search equation applied in SCOPUS, WoS¹, and their respective outcomes:

Table 1. Search equation.

Database	Search equation	Resulting documents
SCOPUS	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“family firm*” OR “family business*” OR “family enterprise*” OR “family owner*” OR “family SME*” OR “family control*” OR “family involvement”) AND (“firm*” OR “business*”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Gender Discrimination” OR “Glass Ceiling” OR “vertical segregation” OR “gender” OR “woman” OR “women” OR “female” OR “wife” OR “daughter” OR “sister” OR “spouse”)	986
WoS	TS = (“family firm*” OR “family business*” OR “family enterprise*” OR “family owner*” OR “family SME*” OR “family control*” OR “family involvement”) AND (“firm*” OR “business*”) AND TS = (“Gender Discrimination” OR “Glass Ceiling” OR “vertical segregation” OR “gender” OR “woman” OR “women” OR “female” OR “wife” OR “daughter” OR “sister” OR “spouse”)	557

Initially, the search yielded 1543 documents. Subsequently, 363 duplicate documents were removed. Then, a search was conducted for all original articles published up to December 2022, utilizing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method methodologies, written in English or Spanish, with titles containing keywords related to women’s participation in family businesses. Articles irrelevant to the study’s theme, literature reviews, and those outside the domains of Business, Management, Economics, and Business Finance, as well as those inaccessible in full text, were excluded. Following the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, the search resulted in 39 documents. Abstracts were reviewed, and based on this examination, 10 studies with non-empirical (secondary) designs were discarded, leaving a total of 29 studies.

3. Methods

To conduct the systematic review on the study’s theme, searches were performed in the SCOPUS and WoS databases, yielding 29 relevant documents addressing women’s participation in family businesses, as detailed in **Figure 1**. The PRISMA diagram (**Figure 1**) illustrates the steps followed in the study selection process, from

identifying the initial number of studies to the final set of 29 documents used in the review. This diagram helps visualize the methodical approach used to ensure the quality and relevance of the reviewed articles.

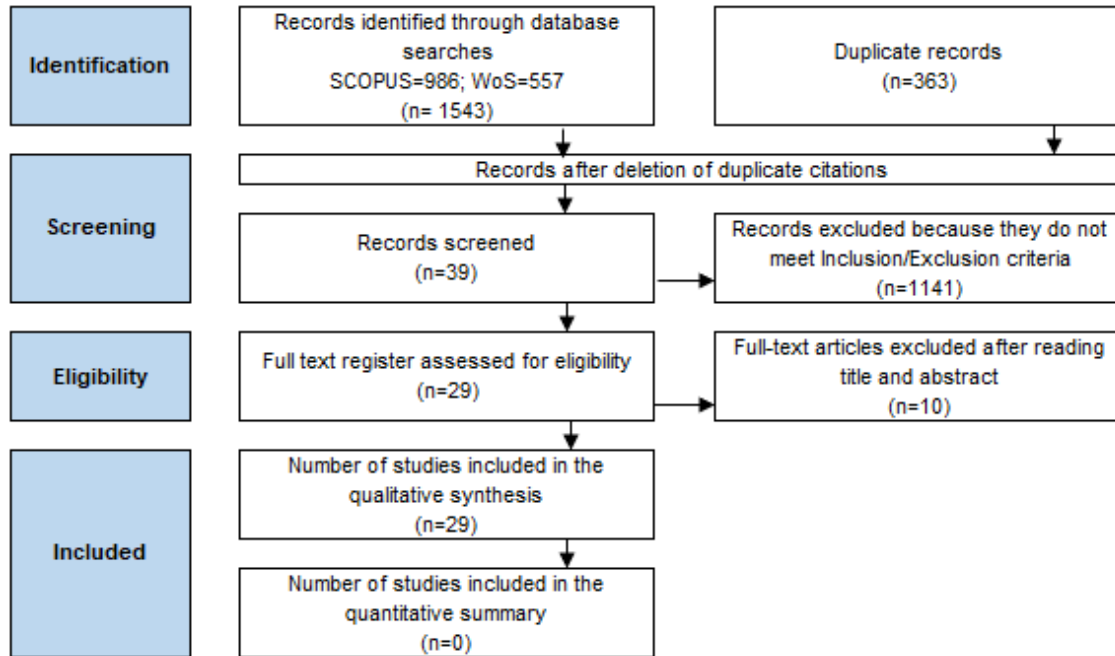


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram.

Source: Based on Moher et al. (2009).

3.1. Characteristics of the studies

Table 2 presents a summary of the 29 articles that contain topics of interest on women’s participation in family business.

Table 2. Characteristics of the studies.

Code	Author	Paper title	Country
A1	(Barrett and Moores, 2009)	Spotlights and shadows: Preliminary findings about the experiences of women in family business leadership roles	Australia
A2	(Vadnjal and Zupan, 2011)	Family business as a career opportunity for women	Slovenia
A3	(Bäckvall and Bjursell, 2011)	Family business women in media discourse; the business role and the mother role	Sweden
A4	(Welsh et al., 2014)	Japanese Women Entrepreneurs: Implications for Family Firms	USA
A5	(Gundry et al., 2014)	Women-owned family businesses in transitional economies: Key influences on firm innovativeness and sustainability	USA
A6	(Merono-Cerdan et al., 2017)	Women in management: Are family firms somehow special?	Spain
A7	(Aldamiz-Echevarría et al., 2017)	Gender issues related to choosing the successor in the family business	Spain
A8	(Chadwick and Dawson, 2018)	Women leaders and firm performance in family businesses: An examination of financial and nonfinancial outcomes	Canada
A9	(Arzubiaga et al., 2018)	Entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance in family SMEs: The moderating effects of family, women, and strategic involvement in the board of directors	Spain
A10	(Welsh et al., 2018)	Women Entrepreneurs and Family Firm Heterogeneity: Evidence from an Emerging Economy	USA
A11	(Chen et al., 2018)	Female leadership in contemporary Chinese family firms	China

Table 2. (Continued).

Code	Author	Paper title	Country
A12	(Akhmedova et al., 2018)	Barriers or motivation? career progress in the family firm: Daughters' perspective	Spain
A13	(Campopiano et al., 2019)	Family and non-family women on the board of directors: Effects on corporate citizenship behavior in family-controlled fashion firms	England
A14	(Cruz et al., 2019)	When Do Women Make a Better Table? Examining the Influence of Women Directors on Family Firm's Corporate Social Performance	Spain
A15	(González et al., 2020)	Does gender really matter in the boardroom? Evidence from closely held family firms	Colombia
A16	(Akhmedova et al., 2020)	Daughters' careers in family business: Motivation types and family-specific barriers	Spain
A17	(Nájera-Vázquez et al., 2020)	Women, corporate governance and economic efficiency: Analysis for the case of agri-food family firms	Spain
A18	(Saidat et al., 2020)	Female directors, family ownership and firm performance in Jordan	Jordan
A19	(García-Sánchez et al., 2021)	The Influence of Female Directors and Institutional Pressures on Corporate Social Responsibility in Family Firms in Latin America	Spain
A20	(McAdam et al., 2021)	Anointed or appointed? Father-daughter succession within the family business	Ireland
A21	(Xian et al., 2021)	Negotiating the female successor-leader role within family business succession in China	England
A22	(Saeed et al., 2021)	Read between the lines: Board gender diversity, family ownership, and risk-taking in Indian high-tech firms	Pakistan
A23	(Sarkar and Selarka, 2021)	Women on board and performance of family firms: Evidence from India	India
A24	(Bannò et al., 2021)	Family firms, women, and innovation	Italy
A25	(García-Meca et al., 2022)	Board gender diversity and performance in family firms: Exploring the faultline of family ties	Spain
A26	(Meroño-Cerdán and Merono-Cerdan, 2022)	Unexpected Successor in Family Firms: Opportunity or Trap for Women?	Spain
A27	(García and Poletti-Hughes, 2022)	Leverage in family firms: The moderating role of female directors and board quality	England
A28	(Mubeen et al., 2022)	The Nexus among Family Business, Household Finances and Women Empowerment: Evidence from PDHS 2017-18	Pakistan
A29	(Kalonaityte and Nulleshi, 2023)	Gender roles or gendered goals? Women's return to rural family business	Sweden

Source: Based on the analysis of the results obtained from the systematic search in SCOPUS and WoS.

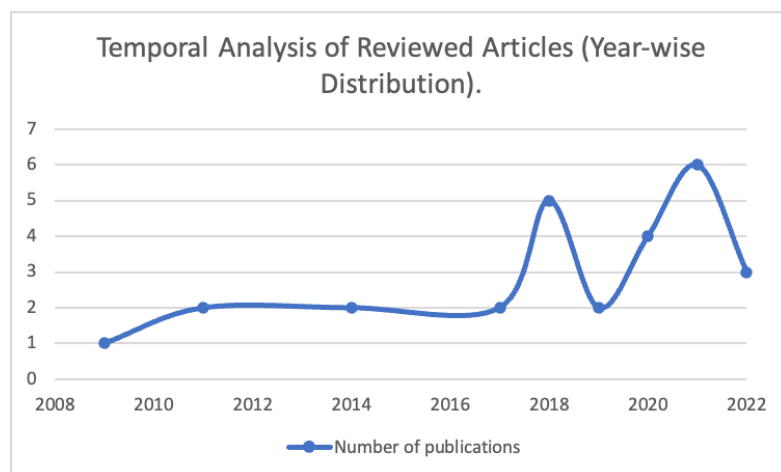


Figure 2. Temporal analysis.

Source: Systematic search.

In **Figure 2**, a temporal analysis graph shows the distribution of reviewed articles by year of publication. Reveals a growing academic interest in the topic of women's

participation in family businesses, with a significant increase in studies published between 2015 and 2022. This supports the notion that gender issues in family enterprises are becoming increasingly important in the global research landscape.

The spatial analysis shows that academic contributions are concentrated in Europe and North America, with relatively few studies emerging from regions such as Africa and South America. This geographic skew suggests a potential limitation in the representativeness of the findings, as contributions from developing countries remain underrepresented in the global discourse on women in family businesses (**Figure 3**).

3.2. Practical implications of women’s participation in family businesses



Figure 3. Geographic distribution in which studies on the subject are reported.

Table 3 below, after a thorough review of the literature, sets out the main practical implications of women’s participation in family businesses according to empirical studies.

Table 3. Practical implications.

Code	Practical implications
A1	Family-controlled businesses require leadership and entrepreneurial input, and women are increasingly assuming leadership roles in them, so more opportunities should be provided for women to learn leadership and entrepreneurial roles (Barrett and Moores, 2009).
A2	Family businesses should recognize and reward women’s contributions to important business decisions. They should also consider adopting a more feminine management style, focusing on communication, product/service quality, support for employee ambitions, teamwork, and inclusive environments (Vadnjaj and Zupan, 2011).
A3	Media representations of women in family businesses can significantly impact how society views and values their contributions (Bäckvall and Bjursell, 2011).
A4	Policymakers and business support organizations should focus on creating a supportive environment for women entrepreneurs in Japan. This includes providing long-term customized support systems that address the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, such as balancing work and family responsibilities (Welsh et al., 2014).
A5	Family businesses in emerging economies can create new products, services, and processes that add value to their market, which can strongly influence their sustainability (Gundry et al., 2014).
A6	Family businesses have a higher presence of women in management positions compared to non-family businesses. Gender differences in the type of company and manager profile found in management literature disappear in family businesses, except for a sectorial gender effect. Women managers in family businesses have less managerial experience, but only in first-generation family businesses (Merono-Cerdan et al., 2017).

Table 3. (Continued).

Code	Practical implications
A7	Gender is not considered a barrier to succession in family businesses, but there are more male successors than female ones. Birth order influences the succession process more if the first child is male than if it is female. Family women are highly valued as family business managers (Aldamiz-Echevarría et al., 2017).
A8	Family business owners and their advisors can benefit from knowing that having senior women leaders on their senior management teams can contribute to both financial and non-financial performance. Female leaders can become role models for younger generations in family businesses, encouraging more women to advance in their careers (Chadwick and Dawson, 2018).
A9	Family SMEs should consider having a diverse board of directors, including both family and non-family members, to enhance their business success. Gender diversity on the board can positively impact the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance in family SMEs (Arzubiaga et al., 2018).
A10	Female entrepreneurs who start their family businesses with borrowed funds tend to perform better than those who use their own savings (Welsh et al., 2018).
A11	The variation in the role of female family members in contemporary Chinese family businesses may lead to the emergence of female leadership within these enterprises, thereby promoting family cohesion and adjusting the family system to accommodate women in leadership roles, prioritizing work-life balance and adopting a participative style in decision-making processes (Chen et al., 2018).
A12	Family businesses should consider the perception of barriers when assessing employee motivation. It is important to emphasize the significance of work-life balance, monetary compensation, and smooth professional progression as areas of extrinsic motivation for women in family businesses (Akhmedova et al., 2018).
A13	Family businesses should contemplate having female directors on their boards to enhance their participation in corporate citizenship behavior. Non-family female directors are more likely to promote engagement with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), while family-affiliated female directors are more inclined to drive philanthropic engagement (Campopiano et al., 2019).
A14	Family businesses with more female directors tend to exhibit better financial performance (Cruz et al., 2019).
A15	Having female directors on the board can positively impact company performance, contingent on whether they have family ties or not. Female directors without family connections are likely to possess exceptional talent and can contribute to enhancing company performance. Conversely, family-affiliated female directors may negatively impact company performance as their appointments might be driven by nepotism or dynastic management (González et al., 2020).
A16	Family businesses need to understand the factors influencing the presence of daughters in high-level positions and develop strategies to promote gender diversity and inclusion (Akhmedova et al., 2020).
A17	The presence of women on the boards of directors and in the general assemblies of shareholders of Spanish agri-food family businesses has a positive and significant influence on economic efficiency (Nájera-Vázquez et al., 2020).
A18	Appointing female directors based solely on gender may not necessarily lead to better financial performance in family and non-family businesses. It is more likely to have a positive impact on performance if directors are appointed based on qualifications and knowledge (Saidat et al., 2020).
A19	Having a critical mass of female board members can positively influence a company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices. The effect of female board members on CSR practices does not significantly differ between family and non-family businesses (Garcia-Sanchez et al., 2021).
A20	Succession should be seen as a dynamic and social "becoming" process rather than a predictable set of events. Successor daughters construct a legitimate successor identity, and the role of the incumbent father in this construction is crucial (McAdam et al., 2021).
A21	Chinese family businesses should understand the challenges daughters face in assuming leadership roles and develop strategies to support their daughters in such leadership positions, adopting a more inclusive succession approach (Xian et al., 2021).
A22	Companies operating in high-tech sectors may benefit from having more female executives on their boards as they tend to take more risks, which can lead to better performance. Companies should consider industry context when making decisions about gender diversity on boards (Saeed et al., 2021).
A23	Having independent female directors on corporate boards can positively impact the performance of family businesses, enabling policies for the promotion of gender quotas on corporate boards (Sarkar and Selarka, 2021).
A24	Including women in leadership positions in family businesses can improve innovation performance. Leadership roles can help mitigate the negative effects of biases against women in family businesses (Bannò et al., 2021).

Table 3. (Continued).

Code	Practical implications
A25	Having women on the board of directors can positively impact the performance of family businesses. However, there may be negative effects if there are too many family members on the board, as conflicts with non-family members may arise. Thus, a balance should be sought (García-Meca et al., 2022).
A26	Family firms can provide a good opportunity for women to become CEOs through succession planning. Succession planning is crucial for distinguishing between identified, nurtured, and committed candidates versus those appointed due to unforeseen circumstances with adverse conditions (Meroño-Cerdán and Merono-Cerdan, 2022).
A27	The involvement of women in decision-making related to economic competitiveness and innovation should be considered (Garcia and Poletti-Hughes, 2022).
A28	Family businesses can play a significant role in empowering women and fostering their entrepreneurship. Educated and employed women are more empowered than those who are unemployed. Greater gender equality has several advantages, including better development outcomes for future generations and increased economic production (Mubeen et al., 2022).
A29	Women opting to work in rural family businesses seek non-material benefits such as work-life balance and social support. Therefore, rural family businesses can offer flexible work arrangements and create a supportive work environment to attract and retain women (Kalonaityte and Nulleshi, 2022).

4. Discussion

The study allows for the recognition of certain limitations, demands, and possibilities that women face in family businesses, highlighting how leadership and entrepreneurship develop within organizational communities of a familial nature (Barrett and Moores, 2009). The impact of female directors is positive on aspects related to the behavior of family businesses, such as innovation and corporate social responsibility (Bannò et al., 2021; García-Meca et al., 2022; Sarkar and Selarka, 2021).

However, there is a need to provide entrepreneurship skills and competencies to women entrepreneurs, recognizing them as active agents seeking to balance gender-based division of labor, wage labor, and even community participation (Kalonaityte and Nulleshi, 2022). On the other hand, in terms of succession, the experiences of successors in other cultural contexts are enriching (Saeed et al., 2021), measuring the intentions and preparedness of pre-candidates, specifically the attitudes and circumstances explaining the acceptance of women as unexpected successors (Meroño-Cerdán and Merono-Cerdan, 2022).

Furthermore, regarding future research, studies can be directed towards exploring the relationship between family businesses, the empowerment, and performance of women in different contexts and regions considering demographic variables of social identities such as race, ethnicity, and sex (Mubeen et al., 2022), as well as cultural or social factors, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers of economic competitiveness and innovation (Garcia and Poletti-Hughes, 2022). Additionally, challenges and barriers faced by women to start and lead their businesses should be identified, and strategies developed to overcome them (Mubeen et al., 2022).

The findings demonstrate that the presence of women in leadership positions positively influences family business dynamics, including innovation, corporate social responsibility, and succession planning. However, cultural factors and industry-specific challenges continue to present barriers. Notably, the digital transformation and the global crisis of COVID-19 have reshaped the role of women in family

businesses, as technological adoption and new work environments have shifted traditional gender roles. Future research should examine how these shifts impact long-term gender equity in leadership and ownership structures.

Future studies should explore the intersection of gender with other social identities, such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background, to provide a more nuanced understanding of women's roles in family enterprises. Additionally, research could investigate the influence of female leadership on business resilience during economic downturns, especially in industries most affected by global crises.

5. Conclusions

The research reveals the necessity of eliminating gender disparities, understanding that gender equality fosters economic and financial development and cannot be achieved without the participation of women. It is imperative for family businesses to acknowledge women's involvement in business decision-making and succession planning, considering that gender is not a barrier.

The research reveals the necessity of eliminating gender disparities, understanding that gender equality fosters economic and financial development and cannot be achieved without the participation of women. It is imperative for family businesses to acknowledge women's involvement in business decision-making and succession planning, considering that gender is not a barrier. Among the practical implications, it is determined that family businesses contribute to the development of local communities and play a significant role in empowering women, recognizing the need to provide them with technical and practical knowledge on leadership, entrepreneurship, and marketing to create sustainable businesses.

At the same time, it is crucial for family businesses to recognize women's participation in business decision-making and succession planning, acknowledging that gender is not a barrier to succession. This recognition helps prevent "heiresses" from becoming unexpected successors in hostile environments, allowing them to prepare and have a positive and significant impact on organizational management and leadership, leveraging their innovative and leadership qualities, while acknowledging their participation in business decision-making.

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