Emotions In Family Firms' Internationalisation: A Review and Suggestions for Future Research

Abstract

While emotions in family firms (FF) are increasingly attracting attention among FF researchers, research on emotions in the context of internationalisation of FFs has received limited attention to date. In this work, we aim to stimulate research development in this particular field of inquiry by providing an understanding of how emotions have been explored in the FFs internationalisation context and where future research on FF internationalisation from an emotional standpoint could be directed to. To do so, we follow the integrative literature review methodology and collect, integrate and synthesise studies from the literature streams of internationalisation, family firms and family science. Our main contribution lies in the development of an integrative framework of the emergence of emotions in FF context in their internationalisation. Moreover, considering the heterogeneity of families that own and manage FFs, we capture nuances in our developed framework across different FF types and suggest future research questions and a family systems approach for further exploration into the role of emotions in FF internationalisation processes.

Keywords: Emotions, Internationalisation, Family firms, Socio-emotional wealth, Family interactions

1. Introduction

Emotions play a powerful role in family led firms (hereafter FFs). Emotions influence family managers decision-making and behaviour (Brundin & Languilaire, 2023; Kammerlander, 2023), that in turn, affect the organisation's strategic behaviour and performance (Ashkanasy, 2003; De Massis et al., 2023). In the context of internationalisation, managers' emotional responses are likely to affect how they perceive opportunities and challenges, how they interact with diverse cultures, and how they manage uncertainty and risk in unfamiliar markets (e.g., Wang et al., 2023; Leonidou et al., 2021). Although this is true for all managers, the unique dynamics in FFs, such as FFs' attachment to kinship, binding social ties and identification (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2007; Smajić et al., 2023), make family managers to experience heightened emotional responses to decisions involving international expansion (Kampouri & Hajidimitriou, 2022; Calabrò et al., 2023), hence triggering internationalisation choices, such as willingness to enter or invest in foreign markets, foreign market targeting, internationalisation speed, thereby resulting in different internationalisation outcomes.

Nevertheless, research on emotions in the context of the internationalisation of FFs specifically is limited (e.g., de Groote, 2023; Debellis et al., 2021), yet, important for a fully understanding of their international expansion. Without such an understanding we miss the opportunity to develop practices that will help FFs to navigate the complexities of international expansion. This is because we cannot fully capture the idiosyncrasies of FFs (De Massis et al., 2023) in their internationalisation decisions and comprehend FFs' international uncertainty avoidance and the aptitude to take small rather than big steps (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020). A lack of such an understanding can also limit the development of strong theorizing in the FF internationalisation field (Newbert *et al*., 2022; Welch *et al*., 2022).

Taking these into account, in this study we aim to spark development of future research on the exploration of emotions in FF internationalisation research, by exploring first how

emotions have been explored in the FFs internationalisation context and second where future research on FF internationalisation from an emotional standpoint could be directed to. To do so, we first systematically gather and critique the relevant FF internationalisation research. Next, we synthesize key findings and integrate them with relevant research on emotions from the FF and the family science fields (Combs et al., 2020). By adopting family system theory (Broderick & Smith, 1979) from the family science field, we develop an integrative framework of the emergence of emotions in FFs' internationalisation. The core assumptions of the family system theory are that family members are emotionally linked, and that relationships within the family, community, and society are mutually influential. Hence, we view the use of the family system theory as an important one since it can help to unpack the generative mechanisms of emotions in FF internationalisation, by focusing on the family members' emotions.

Our contribution is threefold. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first review that evaluates the past and discuss the ambiguities in the existing relevant FF internationalisation literature. A lack of such a discussion could hinder understanding about decision-making in internationalised FFs as well as provide conflicting future findings on FFs internationalisation practices. Hence, we risk missing the opportunity to develop strong theorising in FF internationalisation research (Newbert *et al*., 2022; Welch *et al*., 2022). Second, we develop an integrative framework that articulates the various levels of analysis in FFs (organisational level, family level, individual level) discussed in the FF field, as well as possible events that make emotions emerge within these levels discussed in the family science field. Hence, this work enhances an understanding of the knowledge base pertaining to emotions in FF internationalization and enables theory building (Jaakkola, 2020). Third, through our integrative framework, we identify scantly investigated but relevant areas of research and based on the family system theory we provide directions for future inquiry.

The study is structured as follows. In the next section (section 2) we offer a critique on the need to explore emotions – which are central to understanding FF phenomena –in the current FF internationalisation literature. We then present the methodology followed (section 3). Next, we present key findings (section 4) and propose future research questions based on a proposed integrative framework on the emergence of emotions (section 5). Finally, we discuss the theoretical contributions and limitations and implications of our study (section 6).

2. Conceptualizing on Emotions

Emotion refers to "a mental state of (action) readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events, social interaction of thoughts. It has a phenomenological tone, is accompanied by physiological processes, and is often expressed physically" (p. 184). Scholars have recognised that emotions play an essential role in the FFs' decision-making (Bee & Neubaum, 2014; Bernhard & Labaki, 2013; De Massis et al., 2023; Morgan & Gomez-Mejia, 2014; Umans et al., 2020). They have also emphasized that emotions in FFs can affect decision-making in a more profound way than those in the non-FFs (Kellermanns et al., 2014; Morgan & Gomez-Mejia, 2014). This is mostly due to the family system which enters the business system (Brundin & Sharma, 2012; Humphrey, 2013; Trevinyo-Rodríguez & Bontis, 2010) that makes family characteristics complicate the FF entity and its international and domestic actions.

To illustrate, owning-family members share values and a sense of belonging that shape attitudes, communication, and altruistic behaviours permeating the business (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003), allowing the family-business system to develop equilibrium among the owning-family members. Nevertheless, various family events can potentially disrupt this equilibrium in the family subsystem. For example, in the case of the entry of a child-in-law, a person outside the family system brings personal values, history, traditions that may clash with those of the family

business system bringing tensions, and hence emotions, that could influence FFs international and domestic actions (Mismetti et al., 2022).

Moreover, the family subsystem is characterised by itself by tensions between owning-family members. For instance, family interactions (e.g. rivalry between siblings) can result to tensions between possible successors and these tensions can, in turn, lead to the emergence of different emotions (Magrelli et al., 2022) with the younger family generations, as compared to more senior ones, be more emotionally oriented to future rather than past events, thereby placing a higher emphasis on the future (De Massis et al., 2023) and possibly affect internationalisation outcomes.

The aforementioned FF characteristics increase biases (e.g., loss aversion bias) and paradoxes (e.g., control and autonomy paradox) that could also affect internationalisation actions of FFs (Kano & Verbeke, 2018). To clarify, owning family members are loss averse when it comes to the fulfilment of SEW goals (Kastanakis et al., 2024; Singla & Levasseur, 2023). In the context of internationalisation FFs would avoid uncertainty, prefer the status quo, resist change (Hoffmann et al., 2019), hence influencing international decisions (e.g., about entry modes, international partner selection, divestments from certain foreign markets) based on the potential impact of such decisions on the stock of accumulated SEW (Cesinger et al., 2016; Kampouri & Hajidimitriou, 2024; Scholes et al., 2016). If internationalisation choices jeopardise the preservation of accumulated SEW, family managers will attempt to avoid such losses and thus make choices that are less risky in terms of SEW preservation. Therefore, FFs will enter regional markets (Banalieva & Eddleston, 2011), choose entry modes that ensure full control (Boellis et al., 2016) and avoid entering joint ventures with foreign partners if doing so could threaten their reputation (Debellis et al., 2021; Loehde et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, although the aforementioned characteristics of FFs, their biases and paradoxes and their need to preserve the SEW are all linked with emotions (Hu et al., 2023;

Kastanakis et al., 2024; Smajić et al., 2023), existing theories in FF internationalisation omit how emotions dictate actions relating to them (e.g., how emotions dictate actions relating to SEW and its preservation) (Debellis et al., 2021). However, focusing on emotions could shed light on the international behaviour of FFs and help us to provide a roadmap of internationalisation practises in their future internationalisation actions and help build more robust theories (Newbert et al., 2022; Welch et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

We aim to spark development of future research on the exploration of emotions in FF internationalisation research, by exploring first how emotions have been explored in the FFs internationalisation context and second where future research on FF internationalisation from an emotional standpoint could be directed to. To do so, we first, systematically reviewed the limited, yet, existing studies in the FF internationalisation literature. In the following we integrate and synthesise studies from the literature streams of FFs and family science in an effort to conceptualise on where future research on FF internationalisation from an emotional standpoint could be directed to.

Our review adopts the integrative literature review methodology (Christophi et al., 2021; Cronin & George, 2023; Elsbach & Knippenberg, 2020) as it is widely used for newly emerging topics, such as emotions in FF internationalisation, enables us to strongly anchor in one field (in our case, FF internationalisation) while adding insights by critically examining and synthesising fields from other disciplines (in our case, the FF and the family science) (Cronin & George, 2023; Elsbach & Knippenberg, 2020) and, finally, facilitates the synthesis of studies in a way that enabled the theoretical framework to emerge rather than review old models and or theories or provide just descriptions and comparisons between key themes like other review approaches do (Snyder, 2019).

Our inspiration for conducting the integrative literature review came from methodological articles on the conduct and writing of reviews (Rondi et al., 2022; Cronin & George, 2023; Vrontis et al., 2020; Short et al., 2009) and the selection of data (Paul & Criado, 2020). These studies helped us to form the structure of our review, select the most widely known databases and select the most highly impactful articles. It also came from exemplary works, such as those of Vrontis and Christofi (2021) and Cao and Shi (2021), and exemplary integrative literature reviews (e.g., Kampouri & Hajidimitriou, 2023; Kastanakis et al., 2022). These works, helped as to better understand how to strongly anchor in the FF internationalisation field while adding insights by critically examining and synthesising fields from the FF and the family science fields, leading to the development of an integrative framework which can form the basis for future research.

3.1 Collection of the data pool of studies

We sought to identify the body of research that was relevant to our aim, i.e. to spark development of research on emotions in the context of internationalisation of FFs, following four steps (Figure 1): (1) conducted two systematic literature searches (Tranfield et al. 2003) to consolidate and synthesise studies exploring emotions from the FF internationalisation literature and the FF literature, (2) use inclusion/exclusion criteria to find only peer-reviewed journal articles to make the process more rigorous, (3) use snowballing techniques by examining the references of identified articles to discover additional works related to emotions published in neighbouring literature streams (i.e., FFs and family science), and (4) follow a calibration process to select articles for this review (Aguinis et al., 2018).

"Insert Figure 1 about here"

In step 1 and in line with Cao and Shi (2021), for both literature searches, we chose the Web of Science as our primary search database covering publications without setting a starting point until March 2023. This database is one of the most comprehensive databases for academic

research because it includes a large number of influential journals. To identify the FF internationalisation studies (step 1a), we searched for a combination of the following keywords in the articles' title, abstract or keywords themselves in the Web of Science database: ('emotion*') AND ('internationali*') AND ('family business' OR 'family firm' OR 'family enterprise' OR 'family owned' OR 'family entrepreneur'). Considering that formal search procedures of keywords in electronic databases may sometimes overlook relevant studies, we further tried to refine the search to ensure that we did not exclude relevant articles that the electronic database and methodology process failed to identify. To do so, we conducted a focused search of selected key IB and FF journals (e.g., *Journal of International Business Studies*, *International Business Review*, *Family Business Review*) to ensure the inclusion of articles of relevance not using specified keywords. We then merged the identified studies and had a data poll of 25 of FF internationalisation studies published in journals, books and conference proceedings.

The limited number of articles identified in the FF internationalisation literature indicates that research in emotions in FF internationalisation research is still limited. Consequently, we decided to include studies from the FF field considering also that the FF internationalisation field lies its foundation of the link between the FF field and the internationalisation field. To identify the FF studies (step 1b), we searched for a combination of the following keywords in the articles' title, abstract or keywords themselves in the Web of Science database: ('emotion*') AND ('family business' OR 'family firm' OR 'family enterprise' OR 'family owned' OR 'family entrepreneur'). We also conducted a focused search of selected key FF journals (e.g., *Family Business Review, Journal of Family Business Strategy, Journal of Family Business Management*) to ensure the inclusion of articles of relevance not using specified keywords. The total number of the data pool of FF studies was 498 studies published in journals, books and conference proceedings. This systematic search process

rendered a total sample of 523 articles published in journals, book chapters and conference proceedings.

In Step 2, to make the process more rigorous we used inclusion and exclusion criteria. Thus, we decided to include only peer-reviewed journal articles because studies published in non-peer-reviewed journals usually go through a less rigorous review process. As a consequence, we restricted our data pool to studies published in journals listed in the Chartered Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Guide 2021. We also excluded editorials, commentaries, book chapters, conference proceedings, working papers and other non-refereed publications, from both searches. These criteria are common in literature review studies (e.g., Vrontis & Christofi, 2021) because publication in these journals guarantees that the quality level of the articles included is of the highest possible standard. We also excluded journal articles that were not written in English, due to language limitations of the scholars. The application of these inclusion and exclusion criteria on the results of both literature searches led to a data pool of 241 studies.

In Step 3, we used snowball techniques by examining the references of identified articles to find additional works related to emotions published in the neighbouring literature stream family science. We based the selection of the family science discipline in the definition of the FF entity, i.e. "a firm where the family owns the majority of the stock and exercise full managerial control" (Gallo and Sveen, 1991, p. 181). In this definition the family is emphasized. Indeed, it is the family dimension which distinguishes FFs from other kinds of firms (Swinth and Vinton, 1993). Hence, although the use of studies from other fields (e.g., psychology) could explain individuals' actions, if we aim to better understand internationalisation of FFs, and FFs outcomes in general, we need to take into account the role of the family and how aspects of families (e.g., family-member relationships, family structures, and family events) influence family members' actions. We also screened these new articles in accordance with the inclusion

and exclusion criteria set. This process allowed us to include 15 more articles in the final sample.

Finally, in step 4, with a data pool of 256 studies in total, we analysed all the articles through abstract reading. In this step, and in line with other reviews (Vrontis & Christofi, 2021), we recognised all possibly significant studies that could shed light on the phenomenon of interest. For this reason, and through a calibration process for article selection (Aguinis et al., 2018), we excluded several studies either because they did not exactly deal with the topic of emotions or because they had no direct or indirect link to FF behaviour. In this phase, all co-authors exchanged notes to reach an agreement on the articles to be excluded from our sample. This additional step reduced the number of studies to 53 articles.

3.2 Analysis and synthesis

To analyse the identified studies, we employed a qualitative thematic analysis, anchoring our methodological approach in an abductive logic (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Seuring et al., 2020). following three stages: (1) developing the list of codes, (2) generating subsequent inductive coding specific to the combined codes identified in stage 1, and (3) conducting a meta-synthesis to "[synthesise and integrate] key concepts generated by a qualitative analysis of studies for the purpose of making contributions beyond those achieved in the original studies" (Hoon, 2013, p. 523).

In stage 1, we were inspired by codes used in other literature review articles (e.g., purpose, theories, findings) as well as by family attributes in shaping processes and outcomes of internationalisation (De Massis & Foss, 2018). We also kept notes on our reflections of each article's content and its association with FF internationalisation actions (Saldaña, 2021).

In stage 2, we undertook subsequent inductive coding specific to the combined codes identified in stage 1. To do so, when analysing each article, we kept notes and created

comprehensive memos; these included our reflections on the content of each study (Saldaña, 2009). The notes from stage 1 allowed us to generate new inductive data-driven codes that capture the determinants of emotions in greater detail and thus enabled us to reveal certain family aspects (e.g., sibling rivalry) that can affect FFs' behaviour but are not well covered in FF internationalisation literature. We treated the new inductive codes that emerged as sources and determinants of emotions in family managers that could affect their decision-making processes.

In Stage 3, we conducted a meta-synthesis by exploring the links between the different codes. This process enabled us to interpret and recognise the associations and connections between the key emotional concepts highlighted in the examined studies, group these together, and identify gaps in the literature that could serve as areas for future investigation. To form the synthesis, we considered existing theoretical perspectives from the family science field with insights gleaned from the inductive coding process to formulate new perspectives (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020). This consideration enabled us to expand the theoretical foundation of the specific topic of emotions in FFs' internationalisation by providing an overview of the knowledge base, critically reviewing it, and re-conceptualising it as new information (Snyder, 2019) until new research directions were generated.

4. Findings: Emotions in FF internationalisation

In the examined literature, the definition of term 'emotion' remains elusive. Many scholars often use the word 'emotions' interchangeably with the words 'moods' or 'feelings' despite that emotions are different from moods, feelings or affect (De Massis et al., 2023; Morgan & Gomez-Mejia, 2014). This is because emotions are short in duration and easily identifiable with certain outcomes (Mulligan & Schere, 2012), whereas moods, feelings or affect refer to a longer time and existential issues of life (Hassett et al., 2018; Lazarus, 1991). For example, feeling

melancholy can be enduring and continuous. Moreover, the death of a loved one triggers numerous episodes of feeling sad about loss and may consist of short periods of relieved emotions. However, the emotions themselves do not continue, only the feeling does (Mulligan & Scherer, 2012).

In the context of internationalization, the role of emotions is emphasized. In particular, it is suggested that FFs have unique characteristics, such as the strong identification of family members with the firm, a preference for informal decision-making, and family altruism (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007), that are closely attached to the emotions of family members (De Massis et al., 2023; Shepherd, 2016), and that can have significant implications for their internationalisation decision-making processes. These studies mostly focus on ex ante (before internationalisation) (e.g., Kim et al., 2018; Temouri et al., 2022) rather than ex post (after international engagement in various countries abroad).

Considering that FFs are particularly emotion-dense (De Massis et al., 2023; Humphrey et al., 2021), FF internationalisation literature has mostly focused on the role of SEW in decisions in the context of internationalisation (e.g., Basly et al., 2020; Cirillo et al., 2022; Lin & Wang, 2021; Moreno Menéndez et al., 2021; Stieg et al., 2019; Varas-Fuente et al., 2022). The logic is that family managers make international decisions (e.g., about entry modes, international partner selection, divestments from certain foreign markets) based on the potential impact of such decisions on the stock of accumulated SEW (Cesinger et al., 2016; Scholes et al., 2016). If internationalisation choices jeopardise the preservation of accumulated SEW, family managers will attempt to avoid such losses and thus make choices that are less risky in terms of SEW preservation. Therefore, FFs will enter regional markets (Banalieva & Eddleston, 2011), choose entry modes that ensure full control (Boellis et al., 2016) and avoid entering joint ventures with foreign partners if doing so could threaten their reputation (Debellis et al., 2021; Loehde et al., 2020). It should be noted though that the articles exploring FF internationalisation

phenomena adopting the SEW have not reached a consensus (e.g., on entry mode choices), suggesting that there is more to be explored.

Studies exploring the role of SEW in FFs' internationalisation phenomena have also emphasised the SEW link with the emotions of family managers and family members (Debicki et al., 2016; Swab et al., 2020) and with emotional constructs (e.g., emotional attachment) at the FF level (e.g., Santulli et al., 2019), to illustrate the volume and intensity of emotions at the business level (Alayo et al., 2022; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007) also highlighting that SEW promotes emotional ties to heritage assets (Kano & Verbeke, 2018).

Nevertheless, FFs are multi-layered in the sense that subsystems – the family and the organisation – interact with the socio-cultural environment (Sharma, 2004; Swinth & Vinton, 1993). As such, emotional constructs also exist at the family level (e.g., emotional capital, emotional messiness) (Brundin & Sharma, 2011) or at the individual level (Table 1) interacting with the business level and possibly affecting FFs' internationalisation decision as well e.g., (Alayo et al., 2022).

"Insert Table 1 about here"

Though limited, prior FF internationalisation research has also unearthed the impact of a few emotions at the individual level (e.g., empathy, anger, fear) in FF internationalisation (e.g., Alayo et al., 2022; Goel et al., 2013) but without revealing specific positive (or negative) emotions of key decision-makers per se emerging from, for example, family interactions (e.g. family conflicts) and their impact on FF internationalisation (Debellis et al., 2021). Nevertheless, research on the role of positive or negative emotions such as surprise, happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, and anger (An et al., 2017) can help unravel international motivational action tendencies (Lazarus, 1991) in the context of FF internationalisation.

5. Directions for future research based on a proposed integrative framework

Although FF internationalisation research from an emotional standpoint has started to gain momentum there are many research gaps remaining to be explored, especially considering the various characteristics of FFs (biases, paradoxes, family values), their heterogeneity in terms of ownership structures, their tendency to SEW and the features of the owning families. Having discussed how emotions have been explored in the FFs internationalisation context in the previous section, in this section we elaborate on where future research on FF internationalisation from an emotional standpoint could be directed to. To do so, we synthesize existing knowledge on FF internationalisation from an emotional standpoint with FF and family science literature streams and develop an integrative framework.

5.1. The integrative framework

The developed framework proposes that external, family and personal factors can affect the emergence of positive or negative emotions in family managers, which in turn can lead to an inclination to avoid or engage in particular internationalisation decisions (e.g., location choices, entry mode choice) and other practices, thus affecting FFs' internationalisation.

"Insert Figure 2 about here"

External and personal factors

Individuals can confront various situations in a working environment due to external factors such as the socio-cultural environment they experience (e.g., religious norms, societal norms, cultural differences) or their personal background (Humphrey et al., 2021; Labaki et al., 2013a). Indeed, cultures differ in frequency and intensity of emotions and emotional expressions mainly from cultural differences in norms for experiencing and expressing emotions (Kastanakis & Voyer, 2012), culture-specific value systems (Voyer & Kastanakis, 2017), and national differences in economic, political, and social factors (Fischbach, 2009). Personal factors (e.g., past experiences, personality, gender) also matter in the emergence of emotions. An individual can perceive a situation by comparing the current experience from a

particular situation with past experiences from similar situations (Humphrey et al., 2021). These past experiences are linked with emotions that reflect the individual's actions, as they reflect family managers' feelings and judgements (Humphrey et al., 2021).

Although external and personal factors can affect individuals working in any business, things are more complex in the context of FFs. Emotions in FFs can occur, the same as in other types of businesses, from external and personal factors, also affecting FFs' internationalisation behaviour. For example, religious values and spirituality can affect the formation of organisational ethical practices in faith-led FFs and affect FF outcomes (Astrachan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, emotions in FFs can also occur from business factors appearing in FFs and not in non-FFs (e.g., SEW gains/losses, FF values) and family factors (e.g., relationship attributes and interactions, events such as marriage or birth, family values, stage of family life cycle), thus affecting the behaviour of FFs (Combs et al., 2020). How family members were raised can also have a significant role in the emergence of emotions (Humphrey et al., 2021; Labaki et al., 2013a). For example, contradictory emotions arising from sibling rivalry and parenting style in the family system could spark sabotage behaviour or withdrawal behaviour (Combs et al., 2020), thus affecting FFs' internationalisation.

The multi-layered FF

Not all FFs are the same and not all FFs are affected by emotions in the same way. Indeed, the family science field and recent studies in the FF field emphasize the nexus of emotions between the family and the business system, introducing three FF types: (1) the 'enmeshed' FF, (2) the 'balanced' FF and (3) the 'disengaged' FF (Michael-Tsabari & Lavee, 2012; Daspit et al., 2018).

The enmeshed FF has a high amount of emotional closeness and loyalty between family members but too little independence (Michael-Tsabari & Lavee, 2012). It also has low levels of adaptability due to authoritative leadership, highly controlling parents, limited negotiations,

parental decision-making, well-defined roles (e.g. traditional male/female roles), and unchanging rules. This FF type is also exemplified by high emotional capital, transfer of family emotions to the FF, and emotional dissonance. The characteristics of an enmeshed family usually resemble those of first-generation FFs.

The balanced FF is characterised by clear boundaries with emotional separateness, a lack of loyalty to the family, and a tendency for independent decision-making. Leadership is not authoritative, with more sharing with spouses and children in the decision-making process. Families aim to separate the business and the family system in a way that the FF is usually run by professional managers to avoid conflicts and disputes (Dyer, 2006).

Disengaged FFs are characterised by family members' pursuit of personal interests over those of the firm, with fragmented ownership between many family members who do not share the firm's vision and goals. Family members' relationships tend reflect mutual distrust, constant conflict and an atmosphere of distance and estrangement (Daspit et al., 2018).

In the context of internationalisation, researchers have discussed FFs' heterogeneity and built relevant typologies mostly in terms of ownership, governance structures and size (Daspit et al. 2021; Neubaum et al., 2019), also highlighting their different internationalisation behaviours and actions (Arregle et al., 2012; Rienda & Andreu, 2022). Nevertheless, the literature still lacks an understanding that ties together dimensions of family heterogeneity (Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017) that are relevant for the role of emotions in FFs' internationalisation that might aid in theorising how family aspects affect FFs' internationalisation behaviours and outcomes. This is important given that the literature does not account for emotions or for the emotional interactions within the family and between the systems of family and business and how these affect FFs' internationalisation.

The aforementioned three FF types can also be heterogeneous in terms of the family structure (e.g., traditional nuclear family, same-sex family, stepfamily) and family interactions

(Larson & Almeida, 1999; Han et al., 2015), which could lead to the emergence of emotions affecting FFs' internationalisation actions. For example, some enmeshed FFs are owned and managed by families that lack societal legitimacy in some foreign cultures (e.g., same-sex family) (Flores & Barclay, 2016). This lack of legitimacy could engender negative emotions (e.g., stress, fear) in the partners of the same-sex family, thus leading to the possible withdrawal from foreign markets before they even begin their international activities. Even if an enmeshed FF owned and managed by a same-sex family succeeds in entering foreign markets with societal approval of same-sex couples, things could become blurred in the case of a possible successor. A successor may confront challenges in internationalisation growth in other foreign markets for the same reason (Becker & Todd, 2013).

Different family structures (e.g. a traditional nuclear family, a stepfamily) can also have different family relationships (e.g. parent/children, siblings, spouse), experience different family interactions (e.g. rivalry between siblings), and have different family values, which could spark positive and/or negative emotions between family members, thus also affecting FFs' internationalisation (Arregle et al., 2019; Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017; Shepherd, 2016). For example, a son-in-law who is also a manager in the FF can trigger different types of family conflicts with pleasant or unpleasant emotional valence, permeating the family boundaries, challenging expectations and emotional attachment, and engendering conflicts at the FF level (Haberman & Danes, 2007; Mismetti et al., 2022).

These family factors can affect the emergence of emotions in individual family members, also affecting the way the FF makes decisions and the way it is managed (Kellermanns et al., 2014; Mariotti et al., 2021; Mismetti et al., 2022).

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Events

Unexpected events in the family (e.g., Fosco & Grych, 2008) could also affect the FF's internationalisation. For example, the remarriage of a divorced father and owner of an FF (who has children from the first marriage) could result in other children and possible additional successors. This could affect the emotional wellbeing of the children from the first marriage, bringing tensions between possible successors (Baxter et al., 2011; Bertschi-Michel et al., 2020), engendering negative emotions, and leading to the risk of undermining the rationality of thought of key decision-makers in the FF and their internationalisation actions.

5.2. Suggestions for future research

The integrative theoretical framework developed, could form the basis for future research. Our study reveals that although existing studies focus on emotional constructs at the business level, emotions occur in the family and individual levels as well. Although there are a few studies exploring emotions at the individual level (e.g., Alayo et al., 2022; Goel et al., 2013) the relevant literature fails to unearth the generative mechanisms of emotions in FFs during

internationalisation (Arregle et al., 2021; Debellis et al., 2021) and how these can affect (if so) FFs' internationalisation decisions (e.g., internationalisation speed, de-internationalisation). Entering the international arena can expose FFs to competitive risks, as well as the uncertainty about the different cultural and institutional contexts and the loss of SEW preservation (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2011). Uncertainty about the different cultural and institutional contexts and the risk of losing SEW could engender negative emotions (e.g., stress, frustration, anxiety, fear) and thus undermine the rationality of thought of key decision-makers in the FF and their internationalisation actions. For example, the fear of failing in such actions and, thus, losing SEW, with damage to the family name and the image, can be disastrous for FFs and thereby lead to a slowdown of the internationalisation process (Alayo et al., 2022).

Considering that the enmeshed, balanced, and disengaged FF types would differently view and transfer emotions between the family and the business system (Daspit et al., 2018), we argue that emotions can differently affect the three FF types' international decision-making. In particular, we expect that emotions could affect the enmeshed FF more than the other two FF types because of the high emotional capital and connection of the family transferred in the FF. Enmeshed FFs often face 'emotional messiness', with family members experiencing contradictory emotions related to a situation (Brundin & Sharma, 2011). Randerson and Radu-Lefebvre (2021, p. 162) show that individuals can also experience mixed emotions such as "ambivalent affective states combining positive and negative emotions". For the individual family member, contradictory emotions may lead to emotional dissonance or even deviance, with the risk of emotional exhaustion such as burnout and physical illness as a result, thus affecting FFs' strategic actions. Although ambivalent emotions can help family members deal with demanding situations, they increase uncertainty and risk perception (Bee & Madrigal, 2013), which can imply consequences in the internationalisation processes of FFs, especially

small FFs, which are mostly risk averse in their internationalisation steps (Kontinen & Ojala, 2012).

We also highlight the need to explore the role of emotions in specific actions at different stages of internationalisation: ex ante (before internationalisation) and ex post (after international engagement in various countries abroad). For example, negative or positive emotions in FFs can lead to an inclination to avoid or engage in unethical practices (e.g. bribery, tax havens) before internationalisation (Kim et al., 2018; Kastanakis et al., 2025), thereby affecting FFs' internationalisation growth and performance. For example, the fear of failing in internationalisation could cause FFs to act unethically by, for example, offering bribes to foreign partners to maintain their performance in international markets, especially as the family's SEW is also at stake. In turn, this bribery could increase FFs' internationalisation speed in some foreign markets or even terminate FFs' international activities in the first step of internationalisation (Alayo et al., 2022), as in many countries, bribery is prohibited.

In Table 2 we showcase exemplary research questions that focus on these issues discussed above.

"Insert Table 2 about here"

Finally, we emphasize the need to explore the role of family events in the emergence of emotions and what does this mean for FFs' internationalisation processes through the lens of family systems theory.

Research on FF internationalisation has tended towards using both business-related theories to explain how families make IB decisions and shape outcomes (e.g., Boellis et al., 2016; Hennart et al., 2019) and emotion theories to explain emotions in firms' internationalisation actions (e.g. Leonidou et al., 2019). Nevertheless, these theories make generic assumptions about FFs and their likely behaviour given that they do not take into account the rich diversity among families owning and managing the internationalised FFs (e.g., Arregle et al., 2019). Because families

that own and manage FFs are a universal social group with long histories, memories and emotions (Humphrey et al., 2021), FFs provide a rich context in which to explore how emotions play out with important consequences for both family members and FFs. This means that underlying assumptions of key IB theories may fundamentally change in the context of FF internationalisation, given that assumptions of IB theories involve rational decision-making. The use of rational IB theories in FF internationalisation phenomena without accounting for key assumptions from the FF field (i.e. the aim of FFs to preserve the emotional wealth of the family; Berrone et al., 2012) could lead to misleading findings.

We argue that the family systems theory (Broderick & Smith, 1979) could help better explain the role of generative mechanisms of emotions in FF internationalisation. Family systems theory views the family as a complex system of interconnected and independent individuals. It explores individuals' behaviour through a complex web of emotional processes in their family, work and social systems. In addition, it describes how the emotional independence among family members influences individual character and work–life choices. Its basic assumptions are that the family is a complex emotional unit; that the family is emotionally interconnected; and that familial, community and social relationships are reciprocal.

Under this logic and given the heterogeneity not only in the three FF types but also in the family structure, we argue that emotions in a particular family structure (i.e. the traditional family owning and managing the enmeshed FF) can be of different intensity due to family events (e.g. birth, marriage, divorce) (Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017). For example, an unexpected divorce in the traditionally family of the enmeshed FF may greatly weaken adult children's relationships with both parents (Lye, 1996). Divorce can give rise to family instability and lead to less investment in the next generation (Lee & McLanahan, 2015), also hurting the FF's domestic and international performance (Galbraith, 2003). As a consequence, negative

emotions such as anger (i.e., “feelings that range from annoyance to rage”; Turner, 2007, p. 115) can emerge from such a negative family event in the enmeshed FF, and this could have implications for its internationalisation activities. In the international context, in which risks are higher than in the domestic market, especially when adequate resources (e.g., experimental knowledge) are absent, such as in the case of small FFs (Magrizos et al., 2021), negative emotions of family members could lead an enmeshed FF to withdrawal from foreign markets and, as a result, to de-internationalise.

Other unexpected events in the traditional family of the enmeshed FF (e.g. the sudden death of the family owner-founder) or in any family type having possible family successors could also lead to successors’ emotional pain (i.e., “a feeling of brokenness resulting from a traumatic event, which suddenly shatters the external cover that represents a person’s identity and facilitates connection with others”; Bolger, 1999, p. 357). While struggling to cope with the loss, possible successors are challenged by domestic and internationalisation decisions that cannot be postponed and need to be tackled to secure their SEW. We argue that this situation could affect the way family successors operate in the internationalisation context.

For example, Heinonen and Ljunggren (2022) argue that on the one hand, difficult emotions can shape the decision of the owning family to continue the FF, but on the other hand, many FFs struggle to maintain SEW (e.g. FF identity). As a consequence, a possible family successor could choose to de-internationalise (and to re-internationalise later), especially if the successor lacks international experimental knowledge, to focus on the domestic market and increase the FF’s resilience to secure SEW. By contrast, possible family successors could persist in internationalisation growth, especially if such growth was the owner-founder’s aspiration. Avrichir et al. (2016) confirm that the emotional upheaval of successors under such unexpected events can indeed lead to accelerated internationalisation speed and scope (Avrichir et al., 2016). Such unexpected family events can change family structures, family interactions

(bringing tensions), and family functions and can result in positive or negative emotions, which in turn can lead to positive or negative internationalisation outcomes.

Emotions emerging from family interactions during such unexpected family events could affect the FFs' internationalisation processes, but this largely depends on the international experience and the personality of the family managers of the FFs. In case a family manager does not have international knowledge or the necessary resources to internationalise, the most likely scenario is to feel negative emotions from the unexpected negative family events and to maintain the FF domestically, rather than internationalising.

Different managerial boards with successors with more education and international experience (Oetzel & Oh, 2014) could also lead to different internationalisation pace and speed (Kampouri & Hajidimitriou, 2022). Nevertheless, this situation also depends on the personality of the family manager, the aim to preserve the SEW (not all family members belonging to different generations have the same willingness to preserve SEW), and the family relationships in the FF.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Taking this scarcity into account plus the idea that FFs are emotion-dense organisations (Kellermanns et al., 2014; Morgan & Gomez-Mejia, 2014), we collected, integrated and synthesised studies from the FF internationalisation, FF and family science literature streams in an effort provide an understanding of how emotions have been explored in the FFs internationalisation context and where future research on FF internationalisation from an emotional standpoint could be directed to.

The results indicate that while a wealth of FF research has addressed emotions (Kellermanns et al., 2014; Morgan & Gomez-Mejia, 2014), the exploration of emotions in FFs' internationalisation processes and actions remains scarce (Debellis et al., 2021). Studies

exploring FF internationalisation phenomena from an emotional standpoint focus on SEW constructs, such as for example emotional attachment (e.g., Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007) to illustrate the volume and intensity of emotions at the business level (Alayo et al., 2022; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007). Nevertheless, emotions occur in multiple levels of analysis (e.g., family, individual) and the relevant literature fails to unearth how each level interacts with each other and what this interaction means for FF internationalisation decisions. Taking this into account our study provides such a discussion and proposes a family system approach for future investigation on the generative mechanisms of emotions in the FF internationalisation context. From a theoretical perspective, the use of the family systems approach and other family science theories (e.g., family development theory) can help differentiate between different FF types and family structures (Wikle & Hoagland, 2020) and thus provide a better understanding of the heterogeneity of FFs' internationalisation, including emotions. A family systems view is necessary to understand the emotions rooted in each level (individual, family and business) as well as their interfaces and evolution from one system to another. Family science theories describe how various elements of familial relationships (e.g., conflict), family member roles (e.g., parents, children, siblings), and family events (e.g., marriage, divorce, birth of a child) can affect family outcomes (e.g., children's health and academic performance, marital health) and also affect internationalisation behaviour (Kampouri & Hajidimitriou, 2023). For example, family development theory (Rodgers, 1964) could help explain when FFs owned and managed by the traditional family are motivated to engage in IB activities (e.g. direct exports, international new ventures) in times of crisis. Likewise, life course theory (Elder et al., 2003) – another family science theory – could help explain how and why particular emotions affect internationalisation choices in families that do not have children.

6.1 Theoretical contribution

The contribution of our study is threefold. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first review that summarizes on what has been done in the exploration of emotions in FF internationalisation, and conceptualize on where future research could be directed to.

Second, this review does not merely examine an existing body of research, it also integrates ideas taken from empirical and conceptual insights from the FF and the family science fields (Hoon, 2013). By bringing together empirical and conceptual insights discussed in the FF literature with regard the various levels of analysis in FFs (organisational level, family level, individual level) as well as empirical and conceptual insights from the family science field with regard the possible events that make emotions emerge within these levels, wedevelop an integrative theoretical framework. This integrative framework maps the emergence of emotions in the FF internationalisation context, enhances an understanding of the knowledge base pertaining to emotions in FF internationalization and helps the reader to better understand the mechanisms underlying international decisions in FFs. this work. Hence, it enables theory building (Jaakkola, 2020; Poulis & Kastanakis, 2020).

Third, through our integrative framework, we identify scantly investigated but relevant areas of research and based on the family system theory we provide directions for future inquiry. Hence, our study advances FF internationalisation research by proposing that future research on FF internationalisation from an emotional standpoint should consider heterogeneity among FFs to avoid conflicting and misleading future findings.

6.2. Limitations

Our study's main limitation emanates from the relatively limited number of studies identified. Nevertheless, this is not unusual in literature review articles because of the emerging nature of the topic (Kontinen and Ojala, 2010) and similar studies have been published with even less articles than the 53 we reviewed. We also acknowledge that though the process of

identifying and analysing the articles included in this work was inspired by literature review scholars such as Vrontis and Christofi (2021), this work is not an exhaustive systematic literature review on the topic of emotions in FFs' internationalisation, but an integrative one. In our study we collect, integrate and synthesise studies from the literature streams of internationalisation, family firms and family science to unearth what may heighten or impede FF internationalisation by linking previously neighbouring works from various literature streams (e.g., family science) in a novel way (Jaakkola, 2020). In addition, we acknowledge that emotions can differ depending on gender, the way emotions are transferred in the FF, the life cycle of the FF, and the number of generations involved in the FF. However, discussing all these factors in detail was beyond the scope of our article. Therefore, we note that our discussion is not exhaustive but selective, focusing on family factors that we consider especially pertinent to the role of emotions in FFs' internationalisation. As the issues not discussed here can be especially salient, we hope our study will motivate researchers from different disciplines to produce complementary work to contribute to the FF internationalisation field.

6.3. Practical Implications

This work offers key practical insights for family firms (FFs) engaging in or considering internationalization by emphasizing the critical role that emotions play in shaping FF members' decision-making process. Firstly, given the significant influence of socio-emotional wealth (SEW) on family firm behaviour (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; Debellis et al., 2021), family business leaders should be mindful of how negative emotional factors such as fear, stress and anxiety, or concern for family members' wellbeing can drive risk-averse decisions. By recognizing these emotional triggers, reflecting on their own practices and managing emotions more efficiently, FF owners/managers can better balance non-financial goals with the need for international growth. We also suggest that FFs may benefit from professional management,

succession planning and establishing more clear boundaries between family and business roles, especially enmeshed family firms which exhibit high dependence and emotional closeness across members (Michael-Tsabari & Lavee, 2012). Our provided framework can also assist FFs in understanding how emotions emerge at various levels (individual, family, and business) and how they influence internationalization outcomes, including choices to 'de-internationalise' or internationalise slowly. Another recommendation that stems from our research is stemming from the realisation that emotional responses significantly influence internationalisations decisions: family businesses could invest in and benefit from emotion-management training programmes. Training on emotional intelligence, anger management and coping strategies for stress and anxiety could enable managers and members of FFs to better handle emotional challenges facilitating smoother internationalisation decisions. We, finally, suggest a systemic approach, that recognizes that FF as an interconnected system, where changes in one part (e.g., a family event or emotional trigger) affect the whole system (the business). Recognizing this can help emotional and strategic objectives and foster international growth while navigating the complexities of family dynamics.

Given that emotional responses significantly influence internationalisation decisions, family firms could benefit from tailored emotion-management training programmes.

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Table 1 Emotional constructs in the multi-layered FF

	Emotional constructs	**Key definitions/related constructs**	**Key references from FF literature**
FF level	Emotional attachment	"[P]sychological appropriation of the firm by the family in order to maintain a positive self-concept … can facilitate self-continuity by connecting a person with a desirable past self (e.g., memories), a present self (me now), or a future self (who I am becoming) …. It fosters the family's sense of legacy, since the loss of the firm represents a highly emotional event" (Berrone et al., 2012, p. 263).	Gómez- Mejía et al. (2007); Alayo et al. (2022)
	Emotional cohesion	"A process of attachment and bonding that satisfies needs for security and affiliation" (Labaki et al., 2013, p. 747)	Cabrera-Suárez et al. (2014)
	Emotional ownership	"A sense of ownership that was a matter of sentiment, associated with belongingness and attachment beyond the monetary significance of the ownership bond, in which the family had a central role" (Björnberg & Nicholson, 2012, p. 381)	Bjornberg & Nicholson (2008)
	Emotional labour	The process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfil the emotional requirements of a job (Grandey, 2000).	Pimentel & Pereira (2022)
	Emotional energy	Refers to how individuals feel about what is going on in their lives: work, relationships, and general situation.	Goss (2008)
	Emotional value	"That part of willingness to accept unexplained by the financial aspect of the ownership stake captured in the financial value of the firm and the present value of the private benefits of control, but that is subjectively valued by the owner in terms of endowed emotional benefits and costs related to the ownership stake" (Zellweger & Astrachan, 2008, p. 348)	Zellweger & Astrachan (2008)
	Emotional returns	Refers to "the result of achieving financial and nonfinancial business, family, and individual goals (e.g., pride, self-worth, educational opportunities, family involvement/togetherness, opportunities for self/offspring, community recognition, and independence)" (Astrachan & Jaskiewicz, 2008, p. 143).	Astrachan & Jaskiewicz (2008)
	Emotional costs	"[T]he result of not achieving financial and nonfinancial goals, as well as, for example, family tension, the clash of differing value systems, conflicts, obligations, dependence, sibling rivalry, and the reduction of leisure time" (Astrachan & Jaskiewicz, 2008, p. 143).	Astrachan & Jaskiewicz (2008)
Family level	Emotional capital	"A form of cultural capital that includes the emotion specific, trans-situational resources that individuals activate and embody in distinct fields" (Cottingham, 2016, p. 451).	Sharma (2004)
	Emotional messiness	Emotional messiness occurs when "emotions are seemingly contradictory on the individual, the family and/or the organizational level" (Brundin & Sharma (2011, p. 3)	Brundin & Sharma (2011)
Individual level	Empathy emotions	Empathy is an emotionally oriented response congruent with the perceived welfare of another person or group of persons (Batson et al., 1995).	Goel et al. (2013)
	Emotional intelligence	The ability to understand and manage your own emotions, as well as recognize and influence the emotions of those around you (Goleman, 1995)	Allen et al. (2021)

Fig. 1: Collection of the data pool of studies

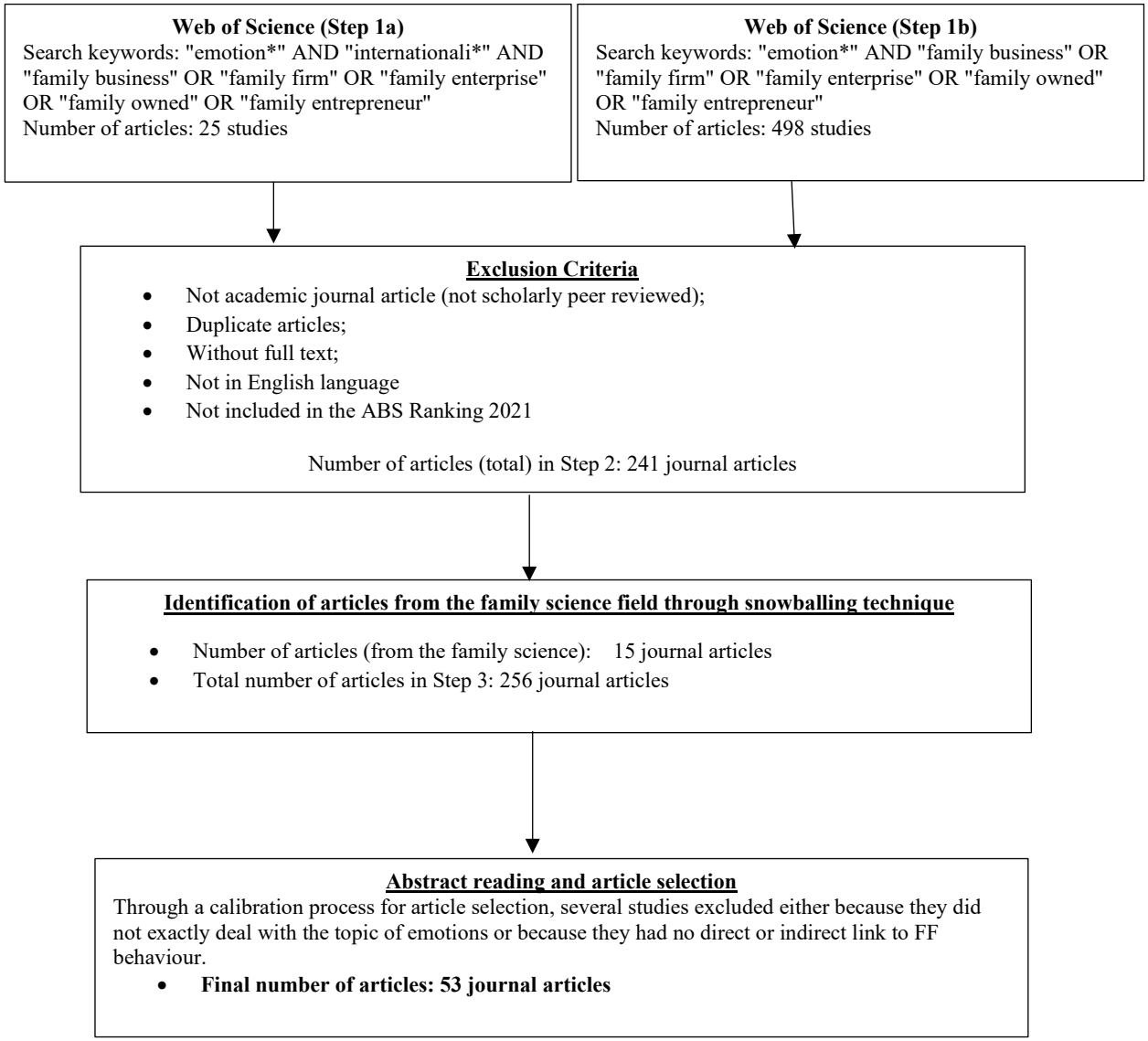

Fig. 2 An integrative framework on the emergence of emotions in the multi-layered FFs' internationalisation actions

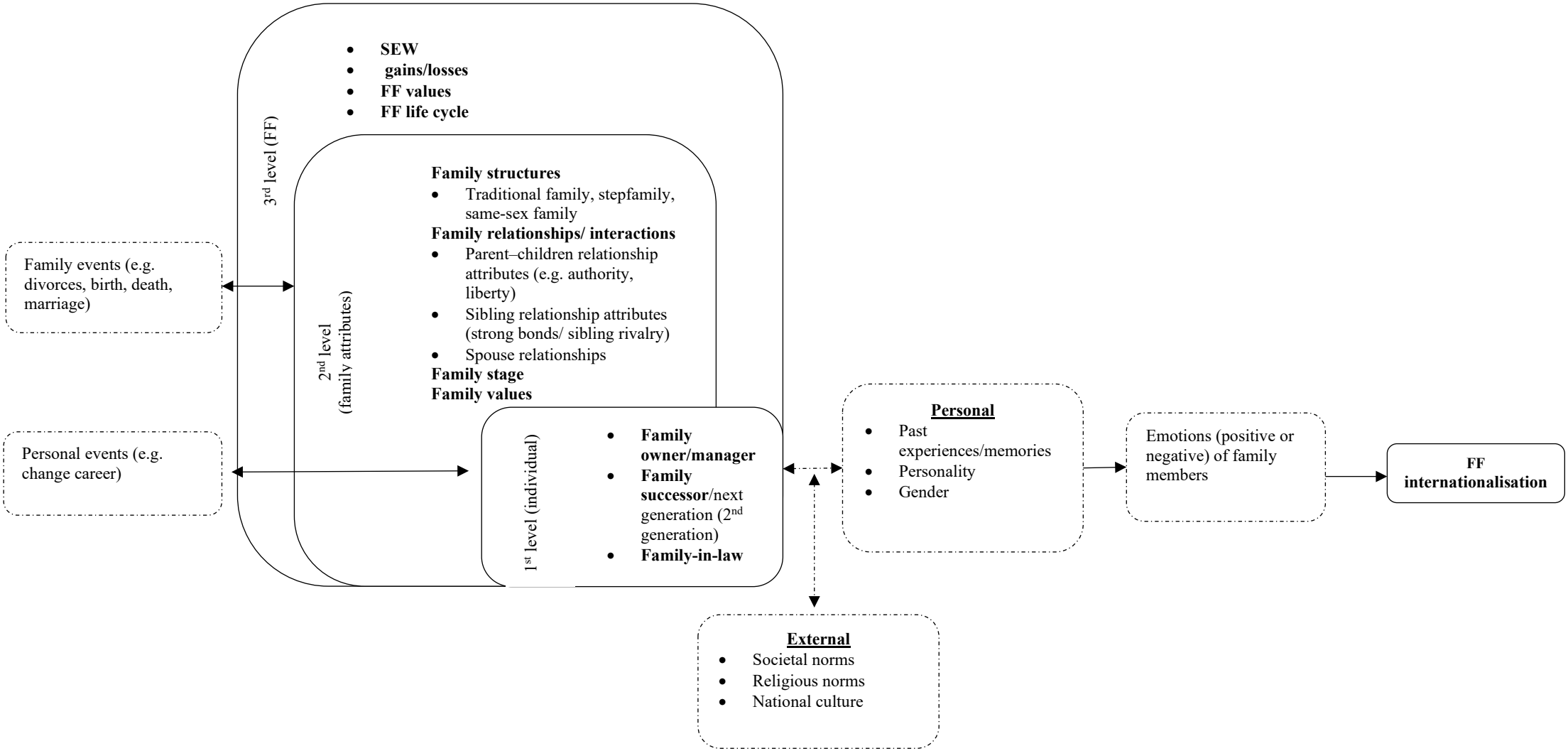

Table 2: Exemplary research questions to study emotions in the FF internationalisation context

Research focus	Exemplary research questions
Focus on the emergence of emotions in specific internationalisation decisions	RQ1: How emotions emerged from different levels in FFs affect internationalization decisions (e.g., internationalization speed, de-internationalisation) of different types of FFs (e.g., enmeshed, balanced or disengaged FFs)?
Focus on the emergence of emotions at different internationalisation stages	RQ2: How emotions (positive or negative) can affect internationalisation decisions (e.g., location choice, internationalisation speed) at different stages of internationalisation?
	RQ3: Do emotions affect FF differently depending on their stage in internationalisation (e.g. ex ante or ex post)?
Focus on the role of the family features in the emergence of emotions in FFs' internationalisation	RQ4: How family features (e.g., parent-children relationship attributes, sibling rivalry) in different types of FFs affect the emergence of emotions (if any) during FFs' internationalisation?
	RQ5: What is the role of international experience of family managers in their emotional responses during internationalisation?
	RQ7: What is the role of personality of family managers in their emotional responses during internationalisation?
Focus on the role of the family events in the emergence of emotions in FFs' internationalisation	RQ8: How unexpected family events (e.g., divorces, re-marriage, death of the founder) of family owning members in different types of FFs affect the emergence of emotions (if any) during FFs' internationalisation? What does this mean for their internationalisation processes?