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**From Experience to Theory: A Mixed Method  
Grounded Theory Investigation of Family  
Businesses Sustainability**

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*Il dottorato è una complicata ricerca di idee semplici.*  
*(Semicit. Horacio Pagani)*

## **Abstract**

This dissertation investigates the psychological foundations of sustainability in family businesses through a mixed-method design. In the exploratory phase, a constructivist Grounded Theory approach was adopted to capture the psychosocial processes that guide sustainable commitment, highlighting the interplay between entrepreneurial identity, attitudes, values, and extrinsic motivations. Building on these findings, a structured questionnaire was developed and validated in the confirmatory phase through confirmatory factor analysis, providing empirical support for the proposed theoretical model. Results reveal that family businesses approach sustainability as both a strategic necessity and a value-based commitment, shaped by the interaction between personal convictions and family heritage. The study expands existing literature—largely dominated by economic and managerial perspectives—by offering a psychological framework that integrates motivations, values, and identity into the understanding of sustainability. Practical implications are discussed for consultants, policymakers, and educators aiming to support family businesses in their sustainable transition.

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## Introduction

In recent decades, sustainability has emerged as one of the most urgent and pervasive global challenges, prompting critical reflection on how natural, economic, and social resources are used, distributed, and preserved. Beyond its environmental dimension, sustainability today represents an integrated process that requires a profound rethinking of both individual and collective practices across all areas of human activity, including entrepreneurship. Organizations are called not only to reduce negative impacts—such as emissions, resource exploitation, and social inequalities—but also to demonstrate their ability to generate shared and lasting value for communities, stakeholders, and future generations.

As key economic and social actors, businesses are increasingly expected to play an active role in the transition toward sustainable development models. The adoption of sustainable practices is no longer considered merely a strategic option but an intrinsic responsibility of doing business. Governments, consumers, and investors now demand that companies align with stringent environmental and social standards, such as those outlined by the United Nations 2030 Agenda and ESG criteria. These frameworks promote business models aimed at reducing environmental impact, improving working conditions, and fostering the well-being of the communities in which companies operate.

Within this entrepreneurial landscape, family businesses stand out for their unique structural, value-based, and relational characteristics, which make them particularly interesting subjects for exploring sustainability. Their intergenerational nature, territorial rootedness, and the emotional and identity-based involvement of key decision-makers often place family businesses at the crossroads of unique tensions between continuity and change, and between economic imperatives and socio-environmental responsibilities. These dynamics make their approach to sustainability not only strategic but also deeply psychological.

In this context, the present dissertation aims to explore the phenomenon of sustainability in family businesses through a psychological perspective and a mixed-methods approach. The goal is to develop a theoretical model of the

processes that underpin family businesses' commitment to sustainability in their specific organizational context.

The thesis is structured into six chapters, reflecting the research trajectory developed over three years of doctoral work. Each chapter represents a step in the theoretical, methodological, and empirical reflection, contributing to the construction of a coherent and scientifically grounded narrative:

1. Chapter One introduces the concept of sustainability and analyses its evolution in economic and organizational contexts, highlighting the growing relevance of systemic and integrated approaches. It also examines the main guidelines and certifications that serve as concrete tools for implementing sustainability in business models.
2. Chapter Two presents family businesses, with particular attention to the Italian context. It offers a theoretical reflection on the psychological dimensions that influence their strategic choices and orientation toward sustainability. At the conclusion of these first two chapters—forming the theoretical framework of the study—the research question and overall methodological design are presented, outlining the theoretical and operational decisions guiding the empirical investigation.
3. Chapter Three illustrates the exploratory phase of the research, conducted using a constructivist Grounded Theory approach. The aim is to expand on the predominantly economic theories in the literature by investigating, from the actors' perspective, the psychosocial processes underlying sustainable choices in family businesses. After describing the methodology, participants, and instruments, the chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis, summarized in a conceptual framework integrating the themes and subthemes that emerged, supported by interview excerpts.

4. Chapter Four presents the second phase of the research, in which the conceptual framework from the qualitative phase is simplified and transformed into a quantitative instrument. Drawing on the participants' own words, a structured questionnaire is developed to serve as the basis for the confirmatory phase, aimed at validating and strengthening the proposed theoretical model.
5. Chapter Five illustrates the confirmatory phase of the study, conducted through confirmatory factor analysis.
6. Chapter Six provides an integrated discussion of the findings, bringing together insights from both phases of the research and linking empirical evidence with the existing literature. This reflection develops along two axes: a theoretical axis, with attention to the contributions of psychological and organizational theories, and a practical axis, highlighting potential professional and operational implications for supporting family businesses in their sustainability journey. The chapter concludes with an overall synthesis of the work, the study's limitations, and future research directions, suggesting possible theoretical and applied developments.

Through this trajectory, the thesis seeks to enhance the understanding of a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, emphasizing the contribution of psychology to the analysis of entrepreneurial commitment oriented toward sustainability. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Propose a theoretical model illustrating how family businesses build, sustain, and enact their commitment to sustainability;
2. Integrate qualitative and quantitative perspectives, offering a model validated through confirmatory factor analysis for future research and practical applications;

3. Expand the largely economic and managerial literature by introducing a psychological approach centred on the meanings that organizational actors attribute to their commitment to sustainability;
4. Identify practical levers for intervention to guide consultants, policymakers, and trainers in developing support tools for family businesses in their sustainable transition;
5. Contribute to the multidisciplinary scientific debate on sustainability in organizations, bridging psychological theories, family dynamics, and entrepreneurial practices.

The following chapters present the complete articulation of the study and its theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions.

## CHAPTER 1

# **Sustainability as a Transformative Construct: Definitions, Tools, and Implications for Business**

This chapter aims to explore the concept of sustainability, with reference to its application in the business context. The primary aim is to provide an articulated and multidimensional definition of the term, capable of capturing its theoretical and operational complexity. Subsequently, the main normative and institutional guidelines that shape sustainable practices at the global level will be analysed, including the United Nations 2030 Agenda and ESG criteria. Finally, a section will be dedicated to the evolution of sustainability in the business world, focusing on new forms of certification and recognition that serve as concrete tools for integrating environmental and social goals into traditional business models.

### **1.1 Beyond Words: Redefining Sustainability in the 21st Century**

The concept of sustainability, whose etymological origin derives from the Latin *sustinere*, meaning “to sustain, to maintain, to endure” (*Oxford English Dictionary, s.d. “sustain”*), encompasses two key meanings: on the one hand, it indicates the capacity to support and preserve systems and resources over time; on the other, it refers —as defined by Osorio et al. (2005, p. 508)— to the idea of equilibrium, understood as “the capacity to maintain the state of a system”. In this perspective, sustainability should not be understood as a static condition, but rather as a dynamic process in which resource use, investment decisions, and development strategies are aligned to preserve, enhance, and adapt systems to meet both present and future human needs (Becchetti et al., 2025).

Although the concept has been central to numerous theoretical and political debates, its widespread usage has, in some cases, rendered it vague or even misunderstood. As Mio (2021) notes, the overuse of the term has contributed to a kind of “semantic inflation” (p. 15), in which the word sustainability risks losing its transformative power, becoming a generic and ambiguous label. Despite this

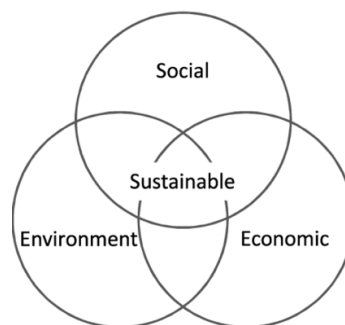
ambiguity, one of the most authoritative and widely accepted definitions is that proposed in the Brundtland Report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), which defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43; Banerjee, 2003; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011).

This vision introduces a forward-looking and intergenerational approach, according to which sustainable development should not be measured solely in terms of economic growth, but also in relation to the ability to ensure equity, well-being, and quality of life over the long term. The resulting model, often represented as three interconnected circles (Figure 1), is based on the integration of three fundamental dimensions: environmental, social, and economic (Sciancalepore, 2020):

- **Environmental dimension:** concerns the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the regenerative capacity of natural resources over time.
- **Social dimension:** includes the improvement of living conditions, the promotion of inclusion, equity, and participation, with respect for cultural and territorial diversity.
- **Economic dimension:** refers to the ability to sustain long-term growth, based on fair, responsible, and quality-oriented production and distribution models.

**Figure 1**

*The Three Dimensions of Sustainability*



## **1.2 Sustainability: Normative and Regulatory Aspects**

In recent decades, the need for a solid regulatory framework to guide the transition toward more sustainable economic, social, and environmental systems has become increasingly evident (World Bank, 1992). International institutions and governments have played a central role in promoting policies and initiatives aimed at integrating sustainability into economic activity, with particular attention to the business sector (Sarabdeen, 2024). Beyond their ethical relevance, sustainable practices are increasingly recognized for their potential to enhance operational efficiency, reduce waste and costs, and foster a more responsible use of resources (Singh, 2024).

At the international level, this transition has been supported by several key reference frameworks, most notably the United Nations Global Compact, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the growing diffusion of ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) criteria. Together, these instruments have contributed to redefining the expectations placed on firms, encouraging the integration of sustainability principles into corporate strategies and governance structures.

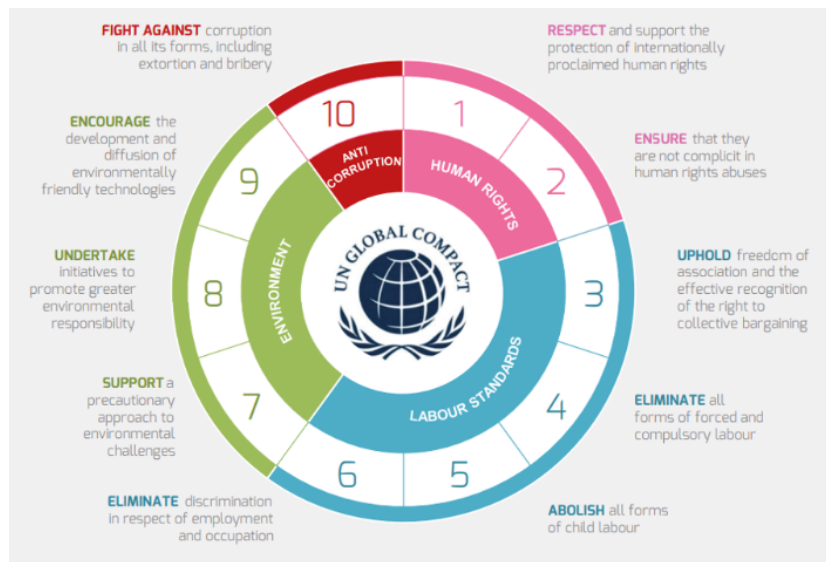
### **1.2.1 The United Nations Global Compact**

The United Nations Global Compact, launched in the late 1990s by the United Nations, is the world's largest voluntary corporate citizenship initiative. This citizenship is expressed in companies' commitment to align their strategies and operations with ten fundamental principles concerning human rights, labour standards, environmental protection, and anti-corruption (UN, 2004) (Figure 2). Initially promoted by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Global Compact marked a pivotal moment in the effort to connect public institutional goals with private sector practices. Since 2000, the initiative has attracted over 18,000 companies from more than 160 countries, fostering a new form of international cooperation based on shared values and multi-stakeholder partnerships (Annan, 1999).

Participating companies commit to submitting an annual Communication on Progress (COP), which is made public and shared with stakeholders, contributing to greater transparency and accountability. The Global Compact thus constitutes a global network that promotes corporate citizenship and sustainable management through dialogue, the exchange of best practices, and continuous monitoring of the commitments undertaken (Figure 2) (Annan, 1999).

**Figure 2**

*The 10 Fundamental Principles of the UN Global Compact (UN, 2004)*



### 1.2.2 The 2030 Agenda

In 2015, the United Nations introduced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a comprehensive action plan structured around 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Figure 3) and 169 targets addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and inclusive economic growth (UN, 2015). The Agenda is grounded in an integrated vision of sustainability that encompasses social, environmental, and economic dimensions.

**Figure 3**

*Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015)*



For the business sector, the SDGs serve as a strategic reference rather than a prescriptive framework, encouraging firms to align their activities with broader societal objectives. Tools such as the SDG Compass support this process by helping companies identify relevant goals, set priorities, and integrate sustainability into corporate decision-making and reporting practices. However, translating the SDGs into measurable corporate outcomes requires complementary instruments capable of operationalizing sustainability at the organizational level.

**Figure 4**

*SDG Compass (Compass SDGs, 2015)*



### 1.2.3 ESG Criteria

ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) criteria have emerged as one of the most widely adopted tools for assessing corporate sustainability, particularly within the financial and investment domains. Initially promoted through the UN initiative *Who Cares Wins* (2004) and later embedded in the Principles for Responsible Investment, ESG criteria provide standardized indicators to evaluate companies' environmental impact, social responsibility, and governance quality (Gillan et al., 2021).

Beyond their role in non-financial reporting and investment decisions, ESG ratings increasingly function as institutional signals, influencing corporate reputation, access to capital, and stakeholder trust. At the same time, the heterogeneity of ESG rating methodologies and the lack of full standardization introduce interpretative challenges, highlighting the complexity of measuring sustainability across different organizational contexts (Daugaard, 2020).

A further evolution of sustainability-oriented business models is represented by B Corps and Benefit Corporations. These organizational forms integrate sustainability directly into their legal and strategic identity, formally committing firms to balancing economic performance with social and environmental impact. ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) criteria have emerged as one of the most widely adopted tools for assessing corporate sustainability, particularly within the financial and investment domains. Initially promoted through the UN initiative *Who Cares Wins* (2004) and later embedded in the Principles for Responsible Investment, ESG criteria provide standardized indicators to evaluate companies' environmental impact, social responsibility, and governance quality (Gillan et al., 2021).

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A further evolution of sustainability-oriented business models is represented by B Corps and Benefit Corporations. These organizational forms integrate sustainability directly into their legal and strategic identity, formally committing firms to balancing economic performance with social and environmental impact. While such models demonstrate the potential for embedding sustainability at the core of corporate purpose, they also raise questions regarding the relationship between formal certification, authentic commitment, and organizational identity—issues that are particularly relevant in the context of family businesses.

**Figure 5**

*The B Impact Assessment (The B Book, 2021)*



While such models demonstrate the potential for embedding sustainability at the core of corporate purpose, they also raise questions regarding the relationship between formal certification, authentic commitment, and organizational identity—issues that are particularly relevant in the context of family businesses.

### **1.3 From Theory to Action: Strategies and Levers for Corporate Sustainability**

As discussed in the previous sections, sustainability represents a guiding principle that calls for a profound rethinking of corporate strategies and operational practices. It implies economic development that does not compromise environmental health. This requires the responsible management of natural resources (Curado & Mota,

2021), in line with the policies promoted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to improve sustainability on a global scale (McKenzie, 2004).

In a context of increasing globalization and competitiveness, companies are progressively urged to pursue long-term goals and adopt ethical behaviours that can generate shared value for all stakeholders (López-Pérez et al., 2018). This entails an evolution of the company's role, increasingly seen as a social and environmental actor, called upon to contribute to a form of development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (Caputo et al., 2017; Shields et al., 2018). This vision promotes the construction of a green economy that fosters well-being and social equity while minimizing environmental impact (Bina, 2013). From this perspective, corporate sustainability requires a strategic alignment between the firm and its external environment, aimed at maintaining a dynamic balance between economic, environmental, and social dimensions (Moore & Manring, 2009; Darcy et al., 2014).

One theoretical and operational model that has gained increasing attention in recent years is the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1997), which translates corporate sustainability into three interconnected dimensions: people, planet, and profit (Shields & Shelleman, 2015). These three pillars provide a concrete articulation of what sustainability entails in practice, allowing for a more balanced assessment of organizational performance. Specifically, the social dimension concerns the well-being of people inside and outside the company; the environmental dimension refers to the impact on the ecosystem; the economic dimension addresses profitability and financial sustainability (Raj et al., 2017). Initially introduced in the late 1990s, this model has been recently re-evaluated and gained strategic relevance due to increasing consumer demands and more stringent international sustainability regulations (Moore & Manring, 2009; Baggia et al., 2013; Dote-Pardo, & Ceballos-Garrido, 2024; Nica et al., 2025; Nogueira et al., 2025). In this light, companies that invest in sustainability can gain significant competitive advantages, both in terms of reputation and operational efficiency (Raj et al., 2017).

According to Caldera et al. (2017), the transition to a sustainable model requires overcoming four key steps: aligning corporate strategy with sustainability strategy; improving outcomes through continuous synergistic process optimization; actively engaging internal and external stakeholders; and transparently communicating the results achieved. However, this transition is not without obstacles. Factors such as rapid technological innovation, the complexity of global supply chains, and transformations in international markets can represent significant barriers (Moore & Manring, 2009).

The effective implementation of sustainability does not depend solely on a company's declared intentions but is influenced by multiple internal and external factors. Internal factors include the personal and value-based characteristics of leaders, organizational culture, and corporate identity. External factors include social norms, market pressures, industry characteristics, and current environmental regulations (Afzal & Lim, 2022).

Several studies have highlighted the role of strategic attitudes in shaping a company's approach to sustainability. Hoogendoorn et al. (2015) distinguish between proactive and reactive strategies, noting that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) tend to adopt a more reactive approach due to limited resources, whereas large businesses are more inclined toward proactive orientations. Tatoglu et al. (2020) add that sustainable orientation may also be influenced by the type of strategy adopted: companies pursuing a differentiation strategy, for instance, show a greater tendency to integrate proactive environmental practices, particularly in response to rising consumer demands for sustainable and reliable products.

Another important internal factor is the personal and moral values of entrepreneurs, shaped by education and prior experiences. According to Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016), values tied to social responsibility, often transmitted through education, can facilitate the adoption of sustainable practices. Similarly, Muñoz and Dimov (2015) argue that entrepreneurs who are attentive to social and ecological issues are more likely to perceive the opportunities offered by sustainable development and turn them into concrete entrepreneurial intentions.

The creation of sustainable value, understood as the ability to generate economic, environmental, and social benefits simultaneously, represents an additional strategic enabler. According to Muñoz and Dimov (2015), sustainability-oriented entrepreneurs can effectively combine long-term vision, eco-efficiency, and social responsibility, overcoming the traditional dichotomy between economic opportunism and social altruism.

On the external side, factors such as social norms, industry characteristics, and environmental legislation act as influential forces in shaping corporate strategies. Hoogendoorn et al. (2015) show that businesses in resource-intensive industries are often subject to greater stakeholder pressure and are more likely to develop sustainable practices, especially when supported by institutional or regulatory incentives. The presence of external support—in the form of partnerships, funding, and collaborative networks—as well as stringent environmental regulations, contributes to fostering the adoption of proactive behaviours, particularly among SMEs. However, in the absence of a coherent support and incentive system, many companies tend to limit themselves to mere regulatory compliance.

From this integrated and dynamic perspective of corporate sustainability, it becomes necessary to introduce the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which represents an additional theoretical and practical tool through which companies can concretely express their commitment to sustainable growth.

Since the late 20th century, CSR has gained increasing importance, especially in European and U.S. contexts, where public and institutional attention to environmental and social corporate responsibilities has steadily grown (Perrini & Tencati, 2008). One of the most influential definitions, proposed by the European Commission (2001), defines CSR as the voluntary integration of social and environmental concerns into business operations and stakeholder interactions, with the aim of contributing to collective well-being without compromising business competitiveness.

Far from being an accessory or philanthropic practice, CSR is now recognized as a strategic component of business (Ardiansyah & Alnoor, 2024).

Companies may adopt different approaches depending on their level of sustainability integration: from passive strategies aimed solely at regulatory compliance, to reactive strategies triggered by external pressures, up to proactive strategies, where sustainability is viewed as a competitive lever and integrated into the business model (Mio, 2021).

According to Molteni (2007), companies follow an evolutionary path in their adoption of CSR, moving from sporadic, informal actions to models where sustainability becomes the core identity of the organization. This maturation is reflected in the company's ability to address environmental and social challenges systemically, to engage stakeholders, and to redesign internal processes considering shared long-term goals.

In this context, companies that successfully integrate CSR into their organizational culture tend to develop greater resilience, innovation, and competitiveness (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Observed benefits include improved corporate reputation, increased attractiveness to investors and talent, stronger relationships with suppliers and customers, and better positioning with respect to future regulations (Perrini, 2018; Rossi, 2017). However, such integration requires genuine effort: companies that limit themselves to superficial or opportunistic initiatives risk reputational damage and the loss of social legitimacy.

To make a company's commitment to sustainability effective and long-lasting, it is essential to adopt reporting and monitoring systems capable of assessing not only economic-financial variables but also the value generated for all stakeholders in the medium and long term. In this perspective, CSR represents a bridge between the ideals of sustainability and strategic business decisions: both an operational and cultural tool, capable of transforming responsibility into a lever for the development of business, society, and the environment.

Having outlined the theoretical and operational foundations of sustainability, it is now useful to shift the focus to how these principles are concretely applied in the peculiar Italian context, characterized by a broad, complex, and highly heterogeneous entrepreneurial fabric.

## 1.4 The Response of Italian Companies

In Italy, interest in sustainability and corporate social responsibility has grown significantly in recent years. This shift has been driven by various factors: regulatory developments (e.g., Legislative Decrees 231/2001 and 254/2016), the emergence of new social and environmental sensitivities, and increasing pressure from consumers, investors, and stakeholders (Harjoto et al., 2021).

Despite the growing adoption of sustainability reporting and evaluation tools, the responses of Italian companies remain highly heterogeneous (Clementino & Perkins, 2021). Many organizations adopt a reactive approach, mainly focused on compliance and corporate image management, rather than on the strategic integration of sustainability into decision-making processes (Capizzi et al., 2021; Marchegiani, 2021). Others display more explicit resistance, questioning the legitimacy or relevance of certain metrics or standards, which they consider poorly aligned with their operational realities (Perrini & Iantosca, 2021).

Moreover, the perception that sustainable practices involve high costs and uncertain returns contributes to a certain degree of scepticism, particularly among SMEs, which make up most of the Italian entrepreneurial landscape (Levi & Della Ventura, 2024; Zambrano, 2023).

At the same time, there is no shortage of virtuous examples of Italian companies that have chosen to invest in sustainability as a strategic lever for competitiveness, innovation, and building trust-based relationships with their stakeholders. In such cases, sustainability is understood not only as a regulatory obligation but also as an opportunity to generate long-term shared value (Perrini & Iantosca, 2021; Rossi, 2017).

Within this framework, Italy presents a particularly interesting context for analysing the processes through which companies respond to sustainability challenges, especially considering the strong presence of family-owned businesses. These enterprises, which represent a significant portion of the national economy, are characterized by a unique value system, highly personalized governance, and

a long-term vision—factors that can provide a competitive advantage in adopting sustainable strategies (Clementino & Perkins, 2021; Perrini, 2018).

For this reason, the following chapter will be dedicated to defining family businesses, analysing the contexts in which they operate, and exploring how their unique characteristics influence the integration of sustainability into their business models.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Family Businesses and Sustainability: An Integrated Perspective**

This chapter will explore the world of family businesses, with a particular focus on the Italian context. It will also highlight the psychological foundations and commitment to sustainability—essential elements that guide these complex entities, constantly oriented toward the future. The chapter will conclude with the formulation of the research question and the overall methodological design, outlining the theoretical and operational choices that guide the empirical investigation.

#### **2.1 At the Roots of the Family Business: A Historical and Theoretical Evolution**

The Family Business (FB) represents one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of economic organization, capable of enduring across historical periods thanks to its remarkable ability to adapt to economic, social, and cultural change (Dana & Ramadani, 2015).

The intertwining of family life and productive activity has deep historical roots. In many pre-industrial contexts, the family was not merely a domestic unit but also an economic and working nucleus, where skills, responsibilities, and values were transmitted across generations. While the industrial era introduced new organizational forms and managerial logics, many families transformed these challenges into entrepreneurial continuity, giving rise to long-lasting dynasties and locally embedded enterprises (Chandler, 1980). In Italy, this trajectory was reinforced after World War II, when family SMEs became central actors in reconstruction and growth within a predominantly small-firm economy (Colli, 2003).

Beyond their economic relevance, FBs are characterized by a strong symbolic and identity-based dimension. These firms often embody values such as

intergenerational continuity, long-term orientation, local embeddedness, and responsibility toward employees and the surrounding community (De Massis et al., 2012). As a result, economic objectives tend to be closely intertwined with emotional ties, family legacy, and reputational concerns, generating organizational dynamics that differ substantially from those of non-family firms.

Despite their diffusion, FBs have long occupied a marginal position in academic debate. During the 1960s and 1970s, dominant managerial and agency-based perspectives considered family involvement as a potential source of inefficiency, predicting that the separation between ownership and control would progressively marginalize family-run firms. It was only from the 1980s onward—following the sustained success of many family-controlled SMEs—that a paradigm shift occurred. FBs began to be recognized as distinct organizational forms, endowed with specific competitive advantages rooted in intangible resources such as trust, internal cohesion, reputation, and a long-term strategic orientation (Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Zahra, 2005).

One of the most debated issues in the literature concerns the very definition of the FB. No single, universally accepted definition exists, reflecting the heterogeneity of these firms and the multiple lenses through which they have been studied. Early definitions focused primarily on ownership and control, identifying FBs as firms in which a single family holds a dominant share of equity and decision-making power (Shanker & Astrachan, 1996). Subsequent approaches expanded this view by emphasizing the active involvement of family members in management and governance, as well as the intention to transfer control across generations (Handler, 1994; Churchill & Hatten, 1987).

Chua, Chrisman, and Sharma (1999) propose a more integrative definition, conceptualizing FBs as organizations governed and/or managed with the intention of shaping and pursuing a vision held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family. This perspective moves beyond purely structural criteria and highlights the central role of family influence on strategic intent, values, and organizational culture. In this sense, what distinguishes FBs from non-family

firms is not merely who owns or manages the company, but how family involvement shapes decision-making processes, time horizons, and priorities.

Building on this integrative view, several scholars have sought to operationalize the concept of FB through multidimensional criteria. Shanker and Astrachan (1996), for example, identify varying degrees of family involvement based on ownership, governance, and management, allowing for a more nuanced classification of family firms. Similarly, Corbetta (1995) emphasizes the relevance of ownership structure, firm size, and governance composition, showing that FBs can assume heterogeneous configurations while still sharing a core family-based foundation.

At the European level, the need for definitional clarity led the European Commission (2009) to propose a harmonized definition of FBs, aimed at facilitating research comparability and policy design. According to this definition, a firm—regardless of its size—can be considered family-owned if most decision-making rights are held by the founder or by members of the founder’s family, and if at least one family member is formally involved in the management of the firm. In the case of listed companies, a minimum threshold of 25% of voting rights is considered sufficient to exert family influence.

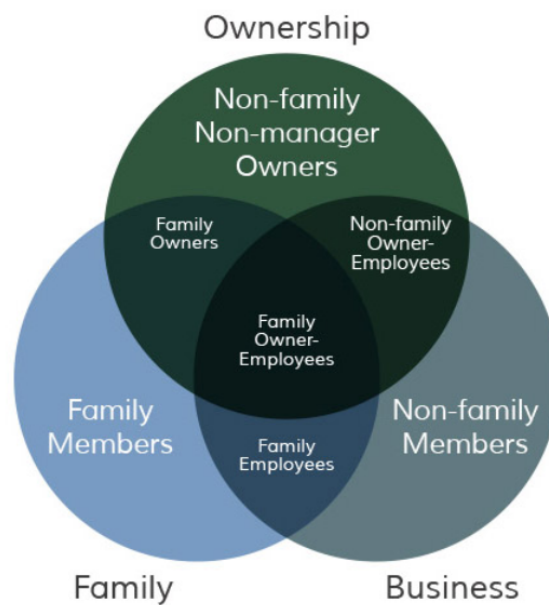
Taken together, these definitions highlight that FBs differ from non-family firms along several key dimensions. Structurally, FBs are characterized by the overlap between ownership, management, and family relationships, whereas non-family firms tend to exhibit a clearer separation between these spheres. Strategically, FBs typically adopt longer time horizons, prioritizing continuity and transgenerational sustainability over short-term financial performance. Psychologically, family involvement introduces emotional attachment, identity concerns, and relational dynamics that strongly influence strategic choices, risk preferences, and openness to change.

This hybrid nature—emerging from the intersection of family, ownership, and business systems—has been effectively captured by the Three-Circle Model proposed by Tagiuri and Davis (1996). The model illustrates how individuals within FBs may simultaneously occupy multiple roles (e.g., family member, owner, manager), generating both potential tensions and unique opportunities for

alignment and synergy. These overlapping roles constitute one of the most distinctive features of FBs and provide a fertile ground for understanding their specific approach to governance, strategy, and sustainability.

**Figure 6**

*The Three-Circle Model of the Family Business System (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996)*



Overall, FBs can be interpreted as hybrid entrepreneurial actors in which economic rationality is deeply intertwined with identity-based, emotional, and relational components. Their longevity often derives from the ability to balance continuity and change, preserving family values and social capital while adapting to evolving competitive and institutional environments. These characteristics are particularly salient in the Italian context, where FBs represent a structural pillar of the national economy. The following section therefore explores the specific features of Italian family businesses, focusing on their diffusion, performance, and governance models.

## **2.2 The Italian Context**

### **2.2.1 Presence and Sectors of Family Businesses in the Italian Economic System**

In the Italian context, FBs represent a fundamental component of the national productive fabric, both due to their quantitative significance (820.000 FBs with at least three employees) and for the role they play in supporting social cohesion and economic continuity (ISTAT, 2023). Their presence is not merely a legacy of the past, but the result of an adaptive capacity that has enabled them to lead development processes even during periods of profound transformation (Zellweger et al., 2012).

As highlighted in the previous section, although during the last century it was believed that industrial development and the rise of professional management would gradually lead to the disappearance of the family business model, reality has shown the opposite. Today, FBs are recognized as key players in both international and Italian economic development, with a resilience that has allowed them to navigate global market transformations without losing their identity (Cucculelli & Romano, 2016).

In Italy, FBs make up over 80% of the national entrepreneurial landscape. Unlike other international contexts—typically dominated by large industrial groups—the Italian economic system is characterized by the strong presence of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, the majority of which are family-run. Confirming this specific feature, ISTAT (2023), through its Permanent Census of Enterprises (Figure 7), reports that in 2022, family-run micro-enterprises accounted for 83.3% of the total, while among small businesses, the share was 74.5%. The prevalence of the family model decreases progressively with company size: among medium-sized enterprises, the figure drops to 58.8%, and among large enterprises, to 41.6%. Nonetheless, these figures remain significant, as they highlight not only the survival capacity of FBs over time but also their ability to grow and consolidate, reaching considerable dimensions and demonstrating remarkable adaptability and resilience within a constantly evolving market.

**Figure 7**

*Enterprises controlled by a natural person or a family, managerial governance, and generational transition*

Employee size class	Enterprises controlled by an individual or a family		Managerial governance	Enterprises involved in generational transition	
	Number	% of total enterprises		Between 2016 and 2022	Potentially occurring in the 2023-2025
3-9 employees	670.888	83.3	0.8	7.7	6.7
10-49 employees	140.970	74.5	3.2	14.4	14.1
50-249 employees	13.442	58.8	10.0	17.8	14.7
250 or more employees	1.653	41.6	21.2	18.9	12.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>826.953</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>7.9</b>

Note. Author's translation, based on ISTAT, 2023

FBs are particularly present in the manufacturing sector, where they represent 81.2% of the total, with strong concentrations in traditional industries such as textiles, apparel, footwear, food, and wood processing. Equally significant is their presence in the construction sector, where FBs constitute 82.4% of enterprises, and in services, especially in retail trade (84.4%) and accommodation and food services (87.3%).

Although business management is in most cases directly handled by the entrepreneur or a family member, there is a gradual shift toward more structured managerial models. There is increasing use of managerial figures—whether internal or external to the family—especially in medium-sized enterprises (10.4%) and even more so among large enterprises (21.3%).

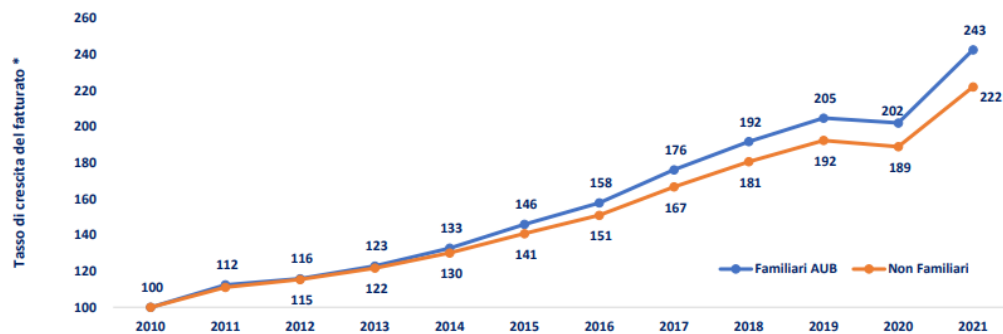
It is also worth noting that in 2021, following the COVID-19 pandemic crisis of 2020, FBs demonstrated a particularly strong recovery capacity, recording a revenue increase over 20% higher than that of non-family firms (Figure 8). This

positive trend was confirmed in the first half of 2022 as well (AUB Observatory, 2023).

In this context, FBs stand out not only for their resilience, but also for their ability to grow and consolidate across different territorial and sectoral contexts in the country, demonstrating a structural and dynamic role within the Italian production system.

**Figure 8**

*Comparison of Growth Rates between FBs and Non-FBs (AUB Observatory, 2023)*



### 2.2.2 Economic and Sectoral Performance of Italian Family Businesses

Recent evidence suggests that Italian FBs have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. Data from the AUB Observatory (2023) indicate that, following the sharp contraction of 2020, FBs experienced a stronger recovery than non-family firms, recording revenue growth rates more than 20% higher in 2021 and confirming this trend in early 2022.

In terms of profitability, FBs reached one of their highest levels of operating performance in the last decade, with a Return on Investment (ROI) of 9.8% in 2022. This result reflects not only cyclical recovery, but also structural strengths related to cautious financial management and long-term investment strategies. Indeed,

several financial indicators point to a progressive strengthening of FBs' balance sheets: reliance on debt has slightly decreased, liquidity levels have increased, and the proportion of firms in critical financial conditions has declined markedly.

Investment behaviour further supports this interpretation. Although extraordinary investment peaks linked to asset revaluation have stabilized, FBs continue to invest more than non-family firms, particularly in fixed assets, innovation, and industrial patents. This pattern suggests that long-term orientation—often associated with family ownership—translates into sustained commitment to competitiveness and organizational renewal, even in uncertain contexts.

### **2.2.3 Governance and Leadership Models**

The analysis of the governance models adopted by Italian FBs reveals a gradual transformation of management structures, with a slow but significant shift from centralized management systems to more structured and shared models. For the first time, during the 2020–2022 triennium, the Sole Director model—where a single individual holds full decision-making authority over the company—was no longer associated with the best business performance, losing the central role it once held.

At the same time, there has been a growing spread of more structured leadership forms, such as that of the sole Chief Executive Officer (CEO), which increased by nearly five percentage points over the same period, to the detriment of the Sole Director and Executive Chairman roles. Moreover, more than a third of FBs (33.9%) are now led by one or more CEOs. This is the only model that, during the pandemic triennium, showed a statistically significant and positive correlation with both growth and profitability rates—especially in larger companies.

Nonetheless, fully family-based leadership remains prevalent, particularly among smaller enterprises. It is estimated that this configuration applies to about 78.8% of small FBs, while among larger firms the percentage is 65.7%. However, there are signs of greater openness to the professionalization of

governance. Between 2020 and 2022, fully family-led businesses declined by about 4 percentage points among larger companies, and for the first time, even smaller FBs are beginning to show a similar trend.

Another significant aspect concerns the age of business leaders: the increase in leaders over the age of 70 has nearly stopped, though their presence remains high in absolute terms (more than one in four). Meanwhile, leaders under 50 remain a minority (fewer than two in ten). Nonetheless, generational turnover is showing encouraging signs: companies led by younger leaders are achieving significantly above-average performance in terms of growth and profitability, whereas performance tends to decline in companies led by older leaders (Asaf et al., 2023).

Overall, the evolution of governance in FBs suggests a transition still underway, marked by the emergence of more modern and performance-oriented management models, while still maintaining the centrality of the founding family (Deloitte, 2019).

#### **2.2.4 Generational Turnover: Challenges and Transformations**

The analysis conducted by the AUB Observatory (2023) highlights how leadership succession represents a crucial transition in the FBs, often accompanied by risks of instability and loss of continuity. However, during the 2020–2022 period, there was an acceleration in generational turnover processes, partly driven by the effects of the pandemic. On average, 7% of FBs changed leadership each year during this period, with a peak of over 10% among larger companies in 2020 alone.

This renewal brought with it two significant dynamics: on one hand, an increase in the involvement of leaders external to the owning family; on the other, a greater presence of young leaders and, to a lesser extent, women in leadership roles. Out of a total of 1.767 leadership transitions analysed, there was a net increase of 315 non-family managers and 210 leaders under the age of 50. The number of women in leadership roles also grew, though more modestly (+35 over the three-year period). Overall, the average age of new leaders was about seven

years lower than that of their predecessors, with the gap reaching ten years in cases where the board of directors included non-family members.

The impact of generational turnover on business performance is generally positive, provided the transition is well planned and accompanied by openness and innovation. A comparative analysis between the three-year periods before and after the leadership change revealed an average increase of three percentage points in revenue growth. However, no significant changes were observed in operating profitability, indicating that, when well-managed, the transition can be a moment of continuity rather than disruption. Turnover proves particularly effective when:

- the outgoing leader is over 70 years old.
- the board of directors includes non-family members.
- the transition occurs between family members through a planned succession.

Conversely, performance tends to worsen when the outgoing leader is the founder, or when the transition is triggered by unplanned circumstances, such as a post-mortem succession.

Overall, generational turnover confirms itself as a strategic lever for ensuring continuity and innovation. The growing presence of younger leaders—and, albeit to a lesser extent, of women—represents a first step toward more open and diversified governance models, even though there is still considerable room for improvement.

### **2.2.5 Sustainability and Family Businesses: A Strategic Research Arena**

In recent years, sustainability has become a strategic imperative for companies of all sizes and across all sectors, and Italy has made significant progress in this direction. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), the European Green Deal, and the UN's 2030 Agenda are just some of the policy and regulatory tools that have encouraged the integration of sustainability into business models. However, despite growing attention and investments in the field, Italian FBs remain

a relatively underexplored area—yet potentially crucial—for understanding the specific dynamics behind sustainable decision-making.

FBs are distinguished by a long-term managerial logic, strong integration with the local socio-territorial context, and a tendency to prioritize the preservation of socio-emotional wealth<sup>2</sup> (SEW) —that is, the set of non-financial benefits families derive from owning and controlling the firm, such as identity, reputation, and the intention of passing the business on to future generations— over mere economic profit. This tendency translates into a vision of sustainability that is less focused on formal regulatory compliance and more rooted in the values and personal convictions of founders and owning families.

However, alongside success stories, it is important to acknowledge the “dark side” of FBs. The literature clearly documents how internal conflicts, favouritism, nepotism, and inadequate resource allocation can hinder the adoption of sustainable practices. Overprotecting SEW can lead to reluctance to embrace innovative change, especially when it is perceived as risky or misaligned with family traditions (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2007; Patel & Chrisman, 2014). This attitude can lead to organizational inertia, compromising operational efficiency and adaptability.

Moreover, emotional attachment to existing resources, long-standing collaborators, and the traditional family governance model can impede the introduction of new technologies, reduce innovation willingness, and limit the inclusion of external competencies. This phenomenon, highlighted in several studies (Konig et al., 2013; Cruz et al., 2010), becomes particularly problematic when sustainability demands profound restructuring and a radical rethinking of the business model.

An empirical study by Miroshnychenko and De Massis (2022) on over 2.000 publicly listed companies reveals a negative relationship between the family nature of a business and its environmental performance (EP). While FBs tend to show social responsibility in areas such as employee policies and attention to diversity, they underperform in pollution prevention, green supply chain management, and development of eco-friendly products. This gap is even more

pronounced when focusing on actual operational practices rather than mere environmental disclosures.

Such discrepancies may stem from FBs' reluctance to engage in long-term investments that do not yield immediate returns or may be perceived as threatening their control. Yet, research confirms that these very practices—such as pollution prevention and sustainable product development—are associated with better financial performance (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008; Miroshnychenko et al., 2017), and could thus represent a competitive advantage for FBs, which are often less capitalized than non-family firms.

Ultimately, FBs offer a privileged lens through which to understand the evolution of sustainability from a psychological, value-based, and intergenerational perspective. Their lower adherence to sustainability practices should not be read solely as resistance to change, but rather as a reflection of different priorities, rooted in a vision of the business as an extension of the family and its legacy. For this reason, public policies and support initiatives should consider these specificities, promoting sustainable models that align with the identity, values, and resources of FBs.

### **2.3 Theories Supporting Sustainability in Family Businesses: A Critical Review**

The literature has proposed numerous theoretical approaches to explain why FBs adopt—or conversely, avoid—sustainable practices. These approaches, drawn from economic, organizational, and psychological disciplines, offer valuable insights, yet they often remain fragmented and fail to systematically integrate the cognitive, value-based, and relational dimensions of entrepreneurial decision-making. Below is a structured review of the main theories, highlighting their strengths, limitations, and complementarity.

### **2.3.1 The Socioemotional Wealth Perspective**

The SEW theory, developed by Gómez-Mejía et al. (2007), provides a crucial interpretive lens for understanding the decision-making dynamics within FBs, as it places the emotional well-being of the owning family at the core of strategic choices. As emphasized by Marques et al. (2014) and Cruz et al. (2014), SEW highlights that strategic decisions are not solely driven by economic logic but are profoundly influenced by the emotional implications these decisions may have for the family. Those managing the business tend to carefully evaluate the emotional impact of their choices to protect family continuity and identity. These psychological aspects will be further explored in subsequent sections.

A further development of the theory is proposed by Dick, Wagner, and Pernsteiner (2021), who focus on the importance of corporate image. According to the authors, a negative reputation can undermine the emotional well-being of the family, creating internal tensions and conflicts. SEW is also closely related to the issue of control over the firm: as noted by Cruz et al. (2014), families tend to retain control to safeguard their autonomy and protect what they perceive as emotional assets. However, this desire can conflict with the adoption of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, especially when these entail more structured governance, internal equity mechanisms, or the redistribution of decision-making power.

In this light, SEW can lead to different outcomes: while it may encourage virtuous and responsible behaviours, it can also generate resistance to practices perceived as potentially threatening to the position of family members within the firm (Dick et al., 2021). In some cases, compliance with formal CSR standards is seen as an obstacle to managerial flexibility and freedom, prompting FBs to reduce their commitment in this area.

Alongside SEW, the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SEST), proposed by Madden, McMillan, and Harris (2020), introduces another interpretive element. According to this perspective, as people age, they become more selective in their social relationships, focusing on emotionally meaningful ties. When applied to the business context, this theory suggests that entrepreneurial families may adopt

sustainable practices to nurture meaningful relationships with stakeholders and strengthen their social networks (Madden et al., 2020).

In this direction, the adoption of sustainability strategies by FBs is not only driven by economic motivations but also reflects a broader commitment to environmental protection, social well-being, and building a solid and lasting reputation (Chaudhary, 2021). Sustainable choices thus become a way to strengthen family identity and consolidate trust-based relationships with the external environment.

### **2.3.2 The Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder Theory, introduced by Freeman (1984), provides a fundamental theoretical framework for analysing the dynamics between businesses and their external context, highlighting the influence exerted by actors such as suppliers, customers, investors, and, more broadly, all stakeholders involved with the organization (Crotto et al., 2017). In this sense, stakeholders have the power to redirect their resources to other businesses, potentially harming the company. It is therefore crucial—especially for FBs—to strategically manage relationships with these actors, valuing their input and addressing their expectations (Laguir & Elbaz, 2014).

In the context of FBs, the relationship with stakeholders becomes even more relevant, as it affects not only economic performance but also the company's reputation and legitimacy within the community. Although the primary goal remains value creation for the owners, there is a growing need to incorporate the needs and values of other stakeholders, including those belonging to the business's social and territorial sphere (Crotto et al., 2017). From this perspective, communicating the company's sustainability practices is interpreted as an ongoing dialogue with stakeholders aimed at gaining recognition, trust, and legitimacy.

In contrast, the Shareholder Theory, articulated by Milton Friedman (1970), contends that a business's sole social responsibility is to maximize profits for its shareholders, within the bounds of legality and ethics (Kaptein, 2023). These two theories represent conceptually distinct, not sequential, paradigms.

In this thesis, Stakeholder Theory is adopted as the primary theoretical lens: in FBs, commitment to sustainability is interpreted as a multifaceted endeavour that reinforces reputation, legitimacy, and ties with the social environment. Shareholder Theory is mentioned solely to clarify the conceptual contrast, not as an evolutionary successor.

Nonetheless, the instrumental strand of stakeholder theory suggests that meeting stakeholder expectations—when strategically aligned—can also foster economic value creation and competitive advantage (Alhumaymidi, 2021).

This aligns with the strategic perspective advanced by Lloret (2016) and Abadía, Vázquez, and Hernández (2018) who view stakeholder management as a deliberate mechanism to generate value through non-market practices. Specifically, they describe stakeholder management as a set of actions aimed at addressing stakeholder concerns while aligning with corporate goals. These authors also emphasize that integrating stakeholder expectations into corporate strategy design fosters harmonious relationships with the external environment, contributing to the development of sustainable competitive advantage (Abadía et al., 2018).

This perspective is supported by other contributions in the literature. Stoian and Gilman (2017) note that focused attention on stakeholder needs allows companies to make better strategic decisions. Nejati et al. (2017) highlight the link between responsible stakeholder practices, corporate reputation, and long-term financial performance, emphasizing that social responsibility is no longer optional but a strategic lever. Wilson and Post (2013) reinforce this view, arguing that stakeholders should be involved from the outset in building a sustainable, socially oriented business model. In the context of proactive Corporate Social Responsibility, Torugsa, O'Donohue, and Hecker (2013) show that companies adopting an inclusive approach—engaging a broad range of stakeholders—are more likely to develop advanced CSR strategies than those focusing on a limited number of interlocutors. Broad and participatory involvement helps prevent conflicts, strengthens social legitimacy, and reduces tensions related to sustainability.

Business legitimacy also involves moral and legal obligations toward the reference community, as highlighted by Grimstad, Glavee-Geo, and Fjørtoft (2020), who emphasize that stakeholder relationships go beyond the economic dimension and entail ethical responsibilities. In this regard, Delmas and Gergaud (2014) link Stakeholder Theory to sustainable entrepreneurship, drawing attention to the role of future generations as key stakeholders. Specifically, they suggest that the intention to pass on the business to one's children can reinforce an entrepreneur's commitment to sustainable practices to preserve not only economic wealth but also values and legacy.

Finally, Meyer and Gauthier (2013), analysing the context of social entrepreneurship, emphasize that the relationship with stakeholders goes beyond utilitarian exchange: the entrepreneur is called upon to respond to multiple and often conflicting interests, requiring mediation skills and a systemic vision that values dialogue with society.

### **2.3.3 The Resource-Based Approach and the Concept of Familiness**

The Resource-Based View (RBV) interprets a firm's competitive advantage as the result of the availability and effective management of internal resources, both tangible and intangible (Barney, 1991; Hiebl, 2012). Intangible resources are particularly relevant—such as distinctive competencies, organizational culture, human capital, and collective memory—which, if rare, valuable, and difficult to imitate, can ensure a sustainable advantage over time (Barney, 2001; Curado, 2006). In FBs, these resources take on a unique connotation, as they intertwine with the relational and value-based dimensions of the family, generating an intangible asset that is often one of a kind.

The direct involvement of the family in business management, the sharing of a common history, and the intergenerational transmission of values represent key elements that help create a strong identity and a long-term strategic orientation. These types of resources, deeply embedded in the organizational culture and difficult to replicate, can facilitate the adoption of sustainable practices. In fact, FBs

tend to exhibit a stronger focus on long-term survival, a particular attention to value coherence, and a predisposition to building strong relationships with stakeholders—all elements that support the integration of sustainability into the business model (Chrisman et al., 2012; Hiebl, 2012).

From this perspective, sustainability is not perceived as an external constraint or a mere regulatory requirement, but rather as a strategy aligned with the family's identity and, at the same time, instrumental in strengthening competitive advantage. The environmental and social practices adopted by FBs can themselves become intangible resources, helping to consolidate the company's reputation, strengthen social capital, and stimulate innovation (Dao et al, 2011). The adoption of a proactive CSR approach, as suggested by Tatoglu et al. (2020), can therefore be seen as an expression of the company's ability to leverage its internal resources, engage in dialogue with stakeholders, and develop new competencies in environmental and social domains.

A further contribution to understanding the specific nature of FBs comes from the concept of familiness, developed by Habbershon and Williams (1999) and later expanded by numerous scholars (Chrisman et al., 2005; Zellweger et al., 2010). The term refers to the set of distinctive resources that emerge from the interaction between the family and the business, constituting a unique source of competitive advantage. These resources are not only economic in nature but also symbolic, cognitive, and relational: they stem from the emotional bonds among family members, the sharing of a common vision and values, mutual trust, the continuity of internal and external relationships, and the personal identification with the fate of the business.

In the context of sustainability, familiness, understood as the distinctive set of resources and capabilities generated by the interaction between the family and the business (Habbershon & Williams, 1999), can be a powerful asset. The presence of an intergenerational orientation, the desire to leave a positive legacy, and the perceived responsibility toward the local community and future generations constitute strong motivational levers for the adoption of sustainable strategies. The social capital developed over time, together with the value coherence guiding

business decisions, facilitates the building of trust-based relationships with key stakeholders, such as employees, customers, suppliers, and local actors. Moreover, the sharing of a long-term family vision can lead to more deeply rooted and genuine sustainable practices, going beyond mere regulatory compliance.

However, it is important to note that familiness does not automatically guarantee positive outcomes. The same relational dynamics that represent a strength can become critical if family conflicts, diverging interests, or a lack of openness to innovation emerge. Situations such as excessive altruism, favouritism toward less competent family members, or the influence of emotional factors in strategic decisions can compromise the coherence and effectiveness of sustainability initiatives (Zellweger et al., 2010; Chirico et al., 2011). For this reason, the true competitive potential of familiness is realized only when family resources are consciously managed, harmonizing the emotional dimension with strategic thinking and directing the family's relational, cognitive, and value-based assets toward sustainability and innovation goals (Miller, & Le Breton-Miller, 2005; Daspit et al., 2019).

#### **2.3.4 The Stewardship Theory**

The Stewardship Theory offers an alternative perspective to more traditional and opportunistic views of managerial behaviour, proposing that individuals—particularly those in leadership roles—are not primarily driven by self-interest, but rather by a sense of identification with the organization and a commitment to collective well-being (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016). In this view, the steward/entrepreneur/manager does not act as an agent motivated by personal gain, but as a caretaker who looks after the business, shares its mission, and actively works toward its goals, even at the cost of personal sacrifices (Pearson & Marler, 2010).

This logic is particularly relevant in the context of FBs, where emotional attachment to the organization and an intergenerational outlook lead family leader to assume a broader sense of responsibility that goes beyond immediate interests. FBs often view themselves as custodians of a legacy, entrusted with the task of

preserving the business not only for themselves, but also for future generations and for the community in which they operate. This vision translates into a greater inclination to build strong and lasting relationships with stakeholders, invest in the local area, and adopt entrepreneurial practices oriented toward sustainability.

It is precisely this identification with the company and the desire to preserve its reputation and continuity over time that represent one of the key elements explaining why FBs may derive competitive advantage from a stewardship-oriented approach. Unlike models focused on control and short-term profit maximization, stewardship promotes a long-term approach, where economic performance is balanced with ethical, environmental, and social goals. The strong sense of belonging, the personal dedication of family leaders, and the perceived responsibility toward the broader community make FBs particularly inclined to embrace sustainable logics and CSR strategies consistent with their founding values (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016).

In this perspective, sustainability is not introduced merely as a response to external or regulatory pressures, but rather as a natural expression of an entrepreneurial identity based on trust, commitment, and collective interest. This connection between family leadership, a stewardship orientation, and the adoption of sustainable practices allows FBs to be interpreted not simply as economic actors, but as organizations morally rooted in their context, capable of exerting a positive and lasting influence on both the social and environmental fronts.

The various theoretical perspectives presented thus far—from Socioemotional Wealth to Stakeholder Theory, the Resource-Based View, and Stewardship Theory—provide a multifaceted framework for understanding how and why FBs engage in sustainability efforts. Considering these conceptual frameworks, the analysis of the actual CSR practices adopted by these firms, which will be explored in the next section, becomes particularly relevant.

### **2.3.5 CSR in Family Businesses**

In recent years, the growing focus on sustainability has led FBs to reflect on how to effectively integrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices into

their management models (Caputo et al., 2017). However, the landscape of FBs is extremely heterogeneous: factors such as family values, governance structures, and the degree of involvement of family members result in different approaches to CSR, making it difficult to identify a universal model (Curado & Mota, 2021).

According to Shields et al. (2018), the main drivers of sustainable practices in FBs are personal interests, organizational culture, and family values. Businesses with deep roots in the local community and a strong focus on reputation appear more inclined to invest in sustainability, both for ethical reasons and for competitive advantage (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015). Well-established FBs seem more engaged in responsible practices than newly founded ones, which are less integrated into the social fabric and less oriented toward the long term.

Over time, CSR has evolved from being a mere response to regulatory pressures to becoming a strategic component of businesses, especially in FBs, where the overlap between ownership and control can foster a value-based alignment between the family and the organization. In this sense, numerous studies have focused on the effect of family involvement in CSR decisions, highlighting how the active presence of the family—in terms of ownership, management, and board representation—facilitates the adoption of social and environmental practices, especially when driven by shared values and intergenerational goals (Marques & Presas, 2014).

Empirical analysis conducted by Marques and colleagues, based on interviews with FB executives, showed that CSR is more developed in businesses with a strong family presence. In these contexts, CSR is often perceived as a collective commitment rooted in corporate culture and a desire to ensure continuity and social legitimacy. However, the literature also highlights potential drawbacks: in some cases, an excessive focus on family interests may reduce sensitivity toward external stakeholders, limiting the effectiveness of ethical and social policies.

Governance has received particular attention. On the one hand, strong and coherent governance can enhance CSR; on the other, evidence suggests that the presence of family directors may, in certain contexts, reduce the quality of social performance, especially when economic logics or protective attitudes toward family

capital prevail (El Ghoul et al., 2016). Studies conducted in Asian contexts have found that high family control can be associated with lower CSR investment, especially when governance structures are weak or when CSR is not perceived as aligned with shareholders' interests.

Within this debate, the role of socioemotional wealth—already discussed earlier—also emerges. For example, Block and Wagner (2014) found that family ownership tends to reduce opportunistic behaviours, while the presence of family CEOs can create tensions between economic goals and social responsibility. In general, FBs appear more inclined to integrate CSR when there is a strong connection to the local territory, a shared culture, and governance capable of balancing family and social demands.

Finally, the work of Abeysekera and Fernando (2020) offers a critical reflection on FBs' orientation toward CSR, showing that family-run businesses tend to invest only in those CSR practices that align with the interests of family shareholders, reflecting a certain selectivity. Moreover, in stricter regulatory environments, FBs seem less responsive than non-family firms, possibly due to the lower formalization of their ethical practices.

In conclusion, the relationship between CSR and FBs is complex and heavily influenced by contextual, cultural, and psychological factors. While it cannot be asserted with certainty that FBs always perform better in the CSR domain, their value structure, long-term vision, and deep ties to the social context predispose them to develop responsible approaches aligned with a FB ethic. For this reason, it is essential to also consider the psychological dynamics at play within FBs, which will be explored in the next section to offer a deeper understanding of the processes guiding their sustainable choices.

### **2.3.6 Psychological Foundations of Family Business Management**

In recent years, scientific literature has increasingly acknowledged the importance of psychological variables in understanding strategic and decision-making behaviour within organizations. This perspective proves especially valuable in the case of FBs, where the intertwining of economic-organizational and

affective-relational dimensions creates a complex field of action. Here, decisions are guided not only by rational logics but also by symbolic representations, emotional experiences, and subjective motivations (Chrisman et al., 2007; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006).

This interplay makes FBs a unique context in which managerial choices cannot be fully understood without considering the psychological fabric underpinning them. Psychological theories—particularly from cognitive, clinical, social, and developmental psychology—offer insightful interpretative tools for analysing how individuals and family groups face decision-making challenges, develop strategies, manage uncertainty, and interact with stakeholders (Gavetti, 2012; Powell et al., 2011).

According to systemic-relational psychology, each member's actions are shaped by family roles, transgenerational dynamics, and implicit expectations (Cigoli & Scabini, 2000). Similarly, cultural psychology highlights the role of shared narratives and meaning-making frameworks in shaping strategic decisions, emphasizing the subjective significance of entrepreneurial action (Bruner, 1990; Ruggieri et al., 2014; Gozzoli, 2016). As family systems, FBs are permeated by a narrative and identity dimension that deeply influences business choices.

A key theoretical construct in this regard is identity, conceived as an intersubjective and dynamic construction rooted in family experiences, significant relationships, and shared values. In FBs, personal, family, and organizational identities tend to overlap, generating a peculiar identity configuration where the business becomes an extension and expression of the Self (Gersick et al., 1997; Labaki et al., 2013). This identification can serve as a strong motivational driver but also as a defensive barrier that hinders change, particularly during generational transitions or competitive pressure.

Within this framework, the adoption of sustainable practices can be interpreted not only as a strategic response to external demands but also as a means of redefining the firm's identity through values. Sustainability may become part of the company's identity narrative, reinforcing its sense of legitimacy, continuity, and responsibility toward future generations (Berrone et al., 2012; De Massis & Foss,

2018). Some FBs develop a genuine “sustainable identity,” which manifests in behaviours aligned with ethical and environmental values, as well as in long-term commitments to the community and local territory (Schmidts, & Shepherd, 2015; Li et al., 2023; Alguera Kleine et al., 2024).

A particularly significant contribution to the psychological understanding of FBs is offered by the model proposed by Pozzi and Ripamonti (2019), which outlines a psychological road map of the implicit representations guiding the actions of both Senior and Junior members within FBs. Developed through a qualitative interpretative approach, this model identifies sixteen implicit theories that shape perceptions of the business, the future, generational relationships, and company management. The analysis of polarities (e.g., “identification” vs. “instrumentality”; “reproduction” vs. “revolution”) helps visualize potential intergenerational distances, thus opening pathways for dialogue and transformative awareness.

This focus on implicit representations and shared narratives resonates with cognitive and constructivist psychological traditions, which interpret action as the result of mental maps, interpretive schemas, and deep-seated beliefs (Kelly, 1955; Dweck, 1999). FBs thus operate through family-rooted meaning systems that shape organizational culture and guide strategic choices, including those related to sustainability.

Leadership is another crucial psychological factor. Numerous studies have shown how personality traits, cognitive styles, and emotional variables of CEOs significantly influence strategic orientation and openness to innovation and sustainability (Hiller & Hambrick, 2005; Peterson et al., 2003). For instance, leaders who display humility and openness are more inclined to embrace stakeholder concerns and implement sustainable practices, while narcissistic or dominant personalities tend to focus on short-term performance (Tang et al., 2015; Ou et al., 2018). In FBs, these traits intertwine with affective and familial values, amplifying their impact on decision-making.

Further insights emerge from the study of decision heuristics—simplified cognitive strategies used by leaders under ambiguity and time pressure (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). While often efficient, these heuristics may also lead to

cognitive distortions, particularly when combined with intense emotional experiences or rigid mental schemas (Campbell et al., 2004). Personality traits such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, or neuroticism influence risk perception and uncertainty management (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Judge et al., 2002), with even greater impact when personal and professional roles overlap.

Equally relevant are emotional dynamics. Emotions such as pride, fear of loss, anxiety about succession, or the desire for recognition act as powerful—often unspoken—motivational forces (Labaki et al., 2013). These emotions are frequently tied to attachment to the founder or family legacy and may lead to paradoxical behaviours, such as resisting innovation in the name of preserving identity (Picone et al., 2021).

Dynamic psychology emphasizes that such emotions can only be understood considering unconscious fantasies, defence mechanisms, and symbolic processes, which shape intergenerational relationships and decision-making authority (Astrachan & Jaskiewicz, 2008). As such, organizational behaviours in FBs must be interpreted within their relational and affective contexts.

Governance structures also play a key role. In FBs, governance often overlaps with family boundaries, fostering value cohesion but also risking self-referentiality, lack of meritocracy, and conflicts of interest (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006). The presence of independent board members and the implementation of formal control mechanisms can help regulate the psychological dynamics that influence business behaviour

Altogether, family identity, personal motivation, internalized values, and emotional experiences offer a powerful interpretative lens for understanding long-term orientation and commitment to sustainability. Nonetheless, in highly competitive environments, these same elements may become obstacles to innovation and adaptability.

Within this complex landscape, there is a clear need for methodological tools capable of capturing the subjectivity and depth of organizational experiences.

## 2.4 Addressing the Literature Gap: Toward a Psychological and Process-Oriented Understanding of Sustainability in FB

Despite the growing body of research on sustainability in family businesses, the existing literature remains characterized by several theoretical and methodological gaps. While prior studies have extensively examined structural determinants—such as ownership concentration, governance mechanisms, and financial performance—less attention has been devoted to the psychological processes through which sustainability-related decisions are constructed, interpreted, and sustained over time (De Massis et al., 2018; Sharma & Sharma, 2011).

First, much of the empirical evidence is based on quantitative designs relying on secondary data, ESG ratings, or sustainability disclosures. Although these approaches offer important insights into observable outcomes, they provide limited understanding of *why* and *how* sustainability becomes a strategic priority for some family businesses and not for others (Berrone et al., 2012; Miroshnychenko & De Massis, 2022). In many cases, sustainability is treated as a static attribute rather than as a dynamic process embedded in entrepreneurs' lived experiences and ongoing sense-making (Capizzi et al., 2021).

Second, dominant theoretical frameworks—such as Socioemotional Wealth, Stakeholder Theory, the Resource-Based View, and Stewardship Theory—have often been applied in a fragmented manner. While each perspective captures relevant aspects of family business behaviour, their isolated use limits the ability to grasp the interplay between values, emotions, identity, and contextual pressures (Zellweger et al., 2013; De Massis et al., 2021). As a result, sustainability is frequently interpreted either as a rational response to external demands or as a mechanism for preserving family control and reputation, leaving the subjective viewpoint of decision-makers underexplored (Cruz et al., 2014).

Third, although identity-related constructs are increasingly acknowledged in family business research, entrepreneurial identity is rarely examined as a central explanatory mechanism. Little is known about how family entrepreneurs integrate

personal values, intergenerational legacies, and professional roles into a coherent identity that guides sustainability-related choices. This limitation is particularly salient given the long-term orientation and emotional embeddedness that distinguish family businesses from non-family firms (Berrone et al., 2012).

Moreover, existing studies seldom adopt a process-oriented perspective capable of capturing the temporal and developmental nature of sustainability. Sustainability-related decisions unfold through iterative negotiations among personal convictions, family expectations, organizational constraints, and institutional pressures (Langley et al., 2013). Static models struggle to account for these trajectories, leaving open questions regarding how sustainable commitment emerges, stabilizes, or weakens over time.

Finally, there remains a notable lack of qualitative, in-depth investigations centred on the voices of family business leaders themselves. Understanding sustainability as a psychologically grounded phenomenon requires access to narratives, reflections, and lived experiences—elements that are often absent in large-scale empirical studies (Capizzi et al., 2021). Qualitative and theory-building approaches are therefore particularly well suited to uncover the underlying meanings that guide sustainability-related behaviour in family firms (Charmaz, 2006; Gehman et al., 2013).

## **2.5 The Present Study: A Mixed Methods Grounded Theory Design**

What has been discussed thus far highlights the need for a methodological framework capable of capturing the relational, symbolic, and motivational complexity that characterizes FBs and their relation with sustainability issues. In this perspective, the mixed methods approach emerges as a particularly appropriate methodological choice, as it allows for the integration of the interpretative depth of qualitative inquiry with the scope and systematic nature of quantitative analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As noted by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007), this approach leverages the strengths of both paradigms, offering a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of complex social phenomena.

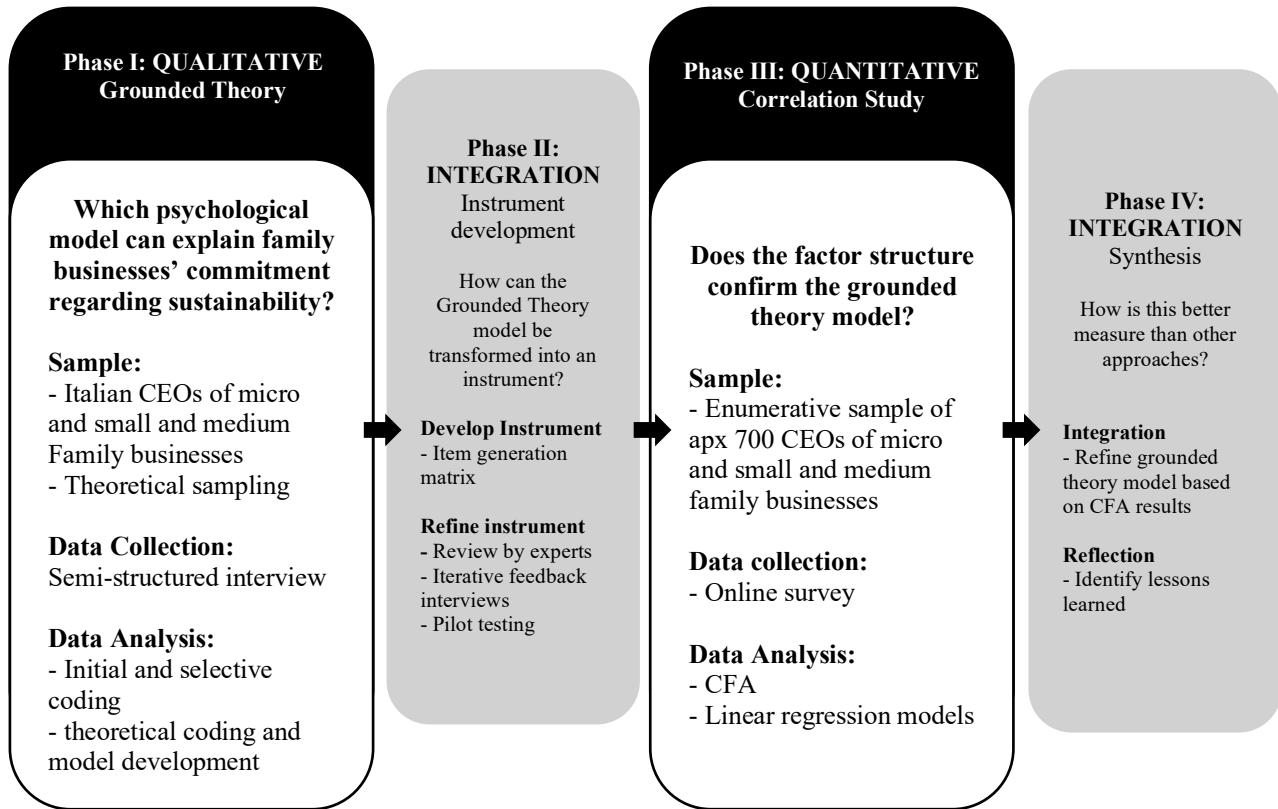
Building on this epistemological foundation, recent methodological developments have further refined the integration between qualitative and quantitative approaches within grounded theoretical frameworks. Specifically, the Mixed Methods–Grounded Theory (MM-GT) design proposed by Howell Smith, Carhart e Hayes (2020) represents a significant methodological reference for research aimed at generating theory grounded in the lived experiences of social actors. This approach enables a structured articulation of exploratory, confirmatory, and integrative phases, promoting a circular movement between data and theory and enhancing transparency in the theory-building process. The adoption of this perspective within the present research responds to the need to explore in depth the representations and meanings that guide sustainable choices in family businesses, while maintaining an open dialogue with a broader and more generalizable empirical dimension.

### **2.5.1 Research Question and Methodological Design**

This study aims to investigate the psychological foundations that guide the commitment of FBs regarding sustainability, with the objective of identifying a theoretical model capable of accounting for their underlying complexity. Specifically, the central question guiding the entire research process is: Which psychological model can explain FBs' commitment regarding sustainability?

As discussed in the previous chapters, this question emerges from the observation that, although FBs operate within a competitive economic environment, they often exhibit a distinctive orientation towards sustainability—an orientation that cannot be fully understood through economic or strategic management lenses alone. Rather, their commitment to sustainability appears to be rooted in deeper psychological dimensions, linked to intergenerational values, the construction of family identity, and a long-term vision grounded in social and environmental responsibility. To address such a multifaceted question, it was necessary to adopt a methodological design capable of capturing the phenomenon's complexity, combining theoretical rigor with a sensitivity to subjective meanings.

**Figure 9**  
*Study Design*



In this perspective, the research is based on the MM-GT approach proposed by Howell Smith and colleagues (2020), which represents an advanced methodological framework for theory-building in complex contexts. This model is based on the structured integration of qualitative exploration, quantitative measurement, and empirical confirmation, aiming to transcend the traditional dichotomy between paradigms by emphasizing the complementarity of methods.

The research process is thus structured into four interrelated phases (see Figure 9). The first phase consists of qualitative exploration, conducted through in-depth interviews and analysed using the principles of constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006). This stage is intended to elicit theoretical categories grounded in the lived experiences of participants and to construct a preliminary interpretative model. The second phase involves the development of a quantitative

instrument by translating the emergent categories into coherent and valid items, ensuring a close alignment between theoretical constructs and empirical indicators. The third phase has a confirmatory nature and involves validating the model on a larger sample through the application of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). This allows for the empirical testing of the latent structure of the identified dimensions and the overall robustness of the theoretical model. In this phase, multiple linear regression models will also be employed to examine whether, and to what extent, demographic variables will predict sustainable behaviours. This analytical step will aim to assess whether basic demographic characteristics exert a significant influence on sustainable practices, thereby allowing the variables identified through the Grounded Theory to emerge—or not—as the main predictors in the subsequent quantitative analyses.

Finally, the fourth phase introduces an integrative moment, in which the model is refined and consolidated considering the results.

The distinctive feature—and at the same time the main challenge—of this research design lies in its circular logic between theory and data, in which inductive and deductive processes alternate and reinforce one another. The MM-GT framework, as proposed by Howell Smith et al. (2020), enables the generation of contextualized and meaningful knowledge through an iterative process that integrates the interpretative depth of qualitative understanding with the analytical robustness of quantitative validation. This approach, grounded in a constructivist and pragmatic epistemology, is particularly well-suited to the study of family businesses, as it allows for a comprehensive account of the subjective meanings, emotional bonds, and decision-making dynamics that influence sustainability.

In this sense, the adopted methodological strategy not only enables a nuanced reading of the dynamics underlying the development and maintenance of sustainable commitment in FBs but also provides a solid foundation for the development of a theoretical model that is consistent with the specificities of the context and sensitive to the richness of the psychological processes involved.

Moreover, the integrated interpretation of the results—beyond facilitating the development of an original theoretical model anchored in the lived experience

of organizational actors—may generate relevant practical implications on multiple levels. First, it may offer concrete tools to support FBs in the delicate process of transitioning toward sustainable practices, by enhancing the motivational and identity-based resources already present within the organization. Second, the findings may inform targeted training and consulting initiatives, developed in collaboration with trade associations, local authorities, or public institutions, promoting context-specific support strategies that reflect the psychological characteristics of this entrepreneurial form. Lastly, this research aspires to foster dialogue between the academic world and the entrepreneurial ecosystem, contributing to the diffusion of a sustainability culture rooted not only in regulatory compliance or economic incentives, but also in shared values and generative awareness.



## CHAPTER 3

### **First exploratory phase: A Grounded Theory Approach**

This chapter presents the exploratory phase of the research, conducted through a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), adopted to investigate the psychological and social processes underlying sustainable commitment in FBs. This qualitative methodology was chosen for its capacity to capture the depth and complexity of meanings attributed by participants to their sustainability engagement, allowing the identification of patterns that may not emerge through quantitative approaches alone.

The first part of the chapter outlines the methodological framework, detailing the criteria for participant selection, the procedures for data collection through semi-structured interviews, and the iterative coding process based on the constant comparative method.

The second part presents the findings of the qualitative analysis, organized into main themes, subthemes, and the core category that emerged from the data. These elements converge into a theoretical model that reflects the complex interplay of values, motivations, knowledge, and external influences shaping the sustainability trajectories of family businesses. This model provides the conceptual basis for the subsequent quantitative phase, in which the constructs identified during this stage are operationalized and tested.

#### **3.1 Method**

The first exploratory phase of this study aims to investigate in depth the psychological processes that lead CEOs of FBs to engage in sustainable behaviours. To address this objective, a qualitative methodological approach was adopted, grounded in Constructivist Grounded Theory as developed by Charmaz (2006) and further elaborated in the methodological framework proposed by Howell Smith et al. (2020).

Grounded Theory is a systematic research strategy designed to generate theory inductively from data, following a bottom-up logic. This study adopts the constructivist version of Grounded Theory, which differs from the classical formulation by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in its adherence to an interpretive and postmodern epistemological paradigm. Within this framework, the researcher is no longer considered a neutral observer, but rather an active co-constructor of data and meaning, engaged in continuous dialogue with the participants. Data are not simply collected but rather emerge through a situated process of interaction that considers the subjectivity and lived context of the individuals involved.

As Charmaz (2006) emphasizes, Constructivist Grounded Theory recognizes that theoretical categories are not “discovered” but constructed through a careful and recursive analysis of the data, guided by the constant comparative method applied across interviews. This methodological principle shapes the entire analytical process, allowing for the emergence of conceptual structures that reflect the connections between individual experiences and broader organizational dynamics. Furthermore, the MM-GT approach proposed by Howell Smith et al. (2020) offers a valuable framework for embedding this qualitative phase within a broader, multi-level research design, oriented toward theory-building through the integration of qualitative and quantitative insights.

Within this methodological framework, the exploratory analysis is expected to lead to the development of a theoretical model that highlights the key psychological constructs and motivations underpinning sustainable commitment among FB leaders. The resulting model will thus be the outcome of an interactive and contextually grounded process, aimed at capturing the complexity of the motivational and value-driven trajectories that sustain and reinforce entrepreneurial commitment to sustainability.

### **3.1.1 Participants and Sampling Strategy**

This study involved a total of nine participants who were owner–managers or senior executives (e.g., CEO, Managing Director, General Manager) of family SMEs and micro-enterprises based in Lombardy, holding ultimate decision-making

authority over strategy and sustainability-related choices. Participants were selected through theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006), deliberately targeting roles in which sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and investment decisions are made; such positions ensure access to experience-based accounts of how sustainability choices are formulated and implemented in practice. To capture heterogeneity and enhance analytic generalization/transferability, a maximum-variation logic was applied across ATECO sector codes, including firms from different industries (Patton, 2015). The goal was not statistical representativeness but theoretical and conceptual depth: each case was included for its potential to enrich, contrast, and saturate emerging categories. All participating firms were family-owned and family-managed SMEs and micro-enterprises, ensuring that the insights reflect the specific governance and value configurations typical of family businesses.

Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached—i.e., when further interviews no longer produced new, relevant conceptual insights and predominantly yielded redundancy relative to identified categories (Charmaz, 2006; Hennink et al., 2017). This criterion supported the analytical depth and interpretive richness required for developing a theory solidly grounded in the data.

In line with ethical standards for qualitative research, participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. All provided informed consent, which outlined study aims, data handling, and participants' rights—including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences—in accordance with APA ethical guidelines (Standard 3.10 Informed Consent). Table 1 presents anonymized descriptors (e.g., gender, age, role, and industry/ATECO) to contextualize participants' narratives and support a clearer interpretation of organizational dynamics.

**Table 1***Participant Details from the Grounded Theory Phase*

<b>Interview Numbers</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Business Sector ATECO Code</b>
<b>Interview 1</b>	M	CEO	52	Retail sale of clothing and fashion (Code 47.71)
<b>Interview 2</b>	M	CEO	54	Textile manufacturing (Code 13.20)
<b>Interview 3</b>	M	Manager Director	56	Machinery production (Code 28.93.00)
<b>Interview 4</b>	F	General Manager	41	Textile manufacturing (Code 13.10)
<b>Interview 5</b>	M	CEO	45	Transport, logistics, supply chain, and warehousing (Code 52.29.22)
<b>Interview 6</b>	F	Manager Director	42	Hot dip galvanizing of iron and steel products (Code 25.61.00)
<b>Interview 7</b>	F	CEO	31	Leather production for clothing, furniture, footwear, and leather goods (Code 15.11.00)
<b>Interview 8</b>	M	CEO	49	Agri-food production (Code 10.73.0)
<b>Interview 9</b>	F	CEO	52	Furniture manufacturing (Code 31.09.10)

**3.1.2 Research Instrument**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted both in person and online, with durations ranging from 40 to 90 minutes. The interview guide (see Appendix, p.

164) was organized around four main thematic areas (see Table 2), which served as the basis for the development of more specific questions. While interviews followed this structured outline, ample space was given to the natural flow of conversation. Where participants did not address key areas of interest spontaneously, strategic prompts were used to ensure that all core topics relevant to the study were covered.

All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim, ensuring a faithful and detailed representation of the participants' narratives. Data were collected between April and September 2024, and collection and analysis were carried out concurrently, following a process of constant comparison as outlined in the constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). This iterative strategy enabled the immediate integration of emerging insights into subsequent interviews, thereby fostering the progressive construction and refinement of the theoretical model. In this way, the analytic process remained closely anchored to the empirical data, enhancing the conceptual depth and validity of the findings. All interviews were conducted by a researcher in the presence of an observer, ensuring systematic documentation of verbal and nonverbal cues. Coding and data interpretation were carried out collaboratively by two researchers, who independently analysed the transcripts and compared their respective interpretations. Instances of disagreement between the coders were discussed until a shared understanding was reached, thus strengthening the credibility and reliability of the analytical process.

## **Table 2**

### *Core Thematic Areas Investigated in the Interviews*

- 
1. History of the Participant's Family Business
  2. Sustainability
    - Personal meaning
    - Business commitment
    - Any certifications
    - Motivations
  3. Family's Role
  4. Future
-

### 3.1.3 Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analysed following the method of constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006), a central principle of Grounded Theory methodology. The coding process unfolded across three distinct levels, reflecting the iterative and reflexive nature of constructivist Grounded Theory:

1. **Initial Coding (Open Coding):** In this first phase, the goal was to explore the data as openly as possible, staying close to the participants' words and adopting a flexible, inductive stance. Broad and generative questions were posed to identify emerging theoretical categories, which were intentionally kept provisional and subject to ongoing revision. Each interview was analysed line-by-line to generate initial codes grounded in the empirical material. This process also served to identify gaps in the data and informed the direction of subsequent interviews. A paper-and-pencil approach was adopted during this phase, as well as throughout the analysis, to ensure close engagement with the raw data and to foster theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2006).
2. **Focused Coding:** The second level of analysis involved a more selective and conceptual engagement with the data. Focused coding is not a linear procedure; rather, it is shaped by continuous interaction between emerging concepts, earlier data, and developing theoretical insights (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). During this phase, the most significant and frequent initial codes were synthesized and clustered into broader categories. Unlike the initial coding phase, which prioritizes openness and detail, focused coding is more abstract and interpretive, using previously identified labels to organize the data systematically. In the present study, this stage enabled the researcher to refine and consolidate major conceptual categories and begin outlining the core category—the central concept that integrates the analytic framework.
3. **Theoretical Coding:** The final phase of analysis aimed to identify and elaborate the core category, the overarching concept that connects and gives

coherence to all other categories. Theoretical coding involved a higher level of conceptual abstraction, establishing hierarchical and relational links between categories. This phase resulted in the construction of an integrated theoretical model that accounts for the complexity of the phenomenon under study. The core category provides a coherent and parsimonious explanation of the psychological and commitment processes guiding sustainable behaviour in family businesses.

To illustrate the coding process: in the initial coding phase, a participant's statement such as "*Sustainability means respecting nature*" (Interview 1) was coded as an in-vivo concept. During focused coding, this was clustered under the sub-theme "Environmental motivations", and in the theoretical coding phase, it was integrated into the higher-order theme "Knowledge and Awareness", within the emerging model.

This step-by-step analytical strategy—combining inductive theory-building with constant comparison and progressive abstraction—ensured that the resulting model remained firmly grounded in participants lived experiences, while achieving conceptual clarity and theoretical robustness (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

## **3.2 Results**

The following section presents the results of the analyses conducted, illustrating both the process and the theoretical model that emerged from the constructive Grounded Theory approach, together with the main themes and subthemes identified. These findings will be commented on and discussed throughout the present chapter and will subsequently be revisited and further integrated following the confirmatory phase of the research.

### **3.2.1 Between values, motivations, and attitudes: exploring the sustainability commitment in Family Businesses**

The qualitative analysis revealed a multifaceted representation of sustainability commitment in FBs, offering a complex and interconnected view of their motivations, meanings, and commitment pathways (Figure 10). In line with the coding process described in section 3.1.3, the findings are organised into categories and subcategories, culminating in the identification of the core category.

Participants' narratives highlighted how sustainable commitment is rooted in multiple dimensions: first, the knowledge accumulated in the environmental, social, and economic domains, as well as individual attitudes toward these issues—often shaped by social comparison and the perceived expectations of the external environment.

Values play a central role, encompassing both personal beliefs and intergenerational principles passed down through the family. In many interviews, an ethic of responsibility and a cautious approach to resource management emerged as defining traits of the family business identity. Alongside these values, extrinsic motivational drivers were also evident, such as normative pressures, the pursuit of reputation, and the recognition of economic benefits associated with sustainable practices.

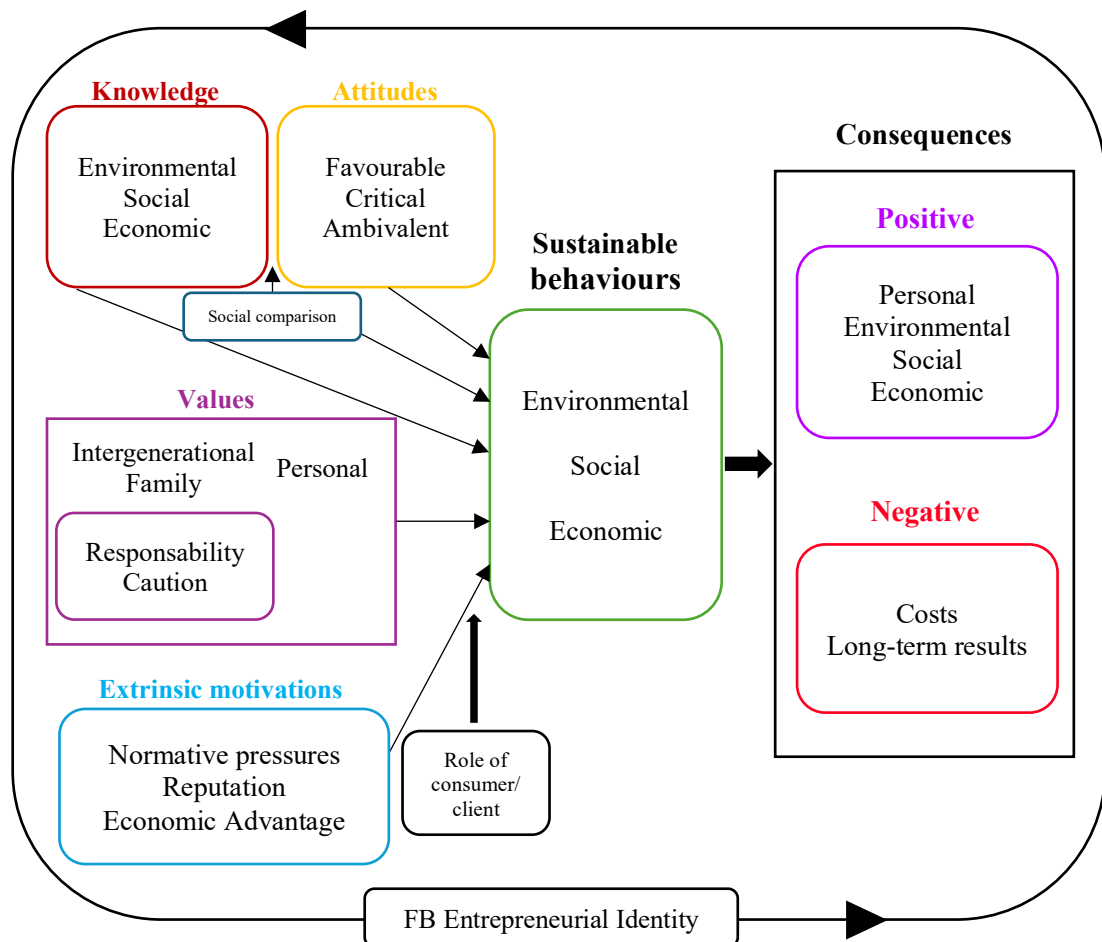
The interaction between these elements nurtures and sustains a commitment to sustainability, which translates into concrete actions across the environmental, social, and economic dimensions. These choices result over time in a range of outcomes: on the one hand, positive effects—such as personal fulfilment, environmental impact, and social and economic benefits—and, on the other hand, challenges related to costs and the need for long-term commitment before outcomes can be fully realized.

Another significant element that emerged was the perceived role of consumers and clients, who are seen as key stakeholders capable of either encouraging or discouraging sustainable practices. All these dimensions are shaped by, and

ultimately converge within, a deeper core category: the “FB entrepreneurial identity”. This construct represents the intersection between the family’s long-term vision, the entrepreneur’s personal and intergenerational value system, and the strategic orientation of the business. It functions both as a motivational driver and as an interpretive framework that orients and sustains organization’s commitment to sustainability, shaping its concrete practices over time. Building on this framework, all the dimensions illustrated in Figure 10 are described in the following sections, with a detailed presentation of the key categories and subcategories that emerged from the qualitative analysis. These elements are summarized in Table 3, providing a structured overview of the constructs that compose the theoretical model and contribute to a deeper understanding of how commitment to sustainability develops and is sustained in FBs.

**Figure 10**

*Theoretical model of sustainability commitment in family businesses derived from the constructivist Grounded Theory analysis*



**Table 3***Categories and subcategories emerging from the Grounded Theory analysis.*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>	
Knowledge	Environmental Social Economic	
Attitudes	Favourable Critical Ambivalent	
Social Comparison		
Values	Intergenerational family	Responsability Caution
	Personal	
Extrinsic Motivations	Normative pressures	
	Reputational	
	Economic Advantages	
Sustainable Behaviours	Environmental	
	Social	
	Economic	
Consequences	Positive	Personal Environmental Social Economic
	Negative	Costs Long-term results
Role of consumers/clients	Purchasing Power	
	Education	
FB Entrepreneurial Identity	Origin	Familiar Personal
	Certifications	Scepticism Trust

Anchored in this theoretical framework, the following section examines the main categories that underpin FBs' commitment to sustainability. Beginning with the cognitive domain of sustainability, it explores how knowledge, attitudes, and social comparison among business leaders constitute a crucial foundation, shaping and sustaining this commitment over time.

### ***3.2.1.1 Knowledge***

Within the narratives collected, knowledge emerged as a foundational element shaping how FB leaders develop and sustain their commitment to sustainability. This dimension encompasses the ensemble of information, beliefs, and operational insights that entrepreneurs have developed over time in relation to sustainability. Such knowledge unfolds along three interrelated axes—environmental, social, and economic—and contributes to the construction of a situated, experience-based vision of sustainability that directly supports and reinforces this commitment. Sustainability is frequently articulated in terms of resource circularity, environmental protection, and energy efficiency, as seen in the following reflections:

*“Sustainability means respect for nature, circularity, and energy saving—efficiency in the use of resources and energy”.*

Interview 1

*“For us, sustainability is this: recycling production waste, choosing local suppliers, and in the production phase, recovering waste and reusing water 100% without any waste”.*

Interview 7

These accounts reveal a solid familiarity with the environmental dimension of sustainability and illustrate how such awareness translates into tangible operational practices—such as waste reduction, supply chain optimization, and circular production processes. Far from being abstract concepts, these ideas are embedded

in daily business routines, suggesting that cognitive frameworks around sustainability may serve as precursors to action. Alongside this environmental awareness, the social dimension of knowledge emerged as a crucial pillar sustaining FBs' commitment to sustainability. This dimension integrates considerations for employees' well-being, supplier relationships, and broader community engagement, framing sustainability as inseparable from human and relational factors:

*“Let’s not forget that sustainability is People, Profit, and Planet; so, if I don’t make a profit, my employees—who have families—and my suppliers are left without work. It’s crucial to promote people’s well-being while protecting the environment”.*

Interview 4

*“For me, sustainability also means creating a healthy work environment where employees feel valued and safe. Without people who are motivated and supported, there is no long-term business.”*

Interview 6

From this perspective environmental goals are pursued in tandem with social responsibility, reinforcing the idea that sustainability must balance planetary health with the stability and prosperity of the people who contribute to the business.

The economic dimension of knowledge further enriches this integrated view, highlighting how profitability and competitiveness are not conflict with sustainability, but can be mutually reinforcing:

*“Thinking sustainably doesn’t mean giving up profit—quite the opposite. It’s an investment in the future of the company. When we save on materials and energy, or when customers choose us because we produce responsibly, that translates into competitive advantage”.*

Interview 9

*“When we innovate to reduce waste, we also lower costs and attract clients who share our values. It’s good for the environment and for business growth.”*

Interview 8

These reflections also point toward the outputs of the process: enhanced market positioning, increased customer loyalty, and measurable economic gains that further strengthen the commitment to sustainability.

Taken together, these narratives portray a holistic and operationalized conception of knowledge in sustainability, in which environmental, social, and economic dimensions are interwoven. The accumulation of knowledge does not remain inert; rather, it becomes the ground on which sustainable practices are developed, legitimized, and sustained over time—transforming understanding into enduring commitment.

### **3.2.1.2 Attitudes**

The attitudes expressed by participants reflect their subjective evaluations of sustainability, which in turn influence the strength and stability of their commitment to it. These evaluations ranged from favourable to explicitly critical, with several cases of nuanced ambivalence.

In many narratives, a strongly positive view of sustainability emerged, seen as a guiding principle for collective well-being and environmental protection, and responsibility:

*“We believe that sustainability is something positive—for nature, the environment, and people. I mean, we have a positive view on this topic”.*

Interview 5

*“For me, sustainability is the way forward: if we don’t act now, the next generations will pay the price. It’s about leaving them a better world and a stronger company.”*

Interview 4

In such cases, positive attitudes act as facilitators of sustained commitment, reinforcing entrepreneurs’ motivation to integrate sustainable practices into strategic and operational choices.

However, alongside these favourable positions, more problematic or explicitly sceptical evaluations also surfaced. Some entrepreneurs struggled to identify a clear definition of sustainability, perceiving it as overly vague, theoretical, or disconnected from operational realities:

*“Sustainability is a beautiful political word, coined—or chosen, if you prefer—not to mean anything, because sustainability means nothing to me. I can’t quantify it in any way. [...] It’s too broad and too difficult to pursue”.*

Interview 2

This scepticism reflects a perception of sustainability as a rhetorical label lacking operational clarity, which may weaken commitment and limit proactive engagement—especially when it is viewed as external to core business priorities.

A more nuanced, ambivalent attitude emerged in reflections that acknowledged the importance of sustainability while also stressing the complexity of its implementation:

*“You must be careful—it’s easy and nice to say, ‘I’m sustainable,’ but achieving sustainability is not simple. So, there’s a whole journey to take, especially because sustainability is a very current issue, but not yet well-defined and still evolving”.*

Interview 1

Ambivalent positions like this suggest a commitment in the making, where genuine motivation is present but tempered by uncertainty, resource constraints, or lack of structured guidance.

Finally, some participants expressed explicitly critical attitudes:

*“Sustainability is more of a slogan than a real opportunity. Small companies like ours often don’t have the resources to invest in it, and taking on debt for it requires considerable effort, and you’re left wondering: is it necessary?”.*

Interview 3

*“For me, sustainability is just an obstacle: it means costs, regulatory constraints, and unnecessary complications. If it weren’t mandatory in some cases, I wouldn’t consider it at all”.*

Interview 8

This perspective frames sustainability as a burden imposed by external forces, rather than an internally valued principle. In such cases, the lack of intrinsic motivation or shared vision can block the translation of attitudes into action and generate resistance to sustainable change. Overall, attitudes appear as a crucial interpretative layer in the sustainability process. When favourable, they act as facilitators of behavioural change; when ambivalent or critical, they reveal tensions between ideal aspirations and perceived feasibility. These evaluations, shaped by personal beliefs, experience, and context, contribute to defining whether and how sustainability becomes a strategic priority in FBs.

### **3.2.1.3 Social Comparison**

Social comparison emerged as a central lens through which participants articulated their knowledge, shaped their attitudes, and defined the contours of their commitment to sustainability. In the interviews, references to other companies—both domestic and international—were not merely anecdotal but functioned as

cognitive and motivational anchors for interpreting one's own position and defining the scope of sustainable action. In several narratives, comparisons with more advanced firms in terms of sustainability acted as a stimulus for continuous improvement, fostering the perception that progress requires moving beyond a local or provincial perspective toward a broader, global outlook:

*“Since we also work with foreign markets, we can no longer just focus on our ‘little Brescian backyard’. This constantly reminds us that we need to adopt a broader, global vision”.*

Interview 4

*“We began reviewing our production practices after a meeting with a Swedish company—the way they spoke about circular economy made us feel a responsibility to do more as well”.*

Interview 7

Such statements illustrate how exposure to international best practices can lead to a reconfiguration of sustainability standards, encouraging FBs to integrate more comprehensive approaches and strengthen their long-term commitment.

The recognition of being relatively less advanced than Northern European or some American companies was often accompanied by a sense of relative advantage compared to emerging economies, generating a dual positioning that combines aspiration with pride:

*“Let’s say that foreign companies—American or Northern European—are more advanced than we are. In Italy, we’re still a bit behind and should follow their lead. But at the same time, we’re ahead of others, like India or China, which still have a long way to go”.*

Interview 1

*“When you see a direct competitor obtaining an environmental certification, you start wondering if you’re the one falling behind. These things push you to reflect and reconsider what you could improve”.*

Interview 2

This dynamic appears to trigger strategic reflection: on the one hand, it motivates the adoption of new practices to close the gap with leaders; on the other, it reaffirms the competitive identity of FBs through comparison with those perceived as lagging.

In other cases, social comparison served to highlight the challenges—and the moral value—of operating within a highly regulated national context. When discussing environmental compliance, some participants contrasted Italian regulations with the more lenient frameworks found in certain Asian countries:

*“If you produce in Vietnam, where no rules are respected—they’re still where we were 40 or 50 years ago, polluting more—it’s much easier than doing business here”.*

Interview 3

*“There’s a certain pride in knowing that, unlike some businesses that outsource to countries with no regulations, we choose to stay here and respect the environment. It’s harder, but it matters”.*

Interview 9

A similar sentiment was expressed by another participant:

*“Many companies go abroad to cut costs and avoid environmental constraints. We prefer staying here, even if it means more bureaucracy—because we believe in doing things right”.*

Interview 6

Overall, social comparison operates as a mirror through which FBs evaluate their own sustainability profile, identify gaps, and reaffirm their commitment to improvement. Whether it serves as a catalyst for progress, a tool for reputational positioning, or a means of validating current choices, it plays a significant role in translating values and knowledge into coherent, sustained behaviours aligned with long-term strategic vision.

#### ***3.2.1.4 Values***

The fourth foundational category that emerged from the analysis concerns the values that underpin and sustain commitment to sustainability in FBs. These values appear to be articulated along two main subcategories: on one side, intergenerational family values, transmitted across generations, often rooted in a legacy of responsibility, prudence, and long-term vision; on the other, personal values, developed autonomously by the entrepreneurs themselves through individual life experiences and professional trajectories. Together, these two subcategories shape the moral compass of the entrepreneurs and provide the normative framework through which sustainability is interpreted, legitimised, and embedded in the long-term orientation of the firm.

##### *Intergenerational Family Values*

Within FBs, values transmitted across generations represent a foundational subcategory in sustaining commitment to sustainability. Among these, responsibility and prudence emerge as particularly salient principles, guiding not only daily management but also long-term strategic vision of the firm. These values are not simply abstract ideals, but rather lived experiences inherited through family narratives, role modelling, and implicit expectations regarding the stewardship of the firm.

The sense of responsibility toward the company's continuity is deeply ingrained in the identity of family entrepreneurs. In this prospective, sustainability is not perceived as an external requirement or a branding opportunity, but as an intrinsic moral obligation—integrated into the very ethos of the enterprise and

closely linked to the legacy passed down from previous generations, as well as the aspiration to hand over a healthy and resilient business to those yet to come:

*“As the father of the company—if I may put it that way—it’s my duty to keep it alive, for example by avoiding reckless investments and being as responsible as possible so that it can continue for future generations. I must make careful, responsible choices, just as my father taught me, without jeopardizing his work, my own, or that of those who will come after me”.*

Interview 2

*“My grandfather used to say: ‘A company is like a house you build for those who come after you.’ That has always pushed us to think responsibly, to avoid waste, and to take care of our resources”.*

Interview 6

Such accounts underscore how sustainability-related commitment is often driven by intergenerational accountability, with entrepreneurs striving to honour the sacrifices and vision of their predecessors by adopting long-term, thoughtful approaches to resource management and organizational growth.

Closely intertwined with this sense of responsibility is the value of prudence, which emerges as a strategic lens through which investment decisions—particularly those linked to sustainability—are filtered. In a context where economic resilience and family reputation are closely intertwined, investments must be evaluated not only in terms of environmental or social impact, but also regarding their feasibility and long-term returns:

*“As the second generation of a family business, we are responsible for its future. So, when we consider sustainability investments, we inevitably must evaluate all aspects to understand whether they’re economically viable. Prudence and*

*feasibility are everything when it comes to preserving, growing, and passing down a healthy business”.*

Interview 5

*“What I try to teach my son is that you don’t run a business thinking about next month’s profit, but about whether it will still exist and provide jobs in the future.*

*It’s a matter of vision, of respect for what we’ve inherited”.*

Interview 8

Here, prudence is not interpreted as hesitation but as a disciplined practice of weighing options carefully, avoiding unnecessary risks, and ensuring a steady path of sustainable growth. Together, responsibility and prudence function as intergenerational beacons, providing FBs with both the ethical grounding and the strategic caution necessary to pursue sustainability in a way that is coherent with their long-term identity and legacy. These values, inherited rather than imposed, thus serve as powerful motivators for translating sustainability from a general principle into a set of concrete, durable behaviours—behaviours that reflect a deep-rooted commitment to continuity, care, and legacy-building.

### *Personal Values*

In addition to the principles passed down through the family, many family entrepreneurs develop a set of personal values throughout their professional careers and life experiences that profoundly shape their commitment to sustainability. These category of values often emerge from a process of reflective internalization, where lived experiences, social interactions, and exposure to environmental and societal challenges contribute to the development of ethical convictions that guide strategic decisions. Among the most frequently recurring personal values are transparency, respect for the environment, and solidarity with the local community. Transparency—understood as a willingness to communicate clearly and be accountable for one’s practices and impact—is often described as a prerequisite for authentic sustainability. It represents a value that not only governs external

communication but also informs internal operations, influencing resource management, supplier selection, and the construction of corporate reputation.

*“I think that a fundamental value in the operations of a company is transparency. For me, environmental sustainability must be grounded in transparency. Because if you don’t explain who you are, how you work, how many resources you use, and what you leave behind for the future... transparency is essential to me”.*

Interview 4

*“Being transparent doesn’t just mean writing a report—it’s about living sustainability every day, even when no one is watching. It’s a constant commitment, not only to our clients but also to our employees”.*

Interview 8

Respect for the environment, often expressed as ecological awareness and intergenerational responsibility, constitutes a second key value. Frequently developed alongside a growing personal sensitivity, it translates into tangible actions aimed at reducing the company’s ecological footprint:

*“The fundamental value of sustainability is the awareness of the impact we have, as a company, on the environment and pollution. For us, this aspect is central, and we are committed to it”.*

Interview 6

*“As an entrepreneur, I witnessed the environmental damage caused by some local companies. That’s when I decided that if I ever ran a business, I would manage it differently—with more respect”.*

Interview 9

These accounts show a direct alignment between internalized personal values and the implementation of sustainable practices, illustrating how ethical convictions held by business leaders can solidify the firm's commitment to sustainability. Alongside these, solidarity toward the local community emerges as a cross-cutting value, often linked to a deep sense of territorial belonging and a desire to give back social and economic value to the collective. This orientation drives FBs to implement initiatives that promote sustainable local development—such as controlling emissions, using water responsibly, and implementing ethical production processes:

*“I realized that it's important to have a value system that prioritizes the protection of the local community. Many companies here still discharge water in an unregulated way. I, on the other hand, feel a strong responsibility for the territory”.*

Interview 7

*“When you produce, you create value—not just economic value, but human, productive, and territorial value. We live in a community, and everyone should contribute. That's the kind of value I want our company to give back to the region”.*

Interview 6

*“Our value is not only reflected in our financial statements, but in how much we manage to improve the lives of people in our area. For me, sustainability also means giving back to the territory”.*

Interview 1

These statements reveal a view of the company as a social actor capable of contributing to collective well-being and territorial cohesion, going beyond a profit-centred logic.

In summary, although personal values originate from individual experiences, they acquire a collective and strategic dimension when embodied by those who lead the firm. They not only shape organisational identity, but also reinforce and direct the commitment to sustainability, guiding it toward coherent, responsible, and enduring practices. Together with intergenerational family values, they form a foundational pillar in the development of embedded sustainable strategies that combine ethical vision with entrepreneurial foresight.

### ***3.2.1.5 Extrinsic Motivations***

Another analytical category emerging from the study concerns extrinsic motivations—external drivers that significantly influence the development and maintenance of FBs’ commitment to sustainability. Unlike the personal and intergenerational family values previously discussed—grounded in internalized convictions and ethical principles—extrinsic motivations refer to incentives, pressures, or perceived benefits stemming from the regulatory, reputational, or economic environment.

The interviews clearly reveal that many entrepreneurs choose to engage in sustainability not only based on personal or family values, but also— and sometimes primarily— in response to explicit market demands, regulatory requirements, or the strategic need to safeguard corporate reputation. While “external” to the historical and cultural fabric of the FB, these motivations often play a crucial role in activating and sustaining sustainable behaviours, particularly in the initial stages of transition toward more responsible practices.

Among the main external factors, regulatory pressures stand out as a frequent driver, requiring companies to comply with specific environmental or social standards to maintain access to certain markets or avoid sanctions. Alongside regulation, reputation plays an increasingly prominent role: being perceived as a responsible and transparent company has become a key competitive condition, especially in sectors under close consumer and media scrutiny. Lastly, perceived economic advantages—such as operational efficiency, energy cost reduction, customer loyalty, or access to sustainability-oriented market segments—are also

commonly cited as compelling reasons to adopt sustainable practices. These motivations will now be analysed in greater detail, distinguishing between regulatory pressures, reputational concerns, and economic incentives, to clarify how each contributes to shaping and sustaining FBs' commitment to sustainability.

#### *Normative pressures*

Within the broader category of extrinsic motivations, normative pressures emerged as a significant force influencing the development and consolidation of FBs' commitment to sustainability. This term refers to the set of rules, directives, and standards imposed by supranational entities, national governments, or local authorities. In an increasingly sustainability-oriented economic context, these regulations are not perceived merely as bureaucratic constraints, but rather as structural forces capable of significantly shaping corporate priorities and strategic direction.

The interviews clearly reveal that sustainability is not always framed as a purely voluntary or value-driven commitment. In many cases, it is described as a necessity imposed by the regulatory environment, without which firms' risk being excluded from the market. European legislation is frequently viewed as a powerful catalyst for change:

*“The fact that regulations are changing gave us a push towards sustainability, [...] also because Europe is basically telling us, ‘You company must follow our directives, or we’ll block you and won’t let you sell anything anymore!’”.*

Interview 2

This quote illustrates how compliance with regulations is viewed not only as a legal obligation, but also as a precondition for commercial survival, especially for companies operating in international markets. Another participant emphasized the steady increase in sustainability-related laws, which gradually transform optional practices into formal obligations:

*“There are more and more laws on various aspects, like material recycling, and these have a strong impact on business decisions—over time, what used to be choices become requirements”.*

Interview 6

In several cases, evolving regulatory frameworks were experienced as an impetus to improve internal processes, even if accompanied by organisational and managerial challenges. Some entrepreneurs acknowledged that, despite the initial perception of compliance as a burden, regulatory requirements often prompt beneficial organisational changes:

*“At first, you see a rule as just an imposition, but then you realize it helped you structure things better—rethink your consumption, your waste, everything”.*

Interview 4

Regulations also frequently serve as a trigger for obtaining certifications (e.g., ISO, EMAS), which ensure adherence to environmental and social standards while enhancing competitiveness:

*“We decided to get environmental certification, especially ISO and EMAS, to meet regulatory demands, but then we realized it also gives us an advantage with clients”.*

Interview 7

*“We didn’t start from an ethical motivation, but because it was required by European funding calls. Eventually, however, we realized it made sense for us too”.*

Interview 9

Overall, normative pressures play a dual role: on the one hand, they act as control mechanisms, forcing businesses to operate within specific boundaries; on the other hand, they represent drivers of innovation, prompting the adoption of new management tools, technologies, and strategies. Though externally imposed, these elements can lead to the development of more structured and enduring sustainable behaviours.

### *Reputation*

Corporate reputation emerges as a central motivational lever for many FBs' commitment to sustainability. In a context increasingly sensitive to environmental and social issues, being perceived as a responsible and forward-looking company constitutes a critical competitive advantage. In this prospective, sustainability is not merely an ethical or regulatory obligation, but also a strategic asset that reinforces stakeholder trust, attracts new customers, and consolidates the firm's market position over the time.

The interviews revealed that many entrepreneurs view sustainability as an integral part of their corporate image, a kind of "business card" capable of conveying solidity, seriousness, and reliability, especially to business partners, customers, and local communities:

*"Engaging in sustainability also has implications for our image. We are a highly structured and serious company; I am the fourth generation, and we have built credibility through years of work. Sustainability further strengthens this credibility. Pursuing specific targets, such as sustainability, brings a clear reputational return".*

Interview 1

*"Sustainability also affects market positioning and reputation".*

Interview 5

These statements reflect a strategic vision in which sustainability is integral to the company's identity, reinforcing both internal values and external perceptions. FBs—often characterized by a strong overlap between the corporate brand and personal or family identity—tend to attach particular importance to reputation, linking it to the protection and enhancement of the family name over time:

*“In our sector, reputation is worth more than anything else. Being recognized as sustainable means being recognized as reliable”.*

Interview 8

*“We have noticed that since we started communicating more about our environmental initiatives, customers' perceptions have changed: they now see us as a modern and conscientious company”.*

Interview 6

From this perspective, the commitment to sustainability is not only a response to market expectations but also a way of constructing and maintaining a narrative that is consistent with the company's values and long-term vision. Moreover, reputation is seen as a form of accountability toward the broader community, where the visible alignment between sustainability practices and public identity strengthens the company's social legitimacy.

In sum, reputation functions as a powerful catalyst for reinforcing and sustaining FBs' commitment to sustainability. It encourages the consistent adoption of responsible practices that are coherent with both stakeholder expectations and the firm's enduring identity. For FBs, what is at stake is not only economic performance but also symbolic capital: sustainability becomes a means of honouring the past, affirming present values, and building a credible and respected legacy for the future.

### *Economic Advantages*

Within the broader category of extrinsic motivations, economic advantages represent an important factor in sustaining and reinforcing FBs' commitment to

sustainability. These advantages include the pursuit of competitive positioning, access to dedicated funding, and long-term cost savings. In a context where profit margins are increasingly constrained by global market dynamics and competitive pressures, the economic dimension often acts as a fundamental incentive for entrepreneurs to maintain and expand sustainability-oriented strategies.

The interviews highlighted how tools such as tax breaks and public funding schemes linked to the ecological transition have played a decisive role in making sustainability not only desirable from an ethical perspective, but also financially viable.

*“Being sustainable leads to advantages. You get paid slightly more for energy because the government provides funding to make it economically feasible to produce green energy; therefore, we receive incentives for the energy we generate, and thanks to these incentives it becomes economical to be sustainable.*

*This convinces even the most sceptical”.*

Interview 1

*“There are now many forms of support for the ecological transition, including tax breaks and subsidies for the investments and initiatives we propose. This has encouraged us to embark on a sustainability path”.*

Interview 6

From this perspective, the ability to transform sustainable engagement into a competitive advantage is particularly significant. The participants emphasized how effectively communicating their green initiatives can strengthen the company’s market position, making it more attractive to both customers and business partners:

*“And if you can also communicate your commitment to sustainability, you gain a competitive edge over other companies”.*

Interview 2

Beyond public incentives, participants frequently referred to their direct experience of substantial savings derived from the use of renewable energy and efficient technologies. Although the initial investment is often considerable, it is perceived as a strategic move for the company's future, as it reduces dependence on traditional energy sources while generating stable economic returns over time:

*“Seven years ago, we installed long rows of solar panels on the roof, producing a total of 500,000 KWH annually, and we also set up a new methane-based energy generation plant. This saves both us and the planet a significant number of resources. [...] In a relatively short time, we have nearly achieved total energy self-sufficiency, with considerable economic savings”.*

Interview 7

Overall, economic motivations illustrate how sustainability can be framed not merely as an obligation or an externally imposed requirement, but as a strategic opportunity capable of reinforcing FBs' commitment and generating tangible returns in the medium-to-long term. For FBs, whose orientation is often shaped by an intergenerational perspective aimed at preserving the business's vitality and relevance over time, these economic benefits acquire particular significance, as they help secure organisational resilience and prosperity for future generations.

Taken together, the three types of extrinsic motivations—normative, reputational, and economic—operate in an interconnected manner, mutually reinforcing one another and creating a powerful framework of external incentives that sustain and strengthen FBs' long-term commitment to sustainability.

*“At first, we acted because European regulations were becoming stricter, and we risked losing some clients if we didn't comply [...]. But over time, we realized it wasn't just an obligation; it was also an opportunity: today, sustainability is a way for us to stand out from competitors and protect our name in the market. Ours is a family business, and the brand coincides with our surname, so reputation is fundamental. Moreover, thanks to government incentives and tax*

*breaks for the ecological transition, some choices that initially seemed costly have turned out to be economically advantageous. This way, we not only comply with the rules but also manage to generate value for the company and for the future generations who will inherit this work”.*

Interview 3

Normative pressures establish minimum compliance thresholds and act as initial catalysts, while the reputational dimension pushes companies to go beyond mandated requirements, integrating sustainability as a core component of their image and public identity. At the same time, economic benefits, in the form of incentives, savings, or competitive advantages, further consolidate the commitment to sustainability by making it financially viable. This combination of external drivers not only activates the adoption of sustainable behaviours but also supports their continuity over time, as it enables companies to align economic interests, regulatory obligations, and societal expectations within a coherent strategic vision. For FBs, this alignment is particularly significant, as it allows them to reconcile their responsibility toward future generations with the need to safeguard the company’s competitiveness in the present.

#### ***3.2.1.6 Sustainable behaviours***

The sustainable behaviours adopted by FBs emerge as the natural outcome of a complex interplay of knowledge, attitudes, values, and extrinsic motivations, which together shape the development and consolidation of a long-term commitment expressed through coherent strategic orientations and consistent daily actions. These behaviours primarily unfold across the three dimensions of sustainability—environmental, social, and economic—which are pursued in an integrated manner, reflecting a holistic vision of the company’s role within its broader context.

### *Environmental Sustainability*

Environmental protection represents one of the foundational pillars of the organizational culture of FBs. The technical knowledge accumulated and the awareness of the impact of their activities on the planet, combined with a strong sense of responsibility toward future generations, often lead to targeted investments in infrastructure and production processes. These interventions aim to reduce emissions, optimize resource consumption, and improve waste management:

*“In terms of the environmental aspect, we carried out major work on the new warehouse. We equipped the 14,000 m<sup>2</sup> roof with drainage tanks because dust accumulates on the roof; when it rains, it’s a mess, and thanks to the settling tanks, we collect polluted water, let the dust settle, and then discharge clean water into the ‘white water’ system”.*

Interview 3

Other examples include the adoption of renewable energy sources and the installation of energy-efficiency systems, which not only reduce environmental impact but also lead to significant long-term savings, combining environmental goals with economic benefits. As one participant stated:

*“We started investing in renewable energy with a photovoltaic system not only to reduce emissions but because it was clear that, over time, it would allow us to cut energy costs. It was a choice that combines responsibility with convenience”.*

Interview 9

### *Social Sustainability*

In parallel, values of social responsibility—rooted in both the family tradition and the personal values of the entrepreneurs—translate into behaviours that combine employee well-being with the cultivation of strong, enduring ties to the local community. FBs often regard human capital not only as a strategic resource to be nurtured and protected, but also as a catalyst for fostering cohesion,

shared identity, and cultural enrichment within the workplace. This belief takes shape in initiatives that go well beyond contractual obligations:

*“Sustainability means having a role as an entrepreneur, a social role [...]. Every month, for example, we meet and take turns choosing a book to read, and then we go out for an aperitif we call ‘SPRIZZiamo cultura’ and discuss the book. This is sustainability in the sense of being together and discussing topics beyond work. [...] We also try to protect our employees by offering a welfare package that includes discounts on medical visits”.*

Interview 6

Such initiatives, which include corporate welfare programs, training opportunities, and actions in support of the local community, pursue the dual goal of creating a positive work environment and reinforcing the company’s territorial roots.

#### *Economic Sustainability*

Finally, economically oriented sustainable behaviours reflect the desire of family businesses to preserve profitability and ensure continuity, balancing ethical and environmental commitments with the need to maintain financial stability. The interviews clearly show that sustainability cannot be pursued at the expense of economic performance:

*“Because a fundamental part of sustainability is still profit. If we excel at everything else but no longer sell anything... we are not third-sector organizations; we are and must remain profitable businesses, so the balance sheet must work, and we always keep that in mind”.*

Interview 5

*“If I don’t make a profit, my employees, who have families, and my suppliers are left without work. It is essential to promote people’s well-being and protect the environment”.*

For many FBs, sustainability is not approached as a set of separate goals, but as an integrated commitment in which environmental care, social responsibility, and economic viability are considered inseparable. Each initiative is assessed through this unified perspective, which embodies the company's identity and its intention to endure over time. As one participant explained:

*“Every decision we make brings together the three things: environment, people, and finances. We cannot separate them because our company is part of the community and the family. If something isn't sustainable across all these aspects, we simply don't do it”.*

This integrated approach reflects how FBs frame sustainability as a multidimensional commitment, where environmental initiatives, social responsibility, and economic management are inseparably linked. Such alignment enables these companies to uphold their ethical responsibilities toward future generations while meeting present-day operational needs, reinforcing their capacity to face the challenges of the sustainability transition with resilience and consistency.

### ***3.2.1.7 The role of consumers and clients***

The role of consumers and clients emerged as a crucial determinant influencing the sustainable behaviours of FBs. This influence is articulated through two interconnected dimensions: purchasing power and education. Both elements shape the way in which businesses perceive market signals and adapt their strategies, either reinforcing or discouraging their commitment to sustainability.

### *Purchasing Power*

The purchasing power of consumers and clients exerts a significant impact on the strategic and operational choices of FBs. On the one hand, consumers—especially younger generations—are increasingly sensitive to environmental and social issues, rewarding companies that demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability. Many interviewees emphasized that younger consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that are ethically produced and environmentally friendly:

*“Young people are much more sensitive to sustainability than the older generation. Major fashion houses like [luxury brand] have embraced this younger audience, making sustainability a new trend [...]. It’s clear that young people, who have their whole lives ahead of them and face the consequences of environmental change, are more willing to spend a bit more for a natural, eco-friendly product”.*

Interview 1

This positive market pressure can act as a catalyst for sustainable practices, encouraging FBs to align with consumer preferences. However, the purchasing power of clients can also have a negative effect when consumers prioritize low-cost products over sustainability. This dynamic was described by several participants, who pointed to the difficulty of competing with companies offering extremely cheap goods:

*“The responsibility for sustainability doesn’t lie solely with companies. We can work harder and invest more, but if consumers buy from fast fashion sites without considering the consequences, the problem of sustainability is also theirs. Many people just want to buy more without asking questions. At the end of the day, price wins, and we can’t compete with companies selling jeans for five euros! We do our best to produce responsibly, pay our seamstresses properly, and keep the business viable, but consumers must understand what they are really buying and choose sustainability”.*

Interview 2

This duality—between consumer segments willing to pay for sustainability and others prioritizing price—poses a major challenge for FBs. One participant highlighted how this contradiction directly shapes purchasing choices:

*“Ultimately, it’s the consumer who decides which companies succeed or fail. Many say they care about sustainability, but when they’re at the checkout, they go for the cheaper option. For me, sustainability must be chosen every day—at the supermarket, when shopping—and consumers need the strength and awareness to make that choice”.*

Interview 1

### *Education*

Alongside purchasing power, consumer education emerged as an equally decisive factor in shaping sustainable consumption patterns and, in turn, influencing family business strategies. Participants stressed that a lack of awareness about sustainability often prevents consumers from making informed decisions, undermining the demand for responsible products:

*“We need to educate consumers, so they understand that spending more on a sustainable product isn’t just about protecting the environment, but also about buying a higher-quality product that lasts longer and resists fast fashion. The hardest part is transferring this awareness to the final customer”.*

Interview 1

This need for education was echoed by another participant, who emphasized the importance of developing a more critical understanding of sustainability claims:

*“Consumers lack awareness. The shift must come from recognizing that spending a little more on a product made responsibly is an investment in the planet and in companies that are genuinely committed to sustainability. People need to think critically; just seeing a logo on a label doesn’t make a product sustainable”.*

Interview 4

Many participants expressed optimism about the long-term potential of cultural change, fuelled by education and public awareness campaigns. As younger generations grow up with greater exposure to sustainability issues, they are expected to become more conscientious consumers:

*“I believe that sustainability will become more embedded in consumers’ lives as awareness campaigns grow and education improves. Right now, only a small number of people are truly attentive to these issues, but in 20 or 30 years, when our children are adults, I believe sustainability will be much more widespread and valued”.*

Interview 6

Consumers and clients, therefore, play a pivotal role in shaping the sustainability trajectories of FBs. Through their purchasing choices, they can either reward or penalize companies for adopting responsible practices. However, without adequate education, consumers may unknowingly perpetuate unsustainable business models by favouring cheaper alternatives. FBs find themselves navigating this complex dynamic, seeking ways to balance the need for profitability with the expectation to meet growing demands for transparency and responsibility.

This dynamic reinforces the broader insight emerging from the analysis: consumer behaviour does not merely react to business strategies but actively shapes them. Strengthening consumer education and fostering greater alignment between purchasing power and sustainable values appear essential to sustaining the long-term efforts of FBs toward environmental, social, and economic responsibility.

### ***3.2.1.8 Consequences***

The interviews provided a detailed and nuanced picture of the direct experiences of those who have chosen to commit to sustainability. This commitment is not confined to environmental protection; rather, it entails a broad spectrum of outcomes that extend to the personal, environmental, social, and economic domains. From the narratives collected, a dual pattern clearly emerged: on the one

hand positive consequences: including greater personal fulfilment, improved environmental performance, social well-being, and economic returns; on the other hand, negative consequences, primarily linked to the high initial cost of investments and the long-time horizons required to achieve tangible benefits.

#### *Positive consequences*

On a personal level, many entrepreneurs described that engaging in sustainable practices generates not only a sense of satisfaction but also a deeper alignment between their actions and their self-image as responsible business leaders. This self-referential effect, close to the idea of self-enhancement, emerges as a positive consequence of sustainability commitment: by acting sustainably, entrepreneurs experience a reinforcement of their self-concept and a greater coherence between values and practices. Such internal consistency strengthens their determination to continue along this path, even when faced with significant challenges. For some, the awareness of contributing to a better future for the next generations adds meaning and legitimacy to their efforts, while for others, the act of “doing the right thing” carries an intrinsic value that consolidates their entrepreneurial identity.

*“When I see the results we achieve with our investments, I feel satisfied. [...] I keep thinking that I do it to feel good about myself”.*

Interview 5

*“Knowing that the company I will one day lead will be more sustainable than the one I inherited is an enormous personal satisfaction: it’s not just about the numbers, but the contribution we leave for future generations”.*

Interview 8

Alongside this sense of fulfilment, many entrepreneurs also reported that the recognition gained through their sustainability efforts represents a further personal benefit. Being identified as responsible and forward-looking leaders not only strengthens the company’s image but also reinforces entrepreneurs’ own sense of

legitimacy and pride. This reputational feedback nurtures their confidence, enhances their standing within professional and community networks, and is often experienced as a personal reward that validates their efforts:

*“Another advantage is reputational return: if you are a company like ours, innovative on this front, clients with the same sensitivity recognize and appreciate you”.*

Interview 1

*“We have noticed that participating in sustainability initiatives opens new doors for us: we are approached by clients who previously did not know us and who now choose us precisely for our environmental commitment”.*

Interview 6

On the environmental front, companies that have committed to sustainable practices report significant and measurable outcomes. Efforts toward resource optimization have enabled some businesses to substantially reduce their dependency on external inputs while enhancing overall production efficiency:

*“Protecting the environment is a gain for the planet but also for the company, even though many costs do not pay off in the short term [...]. The benefits are medium- and long-term, particularly in process optimization”.*

Interview 1

*“Since we invested in water recovery systems, we have reduced water consumption by 60%: this has been a benefit for the environment and for our bottom line”.*

Interview 9

Positive consequences also extend to the social sphere, where sustainable practices contribute to improving employees' working conditions and enhancing the well-being of local communities. The introduction of advanced technologies has, in some

cases, reduced the physical workload of certain tasks, safeguarding workers' health and improving their quality of life:

*“New agricultural technologies cost more, but they allow farmers to work less and use fewer resources. This has a direct impact on their physical well-being and their work-life balance”.*

Interview 3

*“Having a safe and inclusive work environment is part of our idea of sustainability: it's an investment in people, who in turn return trust and productivity to the company”.*

Interview 2

*“Improving working conditions has always been a priority for us. Recently, we introduced systems that make certain tasks less physically demanding, and the atmosphere has improved people feel valued and more connected to the company's direction.”*

Interview 8

Finally, the economic sphere also reflects the long-term value of sustainability. While initial investments may be substantial, reductions in resource consumption, materials use, and inefficiencies ultimately generate tangible financial returns:

*“Our consultants told us we would recover the expenses in five to six years, and that's exactly what happened... Of course, none of these solutions is immediate, but the savings do arrive”.*

Interview 7

*“Green solutions often cost more at the beginning, but then you realize they reduce waste and save money. It’s an investment that works on two levels: sustainability and profitability”.*

Interview 3

#### *Negative consequences*

Despite the many positive outcomes, the high initial costs associated with implementing sustainable practices cannot be overlooked. For many FBs, especially smaller ones, these represent a significant barrier:

*“Investments to become sustainable are very expensive, and it takes time before you see economic returns. We really need patience and to keep our long-term vision in mind”.*

Interview 2

*“We installed renewable energy systems that will bring us benefits, but for the first few years, they will only be costs. Honestly, not every company like ours can bear that”.*

Interview 6

Another critical issue relates to the delayed perception of benefits, which may discourage companies from undertaking such investments:

*“Being sustainable is an advantage for the company even though many costs do not pay off in the short term. You must know how to wait”.*

Interview 4

*“New technologies take years to amortize this deters those who do not have the necessary liquidity or cannot see an immediate return”.*

Interview 9

Finally, some entrepreneurs pointed out that the high level of market competitiveness, combined with consumer pressure toward ever-lower prices, can make the sustainability commitment even more challenging:

*“We can make investments and reduce our impact, but if customers only want the lowest price, we risk not being competitive”.*

Interview 1

The accounts clearly show that sustainability is a complex commitment that entails both advantages and challenges. On the one hand, companies that genuinely embrace this path can strengthen their reputation, improve efficiency, and reduce costs in the long term; on the other, they must be ready to manage high initial costs and long payback periods. However, with the right strategy and a forward-looking vision, FBs can not only contribute to a more sustainable world but also consolidate their survival and competitiveness over time.

### ***3.2.1.9 FB Entrepreneurial Identity***

The core category that emerged from this constructive Grounded Theory study is the entrepreneurial identity of FBs. Rather than being a fixed trait, this identity is portrayed as dynamic shaped over time through the interaction between internal dimensions (such as biographical origins and personal/familial background) and external tools that support or legitimize the sustainability orientation. Two elements proved especially central in anchoring and nurturing this identity: the origin of the entrepreneurial drive, and the role of certifications, which function as both validation mechanisms and potential sites of tension.

#### *Origins*

The origins of FBs' entrepreneurial identity are deeply intertwined with the biographical and intergenerational trajectories of the entrepreneurs. Participants frequently situated the emergence of their sustainability orientation in the legacy of their family's entrepreneurial history, often recalling key turning points such as

inheriting the business, observing the behaviour of parents and grandparents, or responding to formative life events. For example, one participant described a moment of symbolic transition when assuming the leadership of the family business:

*“My father always taught me to act with respect. I still remember when my grandfather appointed me as company manager and said: ‘You’re free to do what you want, but if I ever find out you treat people without dignity and fair wages, I will come back and take this role away from you. You are here to make the world a better place; otherwise, what is the point of what you’re doing?’”*

Interview 2

*“I learned what sustainability meant not from books, but from seeing my parents work the land with care. When I took over the company, it felt natural to continue that path: it was never just a business, but a responsibility.”*

Interview 1

*“When I inherited the business, I also inherited the way of thinking of my family: my father always repeated that the company should last beyond us. This has shaped the way I see sustainability today.”*

Interview 6

This statement illustrates how the entrepreneurial identity is not merely inherited but actively shaped at the intersection of family expectations and personal agency. The entrepreneur becomes a custodian of a legacy, but also a translator of it—integrating tradition with personal convictions and contemporary challenges. In this process, personal values—developed through individual life experiences and professional trajectories—play a decisive role, providing ethical and motivational grounding for the way sustainability is interpreted and enacted. Other participants emphasized how their professional journeys and external exposures shaped their business philosophy:

*“After working abroad for years, I realized how important it was to invest in sustainability. I saw markets where this awareness was much more deeply ingrained, and I came back determined to bring that change into our family business”.*

Interview 3

Such accounts demonstrate how entrepreneurial identity is forged not only through family lineage but also values broader contextual influences that inform the entrepreneur’s worldview and management style. Such accounts demonstrate how entrepreneurial identity is forged not only through family lineage but also through broader contextual influences—such as professional experiences, cultural exposure, and critical life events—that inform the entrepreneur’s worldview and management style. Within this identity, multiple roles coexist and interact that of family member, business leader, community representative, innovator, and custodian of tradition. Each of these roles is anchored in a set of values—whether inherited or personally developed—that guide how responsibilities are interpreted and enacted. Importantly, this “dimension of origin” refers not simply to the transmission of values from one generation to the next, but to the constellation of biographical, emotional, and situational experiences through which the entrepreneur comes to see themselves in relation to the business. These experiences, filtered through the lens of their values, give coherence to the multiple roles they embody and sustain their long-term commitment to the enterprise.

### *Certifications*

Certifications emerged as a second key dimension, situated at the intersection of internal motivation and external validation. While generally acknowledged as instruments to formally communicate a company’s sustainable efforts, certifications provoked mixed reactions among participants.

Some entrepreneurs expressed strong scepticism, highlighting perceived superficiality and opportunism behind the pursuit of certifications:

*“Certifications involve a lot of paperwork. Sustainability starts with people’s conscience, not with pieces of paper. Sometimes the differences between certified and non-certified products are minimal, other times they’re huge, and that makes me question the seriousness of certain certifying bodies”.*

Interview 1

*“It seems like all you need to do to prove you’re sustainable is to show a piece of paper. But who guarantees that, say, becoming a B Corp makes you better than someone who doesn’t certify but is just as committed?”.*

Interview 2

These quotes reflect a dissonance between internal commitment and external recognition: certifications are at times perceived as symbolic markers more than substantive change agents, creating a gap between appearance and reality.

At the same time, several participants recognized certifications as opportunities for improvement and structure, offering formal frameworks that reinforce sustainable action:

*“Certification is a tool that helps you do things properly. It’s not enough to want to be committed: a serious certification gives you guidelines, audits, and objectives, and that helps you improve your company’s practices over time”.*

Interview 6

*“We decided to embark on the B Corp certification process, and, despite the complexity, it was a moment of pride. This title is not just a logo—it’s proof that we went through a serious process consistent with our values”.*

Interview 5

These perspectives suggest that certifications, when perceived as aligned with the company's authentic values and operational practices, can serve as anchors of identity and tools of strategic alignment. The ambivalence voiced by the participants underscores the tension between intrinsic motivation and institutional validation—a dynamic that is central to understanding how entrepreneurial identity is negotiated and reinforced in FBs.

In sum, the entrepreneurial identity in FBs takes shape through a constellation of deeply rooted personal and family experiences, as well as through tools such as certifications that mediate between the company's internal culture and its external legitimacy. This identity acts as a compass for strategic and operational decisions, integrating self-perception, values, and reputational positioning into a coherent sense of entrepreneurial purpose.

### **3.2.2 Theoretical Model Explanation**

The qualitative analysis allowed for the development of a comprehensive theoretical model (Figure 10, page 63) that captures the intricate dynamics through which FBs engage with sustainability. This model reflects the integration of cognitive, motivational, and identity-based processes and highlights how these dimensions converge to shape sustainable behaviours and outcomes over time.

At its foundation, the model emphasizes the knowledge that FB leaders hold regarding sustainability, encompassing environmental, social, and economic domains. These forms of knowledge—often informed by direct experience and social comparison with other companies—provide the cognitive basis for how sustainability is understood and operationalized. Alongside knowledge, attitudes toward sustainability, whether favourable, unfavourable, or ambivalent, frame how these issues are evaluated and prioritized in decision-making processes.

Values represent another cornerstone of the model. These values are rooted in two interconnected sources: intergenerational family principles—such as responsibility and caution, which ensure long-term business continuity—and the entrepreneurs' personal beliefs, shaped by professional trajectories and lived experiences. These

value systems define the ethical orientation of the business and influence its approach to sustainability, particularly in balancing growth with the preservation of resources for future generations.

The model also integrates extrinsic motivations, which include normative pressures, reputation-building, and the pursuit of economic advantages. These external drivers, though distinct from the internal value system, play a decisive role in activating and reinforcing sustainable practices, especially during transitional phases where market expectations or regulatory frameworks exert significant influence.

A further dimension that emerged from the analysis is the role of consumers and clients, who act as key external stakeholders capable of shaping FBs' behaviours through their purchasing power and expectations for transparency and ethical conduct. Their influence can either encourage or discourage sustainable practices, depending on the alignment between consumer preferences and the business's sustainability efforts.

The interaction of these dimensions leads to the implementation of sustainable behaviours, which span environmental initiatives (e.g., resource efficiency, waste reduction), social actions (e.g., employee well-being, community engagement), and economically viable strategies that ensure long-term competitiveness. These behaviours, in turn, generate a set of consequences that the model categorizes as positive or negative. On the one hand, positive consequences include enhanced reputation, personal fulfilment for entrepreneurs, improved environmental impact, and social and economic benefits. On the other hand, challenges persist in the form of significant upfront costs and the need for extended time horizons before tangible returns on investments are realized.

At the centre of this model lies the core category, identified as the entrepreneurial identity of FBs. In FBs, such identity is deeply embedded in a temporal continuum that connects the company's past, present, and future, fostering a long-term orientation aimed at ensuring continuity across generations. The firm is perceived not merely as an economic asset, but as a living legacy to be preserved, strengthened, and handed down, making sustainability a strategic and moral

commitment to safeguarding its vitality and meaning over time. It represents the integration of the entrepreneur's personal self and the family business identity, formed through life experiences, intergenerational legacy, and strategic orientation. Entrepreneurial identity is further shaped by external elements such as certifications, which, despite being met with ambivalence—ranging from trust to scepticism—play a symbolic and operational role in formalizing sustainability commitments. This identity provides coherence and direction, enabling FBs to embed environmental, social, and economic priorities into their strategic vision and daily operations.

The model illustrates how sustainability in FBs is not the product of isolated initiatives, but the result of an integrated process grounded in identity, shaped by values and motivations, informed by knowledge and attitudes, and continuously influenced by stakeholders' expectations. This holistic perspective offers a deeper understanding of the sustainability trajectories in FBs and underscores the role of identity as the conceptual anchor for long-term engagement.

### **3.3 Discussion**

The model emerging from this exploratory investigation offers a nuanced and multilayered understanding of the processes through which FBs approach and commit to sustainability. The qualitative analysis clearly indicates that sustainability is not the product of isolated initiatives, but rather an integrated and dynamic process, arising from the interplay of knowledge, attitudes, values, motivations, and identity-based elements, continuously shaped by interactions with external stakeholders.

From a cognitive perspective, knowledge about sustainability—across environmental, social, and economic domains—represents the foundational layer on which business decisions are built. These forms of knowledge, acquired through both direct experience and social comparison with other firms, provide the cognitive scaffolding for understanding and operationalizing sustainability. As highlighted by Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, knowledge and beliefs, combined with perceived social norms, foster behavioural intentions and increase the likelihood of translating intentions into concrete action. Interestingly,

elements consistent with this theoretical framework emerged spontaneously from the qualitative data, particularly regarding the central role of attitudes and social expectations in shaping sustainability-related intentions. However, no evidence of perceived behavioural control appeared in participants' narratives. This absence should not be interpreted as a methodological gap, but as a theoretically meaningful finding consistent with the exploratory and inductive nature of the study: within family firms, sustainability appears to be grounded less in perceptions of efficacy and more in moral coherence and identity alignment.

In parallel, Bandura's (1986) social-cognitive framework underscores that knowledge and observational learning shape self-efficacy beliefs, facilitating the enactment of behaviours aligned with personal and organizational goals. In this sense, the social comparison process identified in the interviews functions as a mechanism of learning and self-regulation: by observing more advanced firms, FBs evaluate their own positioning, identify gaps, and translate cognitive awareness into actionable sustainability practices.

Attitudes toward sustainability emerge as the second pillar of the process. Participant narratives revealed a continuum of perceptions, ranging from highly favourable attitudes—marked by ethical commitment and optimism—to more ambivalent or critical stances, often tied to perceived complexity and implementation challenges. Consistent with psychological literature on pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour, attitudes intertwine with social norms and perceived behavioural control: when entrepreneurs feel competent and supported by their context, the likelihood of adopting sustainable practices increases.

Values play a central role in shaping sustainable trajectories, encompassing two interconnected dimensions. Intergenerational family values, transmitted through the firm's history, are rooted in responsibility and caution, guiding decisions toward long-term preservation and continuity. Personal values, by contrast, develop through life and professional experiences and include transparency, respect for the environment, and a sense of community belonging. Together, these values establish a strong ethical orientation that underpins sustainable practices. This dual framework resonates with the Socioemotional Wealth (SEW) perspective, which

posits that family firms act not solely to maximize economic returns but also to preserve relational, emotional, and reputational capital for future generations. Sustainability thus becomes a natural extension of “responsible entrepreneurship,” reinforcing the firm’s legacy and legitimacy over time.

Complementing these internal drivers are extrinsic motivations, which include regulatory pressures, reputational benefits, and economic incentives. Interviews reveal that these external forces serve as catalysts for the adoption of sustainable practices, particularly in transitional phases when market expectations or regulatory frameworks exert strong influence. This pattern aligns with Freeman’s (1984) Stakeholder Theory, which frames businesses as embedded in networks of expectations where customers, suppliers, and institutions can drive or constrain strategic choices. In this context, certifications and recognized sustainability standards serve as tools of impression management, allowing firms to formalize and communicate their commitment. In line with Leary and Kowalski’s (1990) Impression Management Theory, projecting a coherent and authentic sustainability image enhances stakeholder trust and strengthens the firm’s strategic relationships. Another critical dimension is the role of consumers and clients, who emerge as active co-architects of sustainability. Interview data confirm that purchasing behaviours can reward or penalize firms based on their environmental and social engagement. Echoing Marquis (2022), a shift toward a culture of responsible consumption—one that privileges quality, durability, and ethical standards over low-cost, high-turnover products—is essential to sustain systemic change. In this sense, consumers are not passive recipients of offerings, but rather active participants in shaping the sustainability strategies of family businesses.

The consequences of sustainability engagement are multifaceted and ambivalent. On the positive side, sustainable practices generate personal fulfilment for entrepreneurs, enhance corporate reputation, improve environmental impact, and yield social and economic benefits. On the challenging side, firms face high initial costs and extended time horizons before tangible returns materialize, requiring strategic foresight and resilience. This balance between benefits and challenges

reinforces the need for long-term commitment, a characteristic well-aligned with the generational vision typical of FBs.

At the heart of the model lies the core category of entrepreneurial identity, which functions as both the conceptual anchor and integrative force connecting values, motivations, knowledge, and sustainable behaviours. This identity is shaped through the dynamic interaction between personal and organizational dimensions. Personal identity reflects the entrepreneur's individual values, moral beliefs, and lived experiences, while organizational identity draws on family heritage, intergenerational continuity, and reputational legacy. In FBs, these two spheres are not discrete; rather, they frequently merge, forming a cohesive entrepreneurial self that sees the business as an extension of one's personal life mission (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

Interview data suggest that within this identity framework, the adoption of sustainable practices is rarely perceived as a purely instrumental or compliance-driven act. For many participants, it represents a way to express and consolidate the values that define both the self and the organization. Sustainability thus becomes part of the company's identity narrative, reinforcing legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders, ensuring continuity across generations, and affirming a shared responsibility toward the future (Berrone et al., 2012; De Massis & Foss, 2018). Some FBs in the sample demonstrated what can be described as a "sustainable identity," evident in behaviours consistently aligned with ethical and environmental values, as well as in long-term commitments to the community and local territory (Schmidts & Shepherd, 2015; Li et al., 2023; Alguera Kleine et al., 2024). Participants also acknowledged that effective implementation is shaped by a combination of internal and external factors: internally, the personal and value-based characteristics of leaders, the strength of the organizational culture, and the clarity of corporate identity; externally, prevailing social norms, market pressures, industry-specific conditions, and current environmental regulations exert a decisive influence (Afzal & Lim, 2022).

This fusion reinforces identity coherence and strengthens the entrepreneur's commitment to long-term goals such as sustainability. The overlap between

personal and organizational identities can be understood through the lens of the Self-Inclusion model (Aron et al., 1992), wherein the boundaries between “self” and “organization” become increasingly blurred. In this view, sustainability is not adopted merely as an external requirement but emerges as a personally meaningful endeavour consistent with one’s values and life narrative.

Finally, it is important to highlight that this qualitative study represents the exploratory phase of a broader research project. Its findings will be translated into a structured questionnaire following the MM-GT framework, enabling a confirmatory and quantitative phase to further test and refine the proposed model. The next chapter will present this methodological transition from qualitative theory-building to questionnaire development, while Chapter 6 will integrate findings from both phases, offering a comprehensive discussion that includes conclusions, limitations, and directions for future research.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Phase II: from qualitative study to quantitative tool**

The second phase of the research represents the methodological passage from the exploratory qualitative stage to the quantitative validation stage. The objective of this transition is to transform the theoretical model, generated through Constructive Grounded Theory, into a structured measurement instrument capable of capturing, in a reliable and valid way, the psychological and organizational dimensions underlying family businesses' commitment to sustainability.

In this phase, the conceptual richness that emerged from the qualitative study is reorganized and systematized, so that it can be operationalized into measurable constructs. The process follows the logic of the MM-GT framework (Howell Smith et al., 2020), which emphasizes the continuity between qualitative theorization and quantitative testing. The participants' verbatim statements collected during the interviews are not only preserved but also function as the semantic foundation for the development of the questionnaire, ensuring a close correspondence between the meanings expressed in the narratives and the indicators used for quantitative assessment.

This chapter first introduces the simplified model derived from the qualitative analysis, outlining the methodological rationale behind the reduction of categories and the preservation of core constructs. It then illustrates the operationalization process, showing how interview excerpts were translated into questionnaire items. Finally, it presents the development of the structured instrument, which, while reported in full in the Appendix, constitutes the empirical basis for the confirmatory phase and the statistical validation of the theoretical model. Through this progression, the research bridges the interpretative depth of qualitative inquiry with the rigor of psychometric evaluation, thus providing a comprehensive and integrated methodological pathway.

## 4.1 Simplification of the Theoretical Model

The theoretical model developed in the qualitative phase provides a nuanced representation of the mechanisms by which FBs develop and uphold their sustainability commitment, highlighting the interplay of values, motivations, attitudes, and contextual influences. To advance toward the quantitative phase and subsequent empirical validation, the model requires a process of simplification, aimed at making its constructs operationalizable and measurable through a structured questionnaire.

As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) observe, the transition from qualitative exploration to quantitative measurement entails a process of conceptual reduction, which preserves the theoretical essence of the phenomenon while reducing redundancies and narrative complexity inherent to exploratory analyses. In line with the MM-GT approach (Howell Smith et al., 2020), this simplification does not entail a loss of meaning but rather a reconfiguration of categories into analytical constructs functional to quantitative measurement and subsequent model testing. This methodological choice is consistent with the principle of theorization-through-reduction (Bazeley, 2013; Guetterman et al., 2015), enabling the shift from descriptive depth to a parsimonious and testable model, while ensuring traceability between qualitative insights and quantitative measures.

The simplification process follows three guiding principles:

- 1) Preservation of core conceptual elements, ensuring a direct correspondence with the categories that emerged from the qualitative phase (Charmaz, 2014);
- 2) Aggregation of categories and subcategories, reducing structural complexity and facilitating subsequent statistical analysis (Hinkin, 1998);
- 3) Alignment with quantitative validation, so that constructs are clearly interpretable and can be directly transformed into items derived from participants' verbatim accounts (Boateng et al., 2018).

These methodological choices were particularly significant in clarifying the scope of the quantitative phase. First, the block of consequences identified in the qualitative phase was removed. These consequences - encompassing personal, social, environmental, and economic outcomes - are better understood as results of sustainable behaviours rather than as dimensions directly associated with their underlying structure. Retaining them would risk conflating antecedents and outcomes, which contrasts with the aim of confirmatory analysis, namely, to test the internal consistency and factorial structure of the dimensions identified in the qualitative phase (DeVellis, 2017; Netemeyer et al., 2003).

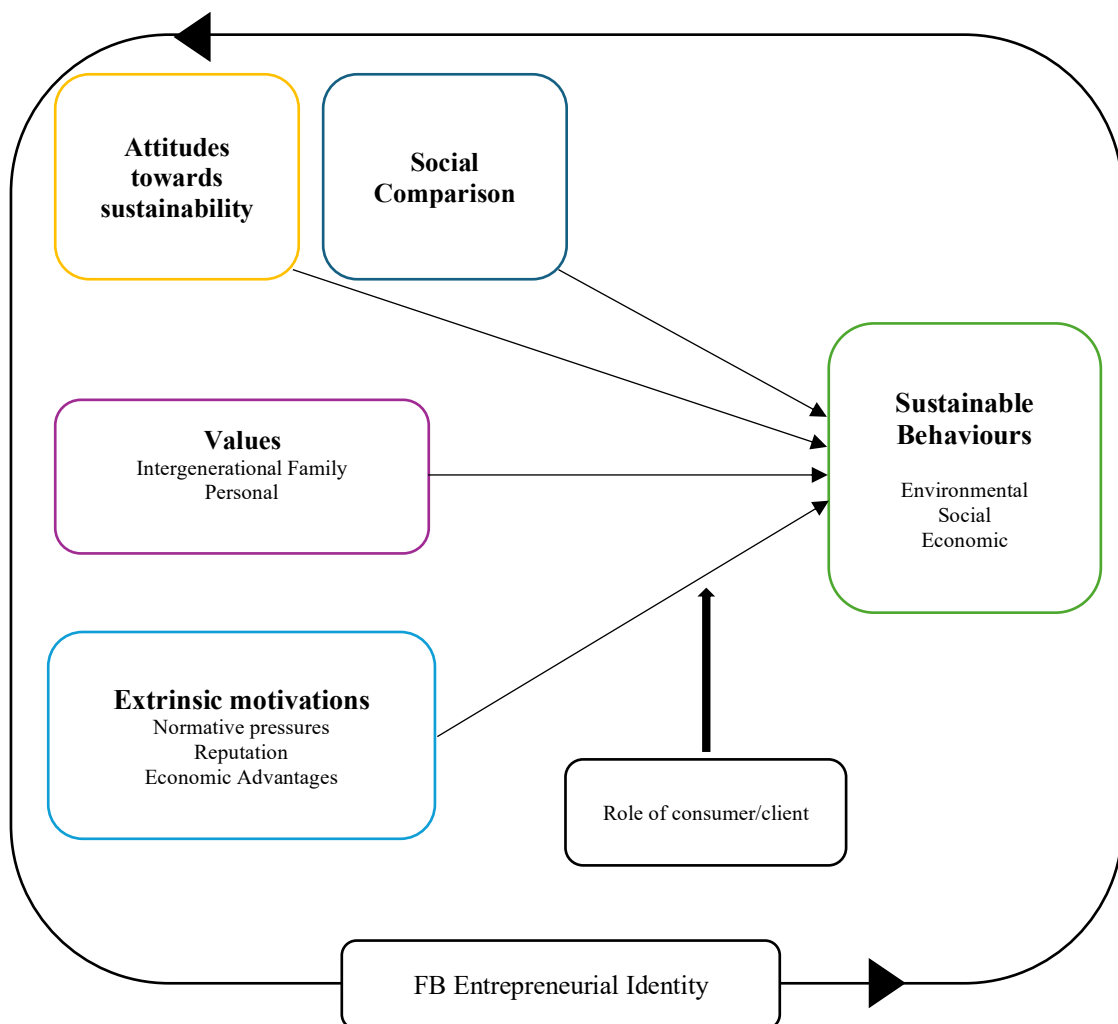
Second, the dimension of knowledge was excluded. Although it emerged as a meaningful theme in the qualitative analysis, its operationalization in a survey context was problematic and particularly vulnerable to social desirability bias, as respondents might tend to overstate their awareness or competencies regarding sustainability. Omitting this dimension allowed the quantitative phase to concentrate on those constructs that could be more reliably measured and meaningfully compared, namely the psychological and behavioural factor that, according to the qualitative phase, are most closely linked with sustainability commitment. In this way, the CFA and subsequent analyses were designed not to establish causal predictions but to verify whether the latent dimensions derived from the qualitative model were empirically supported in a broader and more heterogeneous sample. This strategy ensured coherence between the inductive theorization and its quantitative examination, while respecting the cross-sectional nature of the research design.

Finally, the model's central interpretive anchor was articulated around the construct of FB Entrepreneurial Identity. This identity reflects the integration between the entrepreneur's personal identity and the organizational identity of the FB. It develops over time through personal experiences, moral values, intergenerational legacies, and strategic orientations. To capture this dimension, a visual operationalization was employed using a diagram-based measure inspired by the Self-Inclusion and Self-Extension models (Aron et al., 1992; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Participants were presented with a series of overlapping circles and asked to

select the image that best represented the degree of identity integration they perceived between themselves and their business. This visual scale intuitively reflects the depth of entrepreneurial identification with the firm, reducing cognitive load and minimizing the impact of social desirability in responses. This refinement strengthens the centrality of the model, offering a theoretically grounded and practically applicable framework for understanding how FBs cultivate and sustain their commitment to sustainability (Figure 11).

**Figure 11**

*Simplified Model*



**Table 4***Categories and subcategories to be operationalized*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>
1) Attitudes	
2) Social Comparison	
Values	3) Intergenerational family
	4) Personal
Extrinsic Motivations	5) Normative pressures
	6) Reputational
	7) Economic Advantages
Sustainable Behaviours	8) Environmental
	9) Social
	10) Economic
11) Role of consumers/clients	
12) FB Entrepreneurial Identity	

The simplified model retains the categories that emerge during the qualitative phase, reorganizing them into a linear and operational framework suitable for quantitative measurement. In line with the categories and subcategories presented in Table 4, the model includes twelve constructs:

- 1) *Attitudes* toward sustainability, conceptualized as a continuous and integrated orientation that shapes entrepreneurs' evaluations of sustainable practices.
- 2) *Social comparison*, functioning as a mechanism of self-assessment and benchmarking, influencing perceived positioning and aspirations for improvement.
- 3–4) Values, articulated into two distinct dimensions: *intergenerational family values*, reflecting the transmission of responsibility, continuity, and prudence through family legacy; and *personal values*, rooted in individual experiences and professional trajectories, reinforcing ethical sensitivity and long-term vision.
- 5–7) Extrinsic motivations, comprising three interconnected drivers: *normative pressures*, referring to regulatory and institutional constraints; *reputational motivations*, linked to external recognition and legitimacy; and *perceived economic advantages*, highlighting expectations of efficiency gains and financial returns.

8–10) Sustainable behaviours, expressed across three domains: *environmental* (practices to reduce environmental impact and optimize resources); *social* (initiatives to enhance employee well-being and strengthen community relations); and *economic* (actions to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and secure long-term profitability).

11) Role of consumers/clients, emphasizing the influence of market expectations and consumer preferences in reinforcing or challenging sustainability practices.

12) FB Entrepreneurial Identity, defined as the perceived overlap between the entrepreneur's personal self and the organizational identity of the FB.

This configuration offers a framework that is both linear and robust, capable of translating the complexity of the qualitative model without losing its theoretical depth. In this way, the various dimensions acquire a measurable form while preserving the link with participants' narratives and lived experiences. All constructs contribute to outlining FBs' commitment to sustainability, expressed across its three core components: environmental, social, and economic.

From this perspective, the first eleven constructs are translated into empirical items, through an operationalization process that transforms verbalizations into observable indicators. For the twelfth construct, Family Business Entrepreneurial Identity, the study adopts the measure proposed by Aron et al. (1992), as it is particularly suited to capturing the intertwining between the entrepreneurial self and the organizational identity typical of family businesses. The use of a well-established instrument in the literature ensures greater methodological rigor, maintaining consistency with the psychological dimension identified qualitatively and integrating it into a coherent quantitative design. In this way, the process moves forward toward the construction of items, serving as a bridge between the insights that emerge from the interviews and their empirical validation.

## **4.2 Development of the Measurement Instrument**

The development of the questionnaire followed the framework for scale construction proposed by DeVellis (2017) (Tab. 5). The instrument developed,

hereafter referred to as the Family Business Sustainability Questionnaire (FBSQ), was designed to faithfully translate the theoretical model generated through Constructive Grounded Theory. In doing so, it sought to ensure conceptual clarity, psychometric robustness, and empirical relevance. Through this process, the psychological, motivational, and behavioural dimensions that explain FBs' commitment to sustainability were systematically operationalized.

**Table 5**

*Scale Development Process*

<b>Steps From DeVellis (2017)</b>	<b>Procedures adopted in this dissertation</b>
1. Determine clearly what you want to measure	The simplified theoretical model derived from Constructive Grounded Theory identifies eleven constructs (attitudes, social comparison, family values, personal values, normative pressures, reputational motivations, economic advantages, environmental behaviours, social behaviours, economic behaviours, role of consumers/clients).
2. Generate an item pool	A planning matrix was developed to link each category with in vivo quotations from interviews (see table 6). Items were formulated from participants' language and, where necessary, articulated into subscales.
3. Determine the format of the measure	All items were designed on a Likert-type scale (1–5), capturing degrees of agreement/disagreement.
4. Have experts review the initial item pool	Feedback was gathered from scholars (FB, sustainability, survey methods). In parallel, member checking was conducted with entrepreneurs, ensuring that items reflected participants' meanings and were understandable.
5. Consider the inclusion of validation items	Validation items were not included to minimize participant burden.
6. Pilot administration	Questionnaire is tested with a pilot sample of FBs to evaluate clarity, comprehensibility, and response patterns.
7. Evaluation of items	Psychometric analysis (item-total correlations, Cronbach's alpha). Non-performing items revised or removed.
8. Optimization of scale length	Items streamlined following the principle of parsimony, ensuring full coverage of constructs while avoiding respondent burden.

*Step 1. Determine clearly what to measure*

The simplified theoretical model derived from Constructive Grounded Theory provided the foundation for the instrument. Eleven constructs were identified, representing the psychological, motivational, and behavioural determinants of FBs' sustainability commitment. Together, these constructs captured attitudes, values, motivations, contextual influences, and behavioural orientations, each contributing to the understanding of how sustainability commitment is enacted in FBs.

*Step 2. Generate an item pool*

The operationalization process began with the creation of a planning matrix linking each construct to illustrative quotations from the interviews. This ensured a close semantic connection between participants' lived experiences and the resulting items, keeping the instrument grounded in empirical data. Items were formulated using in vivo expressions whenever possible, and only slightly reformulated to fit the format of a questionnaire statement. The item pool was developed to cover the breadth of each construct. Where subcategories emerged, these were articulated into separate subscales, thus retaining the depth and nuance of the constructs while moving toward quantifiable indicators. Examples of this process are reported in Table 5, where quotations, categories, and resulting items are aligned.

*Step 3. Determine the format of the measure*

All items were presented on a Likert-type scale, allowing respondents to indicate varying degrees of agreement or disagreement. This format reflected the continuous nature of attitudes, values, and motivations while also enabling robust statistical analyses for scale evaluation.

*Step 4. Expert review and member checking*

Once the initial item pool had been constructed, the instrument underwent an iterative review. Feedback was solicited from scholars in the fields of FB, sustainability, and survey methodology, who were contacted via email and invited to provide written comments on an online version of the questionnaire. Their

contributions focused on assessing content validity, readability, and redundancy, and resulted in targeted refinements. In parallel, a member checking procedure was conducted: entrepreneurs who had participated in the qualitative phase were re-contacted and asked to review the items. This was done both by sending them an online form, which allowed them to indicate their level of agreement with the wording, and through virtual meetings, during which items could be discussed in greater depth. This dual review process provided essential insights into both the comprehensibility and resonance of the items, ensuring that they faithfully reflected the meanings expressed in the interviews and enhancing the ecological validity of the instrument.

*Step 5. Consider the inclusion of validation items*

Given the primary aim of translating the qualitative model into measurable constructs, the addition of separate validation items was deemed unnecessary. This choice balanced methodological rigor with respondent burden, ensuring conciseness while maintaining adequate representation of each dimension through multiple indicators. Nonetheless, several items were reverse coded to minimize acquiescence bias and strengthen the internal consistency of the scales.

At this stage, the outcome was a broad pool of items, systematically organized to reflect the theoretical model while remaining deeply rooted in participants’ narratives. Illustrative examples are provided in Table 6, whereas the first version of questionnaire is reported in the Appendix (p. 167).

**Table 6**

*Item Generation Matrix example*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>In vivo quote</b>	<b>Draft Item</b>
Attitudes		<i>“We believe that sustainability is something positive—for nature, the environment, and people. I mean, we have a positive view on this topic”.</i>	I believe that integrating

Category	Subcategory	In vivo quote	Draft Item
		<i>“If I integrate sustainability into my company, it differentiates itself and innovates more easily. That’s why I think it’s a positive thing!”</i>	sustainability into business processes can generate competitive advantages and opportunities for innovation.
		<i>“Sustainability is a beautiful political word, coined—or chosen, if you prefer—not to mean anything, because sustainability means nothing to me. I can’t quantify it in any way. [...] It’s too broad and too difficult to pursue”.</i>	I believe that sustainability is an abstract concept that does not always have a concrete impact on business management.
Extrinsic Motivation	Normative pressures	<i>“European regulations oblige us; without them, nothing would happen”.</i>	The obligation to comply with European environmental regulations significantly influences the sustainability practices adopted by my company.
	Reputational	<i>“Customers look at us, if you show commitment to sustainability, you gain trust”</i>  <i>“Our stakeholders pay close attention to our actions: when we commit to sustainability, it strengthens their trust in our business.”</i>	My company’s reputation with clients and stakeholders improves through its concrete commitment to sustainability.
	Economic Advantage	<i>“For us, sustainability only makes sense when there are clear economic advantages, like reduced costs or financial support”.</i>	Access to financial incentives makes sustainability an economically

Category	Subcategory	In vivo quote	Draft Item
		<i>“The real driver is the economic benefit — if incentives or savings are there, sustainability becomes a profitable choice”.</i>	advantageous choice for the company.

*Step 6–8. Pilot administration, evaluation of items, and optimization of scale length*

The subsequent phase of the process consisted of administering the preliminary version of the questionnaire to a pilot sample of 41 CEO of FBs, collected between March 17 and March 28, 2025. The purpose of this stage was to evaluate the clarity and comprehensibility of the items, to verify the internal coherence of the scales, and to provide a first indication of the instrument’s reliability before moving to the confirmatory phase. The pilot administration thus represented a crucial passage in the transition from qualitative-inspired wording to a standardized measurement format, ensuring that the meanings derived from participants’ narratives were preserved within a quantitatively testable tool.

The evaluation of the items was conducted through an initial psychometric analysis. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were calculated to examine the internal consistency of the scales, while Pearson’s correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) were employed to assess the associations between items and their respective constructs. Items that did not meet the criteria for conceptual clarity or statistical adequacy were revised or removed. This refinement process was further supported by feedback obtained through member checking with a subset of the original interviewees, who were invited to reflect on the extent to which the items captured their perspectives. This step confirmed the centrality of participants’ voices and allowed potential ambiguities to be addressed through targeted adjustments. The optimization of the scale length followed the principle of parsimony, aiming to ensure comprehensive coverage of each construct while at the same time avoiding excessive burden on respondents. The final version of the questionnaire therefore preserved the

multidimensional richness of the theoretical model, while enhancing its psychometric solidity and practical usability.

The synthetic results of the pilot study, reported in Table 7, show that all constructs achieved satisfactory levels of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the conventional threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Importantly, the coefficients reported in the table were calculated after the removal of items identified as problematic, both on statistical grounds (low item-total correlations) and through a critical rereading of their content. Two of the three excluded items were reverse-coded, a format that proved to be a source of misunderstanding for respondents and thus reduced the clarity and reliability of the respective scales. The elimination of these items contributed to enhancing the psychometric robustness of the instrument, while maintaining comprehensive coverage of the underlying constructs.

**Table 7**

*Summary of Pilot Study Results and Scale Decisions*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>N. of initial Items</b>	<b>Psychometric Results</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Attitudes toward sustainability	6	Cronbach's $\alpha=.816$	Scale retained; item 10 removed; final number of item=5
Social comparison	4	Cronbach's $\alpha=.796$	Scale retained
Family values	3	Cronbach's $\alpha=.846$	Scale retained
Personal values	3	Cronbach's $\alpha=.884$	Scale retained
Total Values	6	Cronbach's $\alpha=.805$	-
Normative pressures motivation	4	Cronbach's $\alpha=.938$	Scale retained; item 20R removed; final number of items = 3

Reputational motivations	3	Cronbach's $\alpha=.853$	Scale retained
Economic advantages motivation	4	Cronbach's $\alpha=.830$	Scale retained; item 13R removed; final number of items = 3
Total Motivations	9	Cronbach's $\alpha=.803$	-
Environmental behaviours	4	Cronbach's $\alpha=.932$	Scale retained
Social behaviours	4	Cronbach's $\alpha=.892$	Scale retained
Economic behaviours	4	Cronbach's $\alpha=.703$	Scale retained
Role of consumers/clients	5	Cronbach's $\alpha=.843$	Scale retained

In conclusion, the development and preliminary validation of the questionnaire produced an instrument that is both theoretically coherent and psychometrically reliable. The integration of the qualitative model, participant involvement, and statistical verification ensured that the constructs identified in the exploratory phase were translated into a robust and meaningful measurement tool. The final version of the questionnaire, resulting from this iterative process of review and optimization, is presented in full in the Appendix (FBSQ–final version, p. 202). This achievement marks the completion of the exploratory–integrative phase and sets the foundation for the confirmatory phase, where the instrument will be employed for large-scale data collection and statistical validation of the proposed theoretical model.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Phase III: Confirmatory analysis**

The third phase of the research represents the confirmatory stage, in which the FBSQ, developed and preliminarily tested in the pilot study, is administered to a larger sample of FBs. The aim of this phase is twofold: on the one hand, to provide a confirmation of the theoretical model derived from the qualitative stage; on the other, to examine the psychometric robustness of the measurement instrument in a broader and more heterogeneous context.

The transition thus consolidates the methodological pathway followed so far, bridging the inductive theorization that emerged from the narratives of entrepreneurs with the deductive logic of quantitative testing.

The chapter introduces the characteristics of the sample, with particular attention to the demographic and organizational features of the participating family businesses, outlines the procedures of questionnaire administration and the statistical analyses employed to test the psychometric properties of the instrument, and concludes with the presentation of the results, which provide evidence of the reliability and validity of the scales and lay the foundation for the subsequent discussion of their theoretical and practical implications.

### **5.1 Method**

#### **5.1.1 Data collection and methods of analysis**

Data collection for the third phase of this research was carried out between May and July 2025 using the FBSQ presented in the previous chapter. The instrument was administered through the Qualtrics platform, which ensured both an accessible and user-friendly interface for participants and a secure and standardized management of responses.

To guarantee a broad and diversified participation, two complementary distribution channels were employed. On the one hand, the questionnaire was

circulated via mailing lists provided by industry associations, reaching many FBs across the national territory. On the other hand, the study was presented during events specifically dedicated to FBs or to the theme of sustainability. In these contexts, participants could directly access the questionnaire through a QR code, which facilitated real-time completion. An initial filter question asked respondents to indicate whether their company qualified as a FB; those who answered negatively were automatically excluded from the survey. This strategy allowed for the collection of a large and heterogeneous sample, capable of reflecting the plurality of experiences and characteristics of Italian FBs.

The data analysis, presented in the following sections, was conducted in several stages. First, a description of the socio-demographic and organizational characteristics of the sample was carried out. Preliminary analyses were then performed to test the normality of distributions using the Shapiro-Wilk test (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965), followed by the psychometric validation procedures of the questionnaire. This phase included a series of analyses serving different but complementary purposes. First, CFA were conducted to test the factorial structure of the questionnaire and to assess measurement invariance across groups. Subsequently, multiple regression models were estimated to explore the extent to which control variables were associated with sustainable behaviours.

All analyses were performed using a combination of software and statistical packages. Specifically, Excel (Version 16.100.4) was employed for the initial organization of the dataset, while Jamovi (Version 2.5.3.0) and RStudio (Posit, s.d.) were used for advanced statistical analyses.

### **5.1.2 Participants and socio-demographic profile**

The final sample of this phase of the research project, whose main socio-demographic and organizational characteristics are summarized in Table 8, consists of 728 members of Italian FBs holding decision-making positions within their organizations. The gender distribution reveals a clear predominance of men, who account for 84.2% of respondents, while women represent 15.8%, reflecting a

typical trait of the national entrepreneurial landscape. The age composition also highlights the centrality of older generations: the 50–64 age group is the largest (43.1%), followed by those over 65 (25.7%). Respondents aged 35–49 constitute 25% of the sample, whereas younger participants, under the age of 35, account for only 6.2%. The educational level of the respondents is rather heterogeneous. Most participants hold a high school diploma (39.8%), while 20.2% have a master's degree or equivalent and 10.7% hold a bachelor's degree or university diploma. A non-negligible share (9.6%) pursued further education with postgraduate qualifications, such as master's programs, specializations, or doctorates, whereas the remaining 19.6% are distributed between lower secondary or short-cycle upper secondary qualifications, with a very small proportion reporting no formal education.

From a generational perspective, most respondents identify as first-generation heirs (86.1%), while 12% belong to the second generation and only 1.9% to the third. The distribution of organizational roles confirms the strong concentration at the top: more than three quarters of the sample (75.3%) serve as CEOs or general directors, 11.3% are owners or co-owners, and 11.7% hold positions as area managers. Only 1.6% are employees with decision-making responsibilities, a group predominantly represented in the younger age categories. Sectoral distribution contributes to outlining a representative picture of Italian family businesses. The manufacturing and industrial sector accounts for the largest share (37.4%), followed by agri-food (19.9%), services (12.4%), fashion and textiles (11%), trade and distribution (10%), and construction (9.3%). Company size confirms the predominance of small and medium-sized enterprises: 38.7% employ fewer than ten workers, 32.1% between ten and forty-nine, and 28.4% between fifty and 249, while only 0.7% have more than 250 employees. A similar pattern emerges for annual turnover: 32.4% of companies report revenues between €500,000 and €2 million, 29.3% between €2 and €10 million, and 30.5% less than €500,000, whereas only a small minority (7.8%) exceed €10 million. Family governance emerges as a distinctive feature of the sample. In most cases, decision-making processes involve two or three family members (78.2%), while in 17.7% of

companies' decisions are concentrated in a single individual and in 4.1%, they are shared among four or more family members. International openness also represents a relevant element: more than half of the businesses (52.7%) maintain commercial relations both within and outside the European Union, 22.5% operate exclusively within the EU, and 23.4% have no international ties. Finally, the geographical distribution of the sample reflects the productive concentration typical of the Italian entrepreneurial system: most businesses are in the North (86.7%), followed by the Center (11.3%) and the South (2.1%). To ensure internal coherence of the sample, contingency analyses were conducted among the main socio-demographic and organizational variables, the results of which are reported in the Appendix (p. 236). These analyses confirmed several expected associations, such as the greater presence of men in older age groups and in top managerial roles, or the relationship between educational level and organizational position. These aspects will be discussed more extensively in the concluding section of the dissertation.

**Table 8**

*Comprehensive summary table of socio-demographic and organizational characteristics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Gender	Male	613	84.2
	Female	115	15.8
Age	18-34 y.o.	45	6.18
	35-49 y.o.	182	25
	50-65 y.o.	314	43.13
	65 or more y.o.	187	25.69
Education	Low	143	19.64
	High	215	29.53
	Medium	370	50.82
Generation	First-generation heir	626	85.99
	Second-generation heir	88	12.09
	Third-generation heir	14	1.92
Role	CEO/General Management	550	75.55
	Owner/Co-owner	80	10.99
	Area Manager/Executive	86	11.81
	Employee with decision-making functions	12	1.65

Sector	Manufacturing/Industry	272	37.36
	Services	90	12.36
	Trade/Distribution	73	10.03
	Agri-food	145	19.92
	Fashion and Textiles	80	10.99
	Construction/Building	68	9.34
Employees	1–9 employees	282	38.74
	10–49 employees	234	32.14
	50–249 employees	207	28.43
	250 or more employees	5	0.69
Turnover	Less than €500,000	222	30.49
	€500,000 – €2 million	236	32.42
	€2 million – €10 million	213	29.26
	Over €10 million	57	7.83
Family involvement	Only me	129	17.72
	2–3	569	78.16
	4 or more	30	4.12
International activity	Yes, within the European Union	171	23.49
	Yes, outside the European Union	164	22.53
	Yes, both within and outside the European Union	10	1.37
	No	383	52.61
Geographical area	North: Valle d’Aosta, Piemonte, Liguria, Lombardia, Trentino Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna	631	86.68
	Center: Toscana Umbria, Marche, Lazio	82	11.26
	South: Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicilia, Sardegna	15	2.06
Company identification	1	33	4.53
	2	26	3.57
	3	68	9.34
	4	252	34.62
	5	159	21.84
	6	80	10.99
	7	110	15.11

*Note.* Percentages are based on the total sample (N = 728).

## **5.2 Results: validation and group comparisons**

The following section presents the results of the quantitative phase conducted with the FBSQ. The analyses first focus on validating the latent trait structure derived from the questionnaire items. Once the factorial structure is confirmed, measurement invariance (metric and scalar) is tested for sustainable behaviours. Finally, both non-parametric tests and linear regression models are used to examine the hypothesis that sustainable behaviours are not influenced by socio-demographic and organizational control variables.

### **5.2.1 CFA: testing competing models of FBSQ**

To test the factorial structure of the FBSQ, a series of CFA were conducted. The aim was to verify whether the model derived from the qualitative phases — restructured and presented in Chapter 4 — would show adequate psychometric properties when applied to the larger sample of FBs.

Two alternative models were therefore compared. The first was a six-factor model, which represented the outcome of GT analysis. It included the following dimensions: Attitudes, Social Comparison, Values (considered as a single category), Extrinsic Motivations (integrating normative pressure, reputational concerns, and economic advantages), Role of Consumers/Clients, and Sustainable Behaviours (encompassing environmental, social, and economic practices as one category) (Tab. 9). This parsimonious solution reflected the initial qualitative findings while maintaining conceptual coherence by grouping related categories.

The second was an eleven-factor model, developed during the preparation of quantitative phase. In this model, broader dimensions were articulated into more specific sub-categories based on theoretical considerations and the nuances that emerged during the qualitative stage. Specifically, Values were distinguished into intergenerational Family Values and Personal Values, Extrinsic Motivation were separated into Normative Pressures, Reputational Concerns, and Economic Advantages, Sustainable Behaviours were articulated into Environmental, Social, and Economic; while Attitudes, Social Comparison, and the Role of Consumers/Clients remained as distinct factors (Tab. 10).

**Table 9 and 10**

*Latent Factors and Item Composition in Six-Factor and Eleven-Factor CFA Models*

<b>Latent Factors</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Latent Factors</b>	<b>Item</b>
1) Attitudes	Att_1	1) Attitudes	Att_1
	Att_2		Att_2
	Att_5R		Att_5R
	Att_7		Att_7
	Att_9R		Att_9R
2) Social Comparison	Soc_comp_3	2) Social Comparison	Soc_comp_3
	Soc_comp_4R		Soc_comp_4R
	Soc_comp_6R		Soc_comp_6R
	Soc_comp_8		Soc_comp_8
3) Values	ValF_3	3) Intergenerational Family Values	ValF_3
	ValF_12		ValF_12
	ValF_18R		ValF_18R
	ValP_7	4) Personal Values	ValP_7
	ValP_15R		ValP_15R
ValP_22	ValP_22		
4) Extrinsic Motivations	Motivnorm_1	5) Normative pressures	Motivnorm_1
	Motivnorm_11		Motivnorm_11
	Motivnorm_19		Motivnorm_19
	Motivrep_2	6) Reputational	Motivrep_2
	Motivrep_8		Motivrep_8
	Motivrep_16R		Motivrep_16R
	Motivadv_4	7) Economic Advantages	Motivadv_4
	Motivadv_5		Motivadv_5
Motivadv_21	Motivadv_21		
5) Role of consumers/clients	Consum_6	8) Role of consumer/client	Consum_6
	Consum_10		Consum_10
	Consum_9		Consum_9
	Consum_14R		Consum_14R
	Consum_17		Consum_17
6) Sustainable behaviours	BehEn_1	9) Environmental behaviours	BehEn_1
	BehEn_4		BehEn_4
	BehEn_7		BehEn_7
	BehEn_12		BehEn_12
	BehS_2	10) Social behaviours	BehS_2
	BehS_5		BehS_5
	BehS_9		BehS_9
	BehS_11	BehS_11	
	BehEc_3	11) Economic Behaviours	BehEc_3
	BehEc_6		BehEc_6
BehEc_8	BehEc_8		
BehEc_10	BehEc_10		

Testing both models thus allowed for a systematic comparison between the parsimonious structure derived directly from the Grounded Theory and the more articulated formulation refined considering theoretical arguments. This dual testing strategy provided a robust basis for evaluating which structure better accounts for the observed data and preserves the conceptual richness of sustainability commitment in FBs.

Model fit was assessed using the most widely recommended indices: Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) with 90% confidence interval, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). According to the literature, acceptable model fit is indicated by CFI and TLI values  $\geq .90$  (preferably  $\geq .95$  for good fit), RMSEA  $\leq .06$ – $.08$ , and SRMR  $\leq .08$  (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003; Hair, 2009; Kline, 2016). The comparison of fit indices clearly indicated the superiority of the eleven-factor model (Figures 12 and 13). The six-factor solution showed inadequate fit (CFI = .55; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .106, 90% CI [.101 – .111]; SRMR = .09), with values well below the conventional thresholds of acceptability. In contrast, the eleven-factor model displayed a very good fit to the data (CFI = .95; TLI = .943; RMSEA = .036, 90% CI [.033 – .039]; SRMR = .039), with all indices comfortably exceeding the recommended cut-offs (Tab. 11). These results confirm that the more articulated factorial structure provides a significantly better representation of the observed responses, supporting the theoretical refinement introduced in Chapter 4. For clarity, the main fit indices are summarized below (Table 11), while the complete set of CFA results are presented in the Appendix (p. 240 and 245).

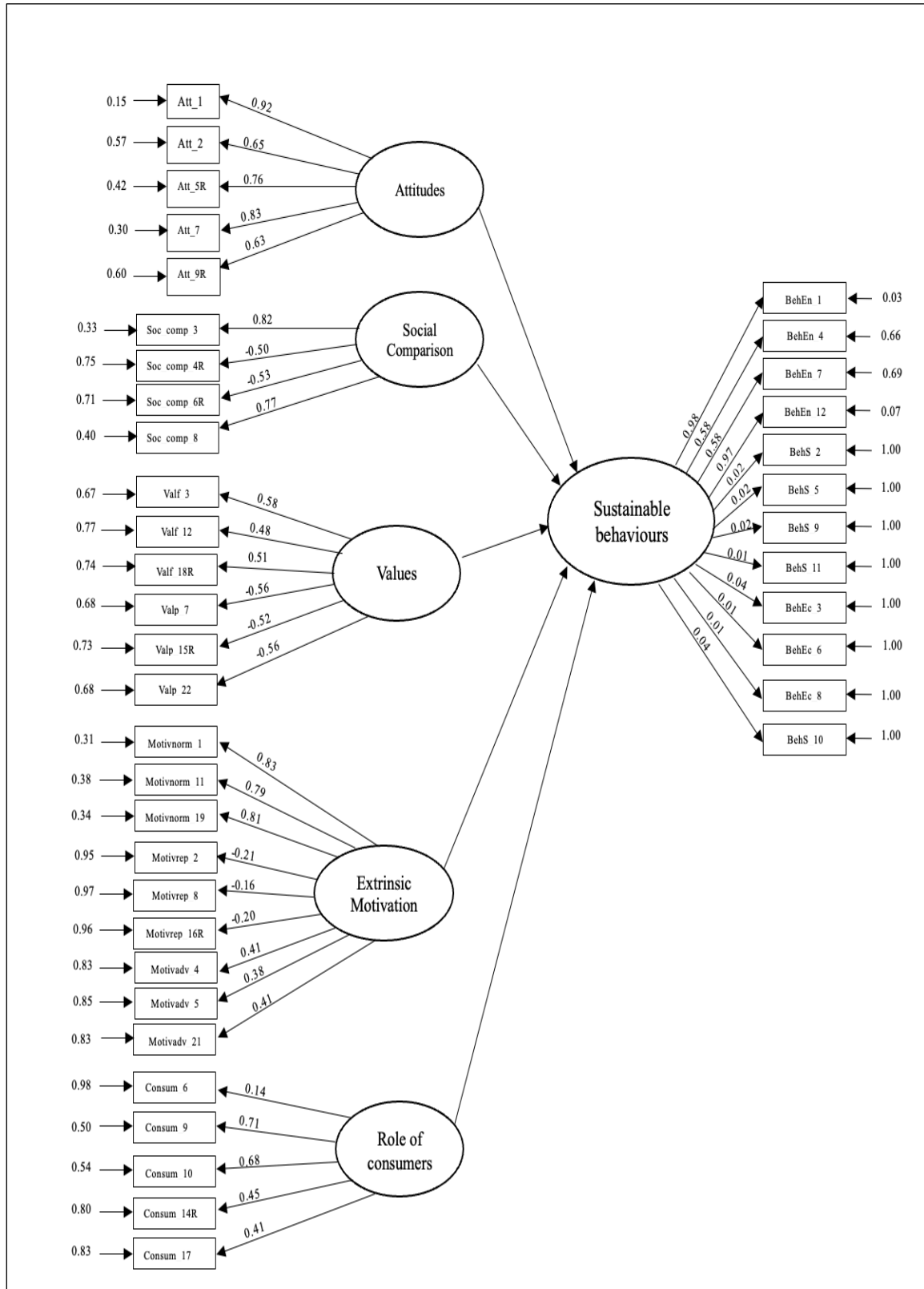
**Table 11**

*Goodness-of-fit indices for the six-factor and eleven-factor CFA models of the FBSQ.*

Model	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR
Six-factor model	.55	.90	.106 [.101 – .111]	.09
Eleven-factor model	.95	.943	.036 [.033 – .039]	.039

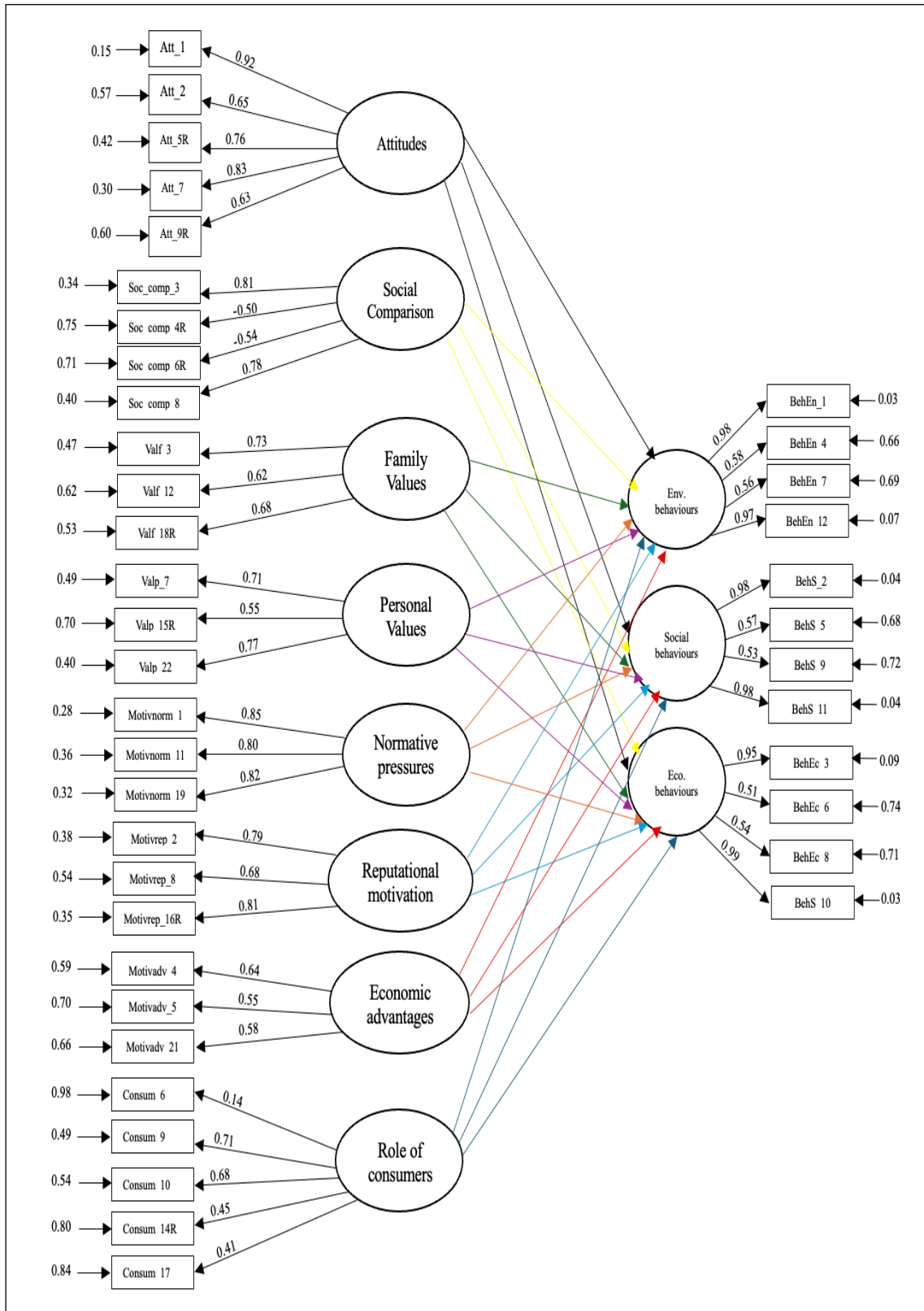
**Figure 12**

*Six-factor model*



**Figure 13**

*Elven-factor model*



### 5.2.2 Measurement invariance across sectors and company dimensions

An additional step in the validation process of the FBSQ concerned the assessment of measurement invariance. Establishing that the factorial structure of the instrument is invariant across subgroups is a fundamental requirement for the meaningful comparison of latent constructs, since it ensures that differences observed between groups reflect true variations in the underlying constructs rather than artifacts of the measurement process. In this study, scalar invariance was tested, which represents a stringent level of invariance because it requires both the equality of factor loadings and the equality of item intercepts across groups. Achieving scalar invariance guarantees that group means can be compared without bias. Two grouping variables of particular relevance were selected: the business sector in which the family firm operates (Manufacturing/industry, Services, Trade/distribution Agri-food, Fashion and textiles, Construction/building) and dimension of the company (micro: 1–9 employees; small: 10–49 employees; medium: 50–249 employees; large: 250+ employees).

For each grouping variable, two models were estimated: a configural model, which allowed all parameters to vary freely across groups, and a scalar model, in which both factor loadings and intercepts were constrained to equality. The two models were then compared using the chi-square difference test (likelihood ratio test).

With respect to the sectoral dimension (Table 12), the chi-square difference between the configural and the scalar model was non-significant ( $\Delta\chi^2(300) = 315.19, p = .262$ ). This result indicates that the imposition of equality constraints does not produce a significant deterioration of model fit, thus supporting the hypothesis of scalar invariance across sectors. In other words, the latent constructs measured by the FBSQ are perceived and interpreted in a consistent way by respondents, regardless of the industry in which their FB operates.

A similar result emerged when testing for invariance across the dimension of company (Table 13). The comparison between the configural and the scalar model yielded a non-significant chi-square difference ( $\Delta\chi^2(60) = 53.54, p = .7093$ ). Also in this case, the constrained model was statistically indistinguishable from the

unconstrained one, which provides evidence for scalar invariance across company dimensions. This finding strengthens the claim that the factorial structure of the instrument is stable across different organizational configurations of FBs.

Taken together, these results confirm that the FBSQ demonstrates robust psychometric properties across heterogeneous groups of FBs. The achievement of scalar invariance for both sector and dimension of company implies that the instrument can be confidently employed for subgroup comparisons and cross-contextual analyses, as it captures the same underlying constructs independently of the specific characteristics of the firms. This reinforces the validity of the questionnaire as a reliable tool for studying sustainable behaviours in FBs.

**Table 12**

*Measurement invariance of the FBSQ across business sectors: comparison between configural and scalar models.*

Model	Df	AIC	BIC	Chisq	Chisq diff	RMSEA	Df diff	Pr(>Chisq)
fit2_config	4,344	57,472.08	62,374.52	6,145.012				
Fit_scalar	4,644	57,187.27	60,712.62	6,460.207	315.1943	0.02043101	300	0.2619843

**Table 13**

*Measurement invariance of the FBSQ across company sizes: comparison between configural and scalar models.*

Model	Df	AIC	BIC	Chisq	Chisq diff	RMSEA	Df diff	Pr(>Chisq)
Fit3_config	1,448	56,927.26	58,561.41	2,081.401				
Fit_scalar2	1,508	56,860.79	58,219.52	2,134.936	53.53567	0	60	0.7092768

### 5.2.3 Regression Models and Nonparametric Tests

A final series of analyses was conducted to test whether sustainable behaviours—environmental, social, and economic—could be explained by a set of control variables, including gender, age, education, generation, organizational role, sector, and company size. For each of the three dimensions of sustainable behaviour, scores were calculated by summing the responses to four items, with

possible values ranging from 4 to 20. Descriptive statistics showed that all three dimensions were characterized by high mean values and limited dispersion: environmental behaviours (M = 16.05, SD = 2.10, min = 10, max = 19), social behaviours (M = 16.36, SD = 1.95, min = 11, max = 18), and economic behaviours (M = 16.10 SD = 2.25, min = 9, max = 19), with medians consistently equal to 17 and interquartile ranges between 14 and 18.

Multiple regression models were then estimated to test the predictive power of the control variables. In all three models, the coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ) were very close to zero ( $R^2$  environmental model= 0.03,  $R^2$  social model= 0.02,  $R^2$  economic model= 0.04), indicating that the sociodemographic and organizational characteristics considered did not substantially explain the variance in sustainable behaviours. In other words, the propensity to engage in environmental, social, or economic sustainability practices was not systematically influenced by gender, age, education, generation, role, sector, or business dimension (number of employees) (see Table 14). Some isolated differences emerged, such as the contrast between CEOs/general managers (role 1) and employees with decision-making responsibilities (role 4) in the environmental model, as well as slight variations between generations and sectors in the economic model. However, these effects were weak and did not alter the overall picture.

**Table 14**

*Multiple regression models of sustainable environmental, social, and economic behaviours*

Multiple regression models of sustainable environmental, social, and economic behaviour			
	<i>Dependent variable</i> Environmental	<i>Dependent variable</i> Social	<i>Dependent variable</i> Economic
GENDER2	-0.09 (0.28)	-0.34 (0.27)	-0.04 (0.26)
AGE2	-0.10 (0.59)	0.58 (0.58)	0.54 (0.56)
AGE3	-0.16 (0.66)	0.41 (0.66)	0.87 (0.63)
AGE4	-0.39 (0.68)	0.43 (0.68)	0.38 (0.65)

EDUCATIONhigh	-0.02 (0.30)	-0.36 (0.30)	-0.30 (0.29)
EDUCATIONmed	0.21 (0.27)	-0.09 (0.27)	-0.20 (0.26)
ROLE2	0.50 (0.39)	0.32 (0.38)	-0.31 (0.37)
ROLE3	0.16 (0.43)	0.05 (0.43)	0.17 (0.41)
ROLE4	2.51*** (0.94)	0.48 (0.93)	0.46 (0.90)
GENERATION2	-0.34 (0.34)	-0.36 (0.33)	-0.35 (0.32)
GENERATION3	-1.45 (0.89)	0.42 (0.88)	2.48*** (0.85)
SECTOR2	-0.09 (0.36)	-0.46 (0.35)	1.13*** (0.34)
SECTOR3	0.30 (0.37)	-0.48 (0.37)	0.18 (0.35)
SECTOR4	-0.04 (0.30)	-0.32 (0.30)	0.42 (0.28)
SECTOR5	0.17 (0.36)	-0.17 (0.36)	0.71** (0.35)
SECTOR6	-0.02 (0.39)	-0.07 (0.38)	0.63* (0.37)
EMPLOYEES2	-0.05 (0.24)	-0.05 (0.24)	0.01 (0.23)
EMPLOYEES3	0.25 (0.28)	-0.21 (0.27)	-0.27 (0.26)
EMPLOYEES5	1.29 (1.22)	0.16 (1.21)	1.52 (1.17)
Constant	16.02*** (0.72)	16.38*** (0.72)	15.15*** (0.69)
Observations	728	728	728
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.02	0.04
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.0002	-0.01	0.01
Residual Std. Error	2.66 (df=708)	2.64 (df=708)	2.54 (df=708)
F Statistic	0.99 (df=19; 708)	0.63 (df=19; 708)	1.54* (df=19; 708)

Note: \*  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Dummy variables were created for all categorical predictors. Reference categories are indicated in parentheses: GENDER2 = male (ref. female); AGE2 = 35–49 years (ref. 18–34 years); AGE3 = 50–64 years (ref. 18–34 years); AGE4 = 65+ years (ref. 18–34 years); EDUCATIONhigh = high school diploma (4–5 years) or higher (ref. middle school

*diploma or lower*); EDUCATIONmed = *high school diploma (2–3 years) (ref. middle school diploma or lower)*; ROLE2 = *owner/co-owner (ref. CEO general management)*; ROLE3 = *area manager/manager (ref. CEO/general management)*; ROLE4 = *decision-making employee (ref. CEO general management)*; GENERATION2 = *second-degree heir (ref. first-degree heir)*; GENERATION3 = *third-degree heir (ref. first-degree heir)*; SECTOR2 = *trade/distribution (ref. manufacturing industry)*; SECTOR3 = *agri-food (ref. manufacturing industry)*; SECTOR4 = *building/construction (ref. manufacturing industry)*; SECTOR5 = *fashion and textiles (ref. manufacturing industry)*; SECTOR6 = *services (ref. manufacturing industry)*; EMPLOYEES2 = *10–49 employees (ref. 1–9 employees)*; EMPLOYEES3 = *50–249 employees (ref. 1–9 employees)*; EMPLOYEES5 = *250 or more employees (ref. 1–9 employees)*.

Given the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test (Table 16), which indicated a significant deviation from normality for all three scales —environmental behaviours ( $W=0.932$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), social behaviours ( $W=0.926$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), and economic behaviours ( $W=0.931$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ )— further analyses were performed using nonparametric tests. The Wilcoxon test (Table 15) revealed no significant gender differences in the three models (environmental behaviours:  $W = 34,961$ ,  $p > .05$ ; social behaviours:  $W = 38,346$ ,  $p > .05$ ; economic behaviours:  $W = 34,984$ ,  $p > .05$ ). The Kruskal–Wallis test confirmed the overall homogeneity of sustainability behaviour scores across groups (see Table 17). Specifically, for environmental behaviours, the following results were obtained: age  $\chi^2 = 3.87$ , education  $\chi^2 = 1.42$ , generation  $\chi^2 = 0.28$ , role  $\chi^2 = 9.66$ , sector  $\chi^2 = 1.35$ , employees  $\chi^2 = 2.22$ . For social behaviours: age  $\chi^2 = 1.68$ , education  $\chi^2 = 2.71$ , generation  $\chi^2 = 1.70$ , role  $\chi^2 = 1.35$ , sector  $\chi^2 = 2.30$ , employees  $\chi^2 = 0.44$ . For economic behaviours: age  $\chi^2 = 3.38$ , education  $\chi^2 = 1.37$ , generation  $\chi^2 = 5.86$ , role  $\chi^2 = 1.91$ , sector  $\chi^2 = 10.96$ , employees  $\chi^2 = 1.29$ . Significant differences emerged only in the environmental model by role ( $p = .02$ ). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons revealed that the difference was specific to CEOs/general managers (role 1) and employees with decision-making responsibilities (role 4), with the latter reporting slightly lower scores ( $p = .034$ ). All other contrasts were non-significant.

Overall, these results suggest that sustainability behaviours among Italian family businesses are relatively homogeneous across sociodemographic and organizational categories. The limited explanatory power of the control variables, combined with the weak and inconsistent differences observed in the non-parametric tests, indicates that sustainability practices are not primarily determined

by the demographic or structural characteristics of the respondents. Rather, they appear to be better explained by psychological dimensions—such as attitudes, values, and motivations—that were central to the theoretical model developed in the early stages of this research. This evidence supports the central assumption of our study: the drivers of sustainability in FBs are rooted in the entrepreneurs’ identities and motivational frameworks, rather than in their superficial characteristics.

**Table 15 and 16**

*Wilcoxon and Shapiro Wilk tests*

<b>Wilcoxon test</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Shapiro Wilk test</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Environmental Model	0,899	Environmental	< 0,0001
Social Model	0,131	Social	< 0,0001
Economic Model	0,897	Economic	< 0,0001

**Table 17**

*Kruskal wallis tests assessing group differences in environmental, social, and economic sustainable behaviours.*

<b>Kruskal wallis</b>	
<b>Environmental Model</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Age	0,275
Education	0,492
Generation	0,871
Role	0,02
Sector	0,929
Employees	0,528
<b>Social Model</b>	
Age	0,641
Education	0,258
Generation	0,428
Role	0,716
Sector	0,807
Employees	0,931
<b>Economic Model</b>	
Age	0,337
Education	0,504
Generation	0,054
Role	0,591
Sector	0,053
Employees	0,732

#### **5.2.4 Summary of quantitative findings**

The quantitative analyses provided convergent evidence in support of the psychometric soundness and theoretical coherence of the FBSQ. The descriptive

analyses highlighted consistently high levels of reported sustainable behaviours, albeit with distributions that departed from normality. The confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the superiority of the eleven-factor model, which captured the multidimensional structure of sustainability more effectively than the reduced six-factor alternative. Moreover, the tests of measurement invariance demonstrated that the factorial structure of the instrument holds across both sectors and dimension of FBs, ensuring that the constructs are interpreted in a consistent manner across heterogeneous groups.

The regression models and non-parametric tests further revealed that socio-demographic and organizational characteristics exert minimal influence on the propensity of FBs to engage in sustainable behaviours. Instead, the results suggest that sustainability practices are relatively homogeneous across categories such as gender, age, role, sector, or company size. These findings reinforce the central premise of the study: that the determinants of sustainability in family businesses are to be found primarily in psychological variables—attitudes, values, and motivations—rather than in structural or demographic characteristics.

Taken together, the quantitative evidence consolidates the theoretical model elaborated in the qualitative phase, lending support to the idea that sustainability in family businesses is best understood through the lens of identity, motivations, and values. This provides a robust foundation for the discussion of the broader theoretical and practical implications, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### Phase IV: Integration, Discussion, and Conclusions

#### 6.1 Integration of Findings

The present study was designed as a multi-phase investigation, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the drivers of sustainability commitment in FB. The first phase, conducted through qualitative interviews, generated an inductive theoretical model that emphasized the central function of entrepreneurial identity, values, the role of the consumer, and motivations in shaping sustainable behaviours. These early stages were crucial in capturing the voices of entrepreneurs themselves, allowing the complexity of their narratives to emerge and revealing the nuanced interplay between personal convictions, intergenerational legacies, and the external recognition provided by certifications. The result was a preliminary conceptualization in which sustainability commitment was not reduced to a set of isolated practices but understood as a deeply embedded process.

The second phase marked the transition from qualitative theorization to instrument development. Based directly on the narratives collected in the interviews, the dimensions and items of the FBSQ were formulated using the very words and categories employed by participants to describe their experiences. This bottom-up construction ensured a strong alignment between the questionnaire and the lived reality of family entrepreneurs. To refine the content and enhance its credibility, a member checking process was carried out, whereby preliminary formulations were presented back to selected participants of the previous phase for feedback and validation. In addition, the instrument was subjected to verification by scholars and experts in the field of family business and sustainability, whose critical review further contributed to ensuring the conceptual soundness and practical clarity of the questionnaire. This iterative step allowed us to confirm the resonance and clarity of the constructs with those who had originally inspired them.

Finally, the preliminary version of the FBSQ was administered in a pilot study, which served to test its feasibility, assess the internal coherence of the scales, and identify potential adjustments needed before launching the large-scale quantitative validation.

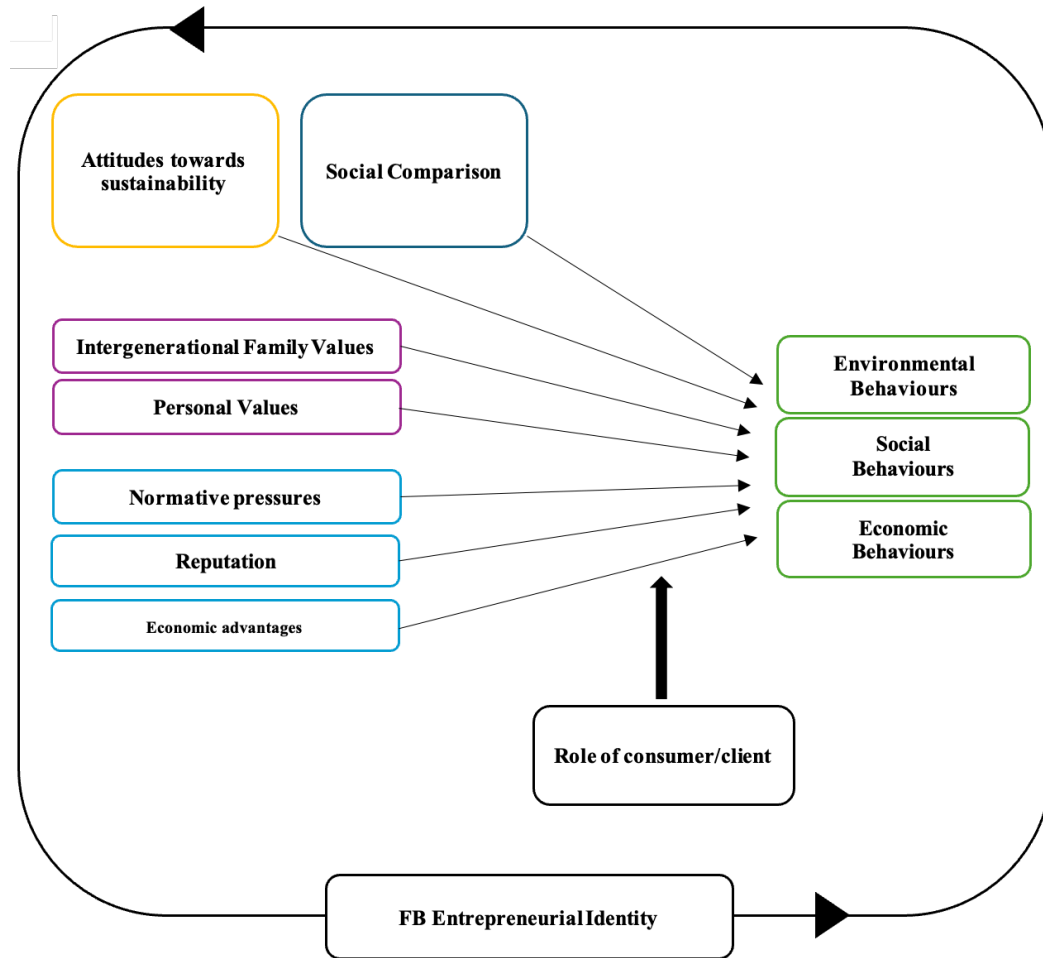
The third phase, which involved the administration of the FBSQ to a large and heterogeneous sample, provided the opportunity to test and refine this inductively derived model through a confirmatory quantitative lens. The CFA was employed to assess the latent structure underlying the questionnaire. Two models were contrasted: a six-factor solution—corresponding to the broader categories that had emerged from the qualitative phase—and an eleven-factor solution, which distinguished the sub-dimensions in greater detail. While the six-factor model offered parsimony, the eleven-factor structure received stronger empirical support, as it preserved the theoretical richness of the qualitative insights and provided a more articulated representation of sustainability commitment.

On this basis, the CFA of the eleven-factor model supported the factorial structure that had emerged from the qualitative phase, confirming the coherence of the instrument and validating the transition from inductive theorization to quantitative verification. The final model proposed by this research is therefore the one presented in Figure 14. It brings together values (both intergenerational and personal), attitudes, extrinsic motivations (reputational, normative, and economic), and social comparison as key antecedents of sustainable behaviours, alongside the distinct dimensions of environmental, social, and economic practices. At the same time, it points to the potentially central role of consumers and clients, whose influence may act as a moderator of these relationships and deserves further investigation in future studies. Importantly, the integration of qualitative and quantitative findings also reaffirms the central role of entrepreneurial and family business identity. While not tested as a separate construct in the CFA, identity emerges as the unifying framework through which values, motivations, and external expectations are interpreted and transformed into sustainable practices. In this sense, the CFA not only provided a solid basis for the proposed model but also

strengthened the theoretical claim that sustainability in FBs is deeply rooted in identity.

**Figure 14**

*Final model*



The convergence between qualitative and quantitative results is particularly significant with respect to the centrality of psychological variables. The qualitative analysis had indicated that values, motivations, and attitudes—both personal and intergenerational—constitute the true foundation of sustainability in FBs, whereas structural or demographic features appeared secondary. The quantitative analyses confirmed this intuition: regression models and non-parametric tests revealed that sustainability behaviours are relatively homogeneous across categories such as

gender, age, sector, or firm size (in this study referring primarily to micro, small, and medium enterprises), and that these variables explain virtually none of the observed variance. Instead, differences in sustainable engagement are better explained by the psychological dimensions captured by the FBSQ.

Another integrative aspect lies in the cross-validation of the measurement instrument. The FBSQ proved both psychometrically robust and theoretically coherent. Not only did it achieve excellent fit indices in CFA, but it also demonstrated measurement invariance across sectors and company types, confirming that the constructs are interpreted consistently across heterogeneous organizational contexts. This ensures that the FBSQ is not only a valid instrument in psychometric terms, but also one that respects the diversity of FBs while preserving comparability of results.

Taken together, the integrated findings answer an implicit yet fundamental question: Why is this a better measure than other approaches? The answer lies in the methodological pathway itself. Unlike instruments derived top-down or borrowed from general organizational research, the FBSQ and its underlying model are firmly grounded in the lived experiences of family entrepreneurs. They reflect their language, their values, and their identity-based ways of conceiving sustainability, while also undergoing rigorous quantitative validation. This dual foundation—inductive richness and deductive rigor—makes the contribution of this research particularly strong, offering both a theoretically sound and practically meaningful framework for understanding sustainability in FBs.

Beyond methodological and theoretical advances, it is worth underlining a distinctive feature of this research: its grounding in a real-world context. The model and questionnaire were not conceived in abstraction but developed through direct interaction with entrepreneurs, professional associations, and events specifically dedicated to family business sustainability. This engagement provided access to authentic narratives and concrete experiences, ensuring that the findings resonate with the actual challenges of FBs. Conducting research in such settings is not easy—FBs are often hard to reach, and sustainability is a sensitive theme touching identity, values, and long-term strategies. The success of this project therefore lies

not only in methodological rigor but also in its ability to bridge academic inquiry and practice, offering a framework that is at once conceptually rigorous and grounded in the lived reality of FBs.

## **6.2 Theoretical Implications**

The findings of this research carry important theoretical implications for the understanding of sustainability in FBs, as they extend and integrate existing frameworks that were not originally conceived with this specific organizational form in mind. While established theories such as the Socioemotional Wealth perspective (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007), Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) have long been used to explain organizational dynamics, their application to FBs has only recently begun to reveal the psychological and identity-based mechanisms underpinning sustainability (De Massis et al., 2021; Hernández-Perlines et al., 2022; Raithel et al., 2024). By integrating these perspectives, the present research advances a multidimensional view in which sustainability commitment in FBs is driven by an interplay of personal, familial, and contextual factors unified through entrepreneurial identity.

A first contribution concerns the role of Socioemotional Wealth. SEW emphasizes that FBs are guided by non-economic goals such as the preservation of family control, the transmission of values, and the protection of reputation (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; De Massis & Rondi, 2020). The results of this study reinforce this view by showing that sustainability commitment is not primarily motivated by short-term profit motives or structural determinants but by enduring intergenerational values and emotional attachments. This aligns with the most recent work by Werner-Lewandowska (2025), who emphasizes the idea of sustainability maturity—a process through which family firms progressively integrate ethical and emotional objectives into their strategic behaviour. The present research extends this discussion by providing empirical evidence that sustainability itself can be conceptualized as a form of socioemotional wealth: an expression of family identity and legacy preserved and renewed through sustainable action.

The research also contributes to Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) by reframing stakeholder engagement as an identity-driven rather than a purely instrumental process. Traditional interpretations have portrayed sustainability as a rational response to external pressures or legitimacy demands. However, the present results suggest that FBs internalize stakeholder expectations through the lens of family values, thereby transforming external pressures into internal motivations (Amore et al., 2022; Bertschi-Michel et al., 2023). In line with Llach et al. (2023) and Orellana et al. (2025), who describe the social dimension of sustainability as a lever for both legitimacy and moral coherence, this study shows that stakeholders are part of a broader relational system in which trust and continuity sustain not only the firm's external image but its internal identity. This perspective extends stakeholder theory by suggesting that stakeholder relationships in FBs function as processes of identity negotiation, in which moral responsibility and reputational sensitivity merge with emotional continuity across generations. The findings also enrich the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), by illustrating how classical cognitive components—attitudes and subjective norms—interact within a family and identity-based framework. In line with Ajzen's (1991) model and subsequent developments in organizational psychology (Raithel et al., 2024), favourable attitudes toward sustainability and perceived social norms emerged as central antecedents of sustainable behaviour. Yet, the current findings go further by demonstrating that, in FBs, sustainability engagement is not primarily guided by perceived behavioural control, but by the degree of alignment between personal convictions, shared values, and collective mission.

Although the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) identifies perceived behavioural control as a central determinant of intentions, this component did not emerge in participants' narratives and was therefore not operationalized in the present study. This absence, far from representing a methodological limitation, reflects a specific epistemological stance consistent with the exploratory nature of the research: in FBs, sustainability does not manifest as an act of control but as an act of coherence, grounded in moral alignment and identity continuity. In this sense, the findings do not contradict the TPB but rather suggest an extension of it, indicating that in highly

value-oriented contexts, moral obligation and identity coherence may function as alternative pathways in the formation of behavioural intentions (Manstead, 2018).

This supports Hernández-Perlines et al. (2022) and Arijs et al. (2023), who argue that sustainability in FBs reflects a moral logic—a choice anchored in values and meaning rather than utility. In doing so, the study extends TPB by embedding it within an identity-continuity framework, in which attitudes become moral expressions and sustainability behaviour reflects coherence between belief, belonging, and purpose.

From a psychological standpoint, the research underscores the importance of a constructivist and dynamic view of entrepreneurial identity (Pozzi & Ripamonti, 2019), illustrating how sustainability operates as a process of meaning-making across generations. This finding resonates with the most recent evidence from Luft et al. (2025) and Zhao et al. (2025), who show that sustainability-oriented identity construction enhances both innovation and ethical coherence in family firms. The present study builds upon this by empirically linking identity formation to motivational and attitudinal structures, demonstrating that sustainability is not an isolated outcome but a dynamic psychological process through which entrepreneurs negotiate between inherited legacies and future-oriented aspirations. In this sense, sustainability serves as both a stabilizing and transformative force in the evolution of entrepreneurial identity—a finding that connects FB research with broader theories of psychological adaptation and identity continuity.

The study also contributes to emerging debates on transformative sustainability, which reconceptualize sustainability as a process of identity and value transformation rather than compliance with environmental or social norms (Ramos et al., 2025). From this perspective, the sustainability journey of FBs can be viewed as an instance of organizational self-renewal, where the reinterpretation of values fosters both innovation and resilience. This interpretation situates family businesses at the forefront of transformative change, showing how psychological processes of reflection and meaning making can generate long-term organizational evolution.

Another theoretical advancement lies in the link with the concept of psychological ownership (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001; Sieger et al., 2024). The results suggest that sustainability commitment in FBs stems from a perceived sense of ownership and responsibility that extends beyond economic concerns to encompass moral and environmental domains. Family members' identification with the business fosters a felt responsibility for its long-term impact, which, in turn, enhances sustainable engagement. Integrating psychological ownership within family business research enriches the understanding of sustainability as a behaviour rooted in affective bonds and moral duty.

Furthermore, the research deepens the concept of transgenerational intentionality, showing that sustainability represents a psychological bridge across time—a manifestation of the family's long-term orientation translated into moral and strategic behaviour. By connecting sustainability to intergenerational continuity, the study highlights how FBs pursue goals that extend beyond individual lifespans, embedding sustainability into the family's collective sense of purpose.

Methodologically, this research extends the literature by demonstrating how qualitative theorization and quantitative validation can be combined to capture the complexity of psychological constructs in organizational contexts. While earlier studies relied on isolated survey measures or conceptual frameworks (Arregle et al., 2007; Raithel, 2025), the present study grounds its measurement model directly in entrepreneurs' lived experiences. The Family Business Sustainability Questionnaire (FBSQ) thus provides a dual contribution: a validated instrument for assessing sustainability-related psychological dimensions and a methodological blueprint for integrating inductive and deductive reasoning in family business research. This responds to recent calls by De Massis et al. (2021) and Werner-Lewandowska (2025) for research designs that bridge experiential narratives and quantitative robustness.

Finally, this research bridges disciplinary boundaries by integrating insights from organizational psychology, sustainability science, and FB studies into a unified framework. While much of the literature has focused on governance, performance, or succession (De Massis et al., 2018), the present work situates

sustainability within a psychological paradigm of meaning, motivation, and value transmission. In doing so, it complements the interdisciplinary shift proposed by Boberg et al. (2023) and Luft et al. (2025) toward more human-centered models of sustainable entrepreneurship.

At an epistemological level, this integrative approach contributes to bridging interpretivist and positivist paradigms within family business research. It demonstrates how qualitative meaning-making processes can be systematically translated into quantitative validation, expanding the methodological pluralism of the field.

Beyond its integrative contributions, this research also challenges several established assumptions.

First, it questions the predictive role of perceived behavioural control proposed by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of family businesses, sustainability commitment appears to stem not from perceived efficacy but from moral alignment and value coherence. This suggests that the classical cognitive model of behavioural prediction requires revision when applied to identity-driven contexts, where moral duty replaces rational control as the primary behavioural determinant.

Second, it challenges the instrumental interpretation of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which traditionally frames stakeholder engagement as a strategic reaction to external legitimacy pressures. The findings indicate that, in FBs, stakeholder relations are better understood as acts of identity enactment—processes through which external expectations are internalized, reinterpreted, and aligned with family values.

Third, the study nuances existing discussions on extrinsic motivations. While previous research has often portrayed reputational concerns, normative expectations, and economic incentives as self-interested or even opportunistic (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006), the current findings suggest that such motives, though ego-oriented, may coexist with—and be reinterpreted through—family identity. In family businesses, the pursuit of legitimacy and reputation does not necessarily contradict moral or pro-social goals; rather, it reflects a form of identity protection

aimed at ensuring coherence between the firm's public image and its internal value system. This integration of self-interested and moral motives challenges the dichotomy between egoism and altruism, illustrating how extrinsic motivations can be transformed into meaningful expressions of continuity and belonging.

Finally, it contests structuralist perspectives that attribute sustainable engagement to firm size, sector, or resource availability. Empirical analyses revealed that demographic and organizational variables explain minimal variance in sustainable behaviours, while psychological dimensions—values, motivations, and attitudes—account for the most significant differences. This disconfirms the assumption that sustainability is primarily resource-driven, positioning it instead as a phenomenon rooted in meaning, purpose, and identity.

In doing so, the present research not only extends existing frameworks but also redefines their boundaries, revealing the limits of rationalistic and structural explanations. Sustainability in family businesses thus emerges as a deeply psychological, moral, and identity-based process—one that acknowledges the coexistence of self-oriented and collective motives and transforms them into a coherent system of purpose and continuity. Taken together, these extensions show that this research does not merely apply existing theories to a new context but reinterprets them through the psychological lens of family identity. By combining qualitative depth with quantitative rigor, and by grounding theoretical claims in the lived experience of entrepreneurs, the study advances the literature from viewing sustainability as a strategic or reputational choice to understanding it as a psychological and identity-based process of continuity and transformation within FBs.

### **6.3 Practical Implications**

Beyond its theoretical relevance, this research also speaks directly to practice, suggesting concrete ways in which sustainability can be fostered within FBs and supported by the broader ecosystem around them.

For entrepreneurs themselves, the findings are encouraging. They show that sustainability commitment is not dictated by size, sector, or demographic features,

but rather by the convictions, values, and motivations that guide decision-making. This means that even micro and SMEs firms, often lacking the structural resources of larger organizations, can still cultivate strong and lasting engagement with sustainability by drawing on the cultural and relational assets that are already present within their business. Working with these internal resources—intergenerational values, reputational concerns, or personal beliefs—can help entrepreneurs integrate sustainability into their long-term vision, not as an external obligation but as a natural extension of the way they conceive of their business.

Associations and business organizations also emerge as key actors. Because the FBSQ captures psychological and motivational aspects rather than merely structural indicators, it can be used as a tool to design programs that truly resonate with entrepreneurs. Rather than segmenting initiatives by age, gender, or company size, associations can focus on strengthening the motivational levers that this research has shown to be decisive. Training sessions, peer-to-peer exchanges, and tailored workshops can thus become opportunities to activate reflection and commitment, creating spaces where sustainability is discussed in ways that connect directly to entrepreneurs' experiences and concerns.

A final implication concerns those who support FBs professionally, such as consultants, educators, and policy advisors. The results point to the value of involving professionals with psychological or psychosocial expertise in these processes. Since the real drivers of sustainability are attitudes, values, and motivations, there is an important role for those who can facilitate reflection, dialogue, and vision-building within families and organizations. These professionals can help entrepreneurs articulate the meaning of sustainability for their specific context, mediate intergenerational perspectives, and transform personal convictions into organizational practices. In this sense, the research highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, where psychological knowledge complements managerial and technical expertise in guiding firms toward more sustainable futures.

Overall, the practical message is clear: supporting sustainability in FBs requires going beyond regulations and incentives. It calls for approaches that

engage with the motivational and value-based dimensions of entrepreneurship, helping firms to recognize and build upon what already exists within their own culture. By doing so, both practitioners and associations can accompany FBs in embedding sustainability into their trajectories in ways that are authentic, resilient, and enduring.

#### **6.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions**

As with any research, these results must be considered alongside their limitations. The focus on Italian FBs provided an in-depth view of a distinctive cultural and institutional context, but it also limits the extent to which findings can be generalized to other countries. Comparative international research would allow testing whether the psychological drivers of sustainability identified here hold across diverse settings, in line with calls for more cross-cultural approaches in family business and sustainability studies (Hofstede, 2001; Jiang, 2021).

The cross-sectional design represents another limitation, as it captures sustainability commitment at a single point in time. Consequently, the associations observed between psychological variables and sustainable behaviours should be interpreted as correlational rather than causal. Yet sustainability is dynamic, evolving across generational transitions and shifting external conditions. Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs to trace how attitudes, values, and motivations develop and change over time (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010; Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). Such an approach would be particularly valuable for FBs, whose trajectories often span decades and are shaped by intergenerational processes.

Methodologically, the reliance on self-reported data carries the risk of social desirability bias, particularly in a domain as normatively charged as sustainability (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Moreover, the use of a single data source in the quantitative phase raises the possibility of common-method variance, which cannot be entirely ruled out. Although the FBSQ was carefully validated and tested for measurement invariance, the possibility that respondents may have over-reported their commitment to sustainability cannot be excluded. Future studies could integrate multiple methods, combining survey data with case studies, observational research,

or objective performance indicators, to triangulate findings and enhance validity (Jick, 1979).

Finally, while the FBSQ successfully operationalized psychological and motivational constructs, future research could expand its application by employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the complex interrelations between attitudes, values, motivations, and sustainable behaviours (Kline, 2016). Such an approach would allow for a more sophisticated assessment of the pathways through which psychological factors shape sustainability commitment, moving beyond factor-level validation toward explanatory models of causal relationships.

In sum, despite these limitations, the research offers a robust contribution by demonstrating that sustainability in family businesses is best understood not through structural or demographic variables, but through psychological dimensions. By integrating qualitative and quantitative evidence, the research provides both a validated measurement instrument and a theoretical model, laying the groundwork for future inquiry and practical interventions at the intersection of psychology, FB, and sustainability.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This research has accompanied the reader through an exploratory journey into the psychological underpinnings of sustainable engagement in FBs. Starting from the direct voices of entrepreneurs, a grounded process led to the identification of motivational drivers, values, and contextual influences that converge into a broader conceptual model. This model, rooted in the lived experiences of participants, articulates how sustainability becomes a long-term commitment shaped by personal beliefs, family legacies, and perceptions of responsibility towards stakeholders.

Rather than treating sustainability as a purely strategic or reputational choice, the findings point to a complex interplay of psychological and social dimensions, confirming that behaviours are embedded in a broader system of meaning. In this sense, the research aligns with recent calls for a more nuanced understanding of FBs' behaviour, moving beyond traditional economic frameworks

to include socioemotional and value-based logics (Berrone et al., 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; Sharma & Sharma, 2011).

The proposed model does not aim to generalize across all contexts but offers a grounded representation of how sustainability can emerge, consolidate, and evolve within the specific cultural and relational configurations of FBs. As such, it contributes to bridging the gap between qualitative depth and theoretical abstraction, offering a framework that is both empirically grounded and conceptually rich.

Future research could build on this foundation, using SEM or other advanced techniques to test and refine the relationships hypothesized within the model. However, the real value of this work lies not only in its potential for generalization but in its attention to the specific, the contextual, and the meaningful—a reminder that behind every sustainable practice, there is a story, a motivation, and a legacy.

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## APPENDIX

### Semi-structured interviews

Topic	Question	Further references
<b>Opening</b>	<i>Could you briefly tell me the story of your family business and how you became president / got involved in it?</i>	<p>When and how was the company founded?</p> <p>How many generations are currently working or have worked in the company?</p> <p>Do you have any other relatives who are currently working in the company?</p>
<b>Meaning of sustainability</b>	<p><i>What personal meaning do you attribute to the concept of sustainability?</i></p> <p><i>How is the theme of sustainability addressed at the company level?</i></p> <p><i>* Have these meanings changed over time?</i></p>	<p>If I say “sustainability,” what are the first three words that come to your mind to describe it? *</p> <p>How important is sustainability?</p> <p>How much attention is given to sustainability?</p> <p>When did you first hear about sustainability?</p> <p>What motivated you to embrace this theme?</p> <p>If you had to identify the key factors that led you to adopt this theme, what would they be?</p> <p>Who contributed to this change?</p>

<b>Company commitment to sustainability</b>	<i>What are your company's experiences with sustainability?</i>	Could you specify the name of the certification(s) and briefly explain what it is about?
	<i>What do you think about certifications?</i>	How did you first learn about and choose this/these sustainability certification(s)?
		What was the process that led to certification like?
		What values do you attribute to this/these certification(s)?
	<i>What motivations led you to commit to sustainability?</i>	What motivates you?
		In your opinion, are these motivations influenced by third parties (suppliers or clients)? Why?
	<i>What do you think were the turning points and the most critical moments in this journey?</i>	What results do you expect?
		In what way do these results influence your motivations?
		Thinking back to those moments, could you give me an example for each episode (turning point/critical event)?
<hr/> <b>Role of the family</b>	<i>What role did your family play in the decision to move towards sustainability?</i>	If so, who and in what way?
		Did anyone oppose it? For what reason?

		Do you believe that being a family business is an added value or an obstacle to this goal?
<b>The future of the sustainable company</b>	<i>What are your expectations for the future?</i>	How do you imagine your company in five years?  In your opinion, what could lead to further investments or to moving away from sustainable practices?
<b>Promoting the movement towards corporate sustainability</b>	<i>Finally, how do you think other family businesses could be encouraged to undertake changes towards sustainability?</i>	Looking back at your experience, what were the main incentives?  Thinking about initiatives aimed at implementing sustainable practices (in family businesses), what would you suggest?

## Family Business Sustainable Questionnaire (FBSQ): first version\*

\*In red, the critical items removed in the final version of the FBSQ

Start of block: PRESENTATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

### PRESENTATION

#### WELCOME TO THE FBSQ QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Sir/Madam,

We would like to inform you that we are conducting a study entitled: “*Family Businesses and Sustainability: An Exploratory Study*”, organized by the Social Psychology Research Group, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan.

For this reason, we invite you to participate in the study, which will be carried out under the responsibility of Dr. Daniela Poli Martinelli and under the scientific supervision of Prof. Maura Pozzi.

Before you decide whether to accept or decline, we kindly ask you to carefully read this document. Should you wish to receive further information or clarifications, you may contact Dr. Daniela Poli Martinelli (daniela.polimartinelli@unicatt.it, +39 3466061706) or Prof. Maura Pozzi (maura.pozzi@unicatt.it, +39 02 7234 4469), who will be available to answer any questions and provide clarifications. You may also contact the operators involved in the study at any time. Participation is completely voluntary. Furthermore, if at any point you change your mind and wish to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so.

### Background and Purpose of the Study

- **Purpose:** The research aims to carry out an in-depth analysis of the motivations and mechanisms that influence sustainability-related decisions within family businesses, with the objective of developing a theory outlining the process through which FBs adopt sustainable choices.
- **Study Design:** To achieve this goal, the research uses an ad hoc questionnaire.
- **Expected Duration of the Study:** 4 months.
- **Number of participants:** Between 400 and 500 participants.

For more detailed information on the study, please download the information sheet on research participation (Data processing and informed consent information sheet).

## **DECLARATION OF CONSENT TO DATA PROCESSING**

I, the undersigned, DECLARE THE FOLLOWING: In accordance with Legislative Decree No. 196/2003 and the GDPR – EU Reg. 2016/679, having received the information sheet on the processing of personal data and with reference to the details provided therein, I freely give my consent, by ticking the box below, to the collection, processing, and communication of personal data for all the purposes and in the manner indicated in this information sheet.

- I GIVE MY CONSENT (1)
  - I DO NOT GIVE MY CONSENT (2)
- 

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

I ALSO DECLARE THE FOLLOWING: (1) I have read and understood the information sheet, of which this document is an integral part. (2) I have had the opportunity to ask questions via email or phone and to request clarifications from Dr. Daniela Poli Martinelli and Prof. Maura Pozzi, from whom I received satisfactory answers. (3) I have been informed in the information sheet about the nature, purpose, and duration of the study, the procedures that will be followed, the treatment expected for participants, and the type of collaboration required. (4) I understand that participation in the study is free and voluntary and that at any time I can decide to withdraw myself/my representative from the study without being subject to any negative consequences and without compromising my/his/her rights or my/his/her relationship with the personnel involved.

Having understood the above, I agree to participate in the study described in this document.

- I AGREE (1)
- I DO NOT AGREE (2)

**End of Block: PRESENTATION AND INFORMED CONSENT**

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**Start of block: BLOCK 1: DEMOGRAPHICS**

### **GENDER**

What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / Third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

**AGE**

What is your age?

- 18–34 years (1)
- 35–49 years (2)
- 50–64 years (3)
- 65+ years (4)

**EDUCATION**

What is your highest level of education?

- Postgraduate (PhD, Master's, Specialization) (1)
- University degree (old system), Master's degree or single-cycle degree (2nd level) (2)
- University diploma, Bachelor's degree (1st level) (3)
- High school diploma (4–5 years) (4)
- Short professional track (2–3 years, e.g., professional institute, vocational training, IeFP, etc.) (5)
- Middle school qualification (6)
- No educational qualification (7)

**GENERATION**

Regarding the management of the family business you are part of, which of the following situations best describes you?

- I am a first-generation heir of the family business (before me it was managed by my father/mother or uncle/aunt) (1)
- I am a second-generation heir of the family business (it was managed by my grandparents before being passed to my parents/uncles and then to me) (2)
- I am a third-generation (or higher) heir of the family business (the company was founded by my family and passed through two or more generations before me) (3)

**ROLE**

What is your role in the company?

- CEO/General Management (1)
- Owner/Co-owner (2)
- Area Manager/Executive (3)
- Employee with decision-making functions (4)
- Other (with decision-making functions) (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (without decision-making functions) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTOR**

Which sector does your company operate in?

- Manufacturing/Industry (1)
- Services (2)
- Trade/Distribution (3)
- Agri-food (4)
- Fashion and Textiles (5)
- Construction/Building (6)
- Other (please specify) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

### **EMPLOYEES**

How many employees does your company have?

- 1–9 employees (1)
- 10–49 employees (2)
- 50–249 employees (3)
- 250 or more employees (4)

### **TURNOVER**

What is the approximate annual turnover of your company?

- Less than €500,000 (1)
- €500,000 – €2 million (2)
- €2 million – €10 million (3)
- Over €10 million (4)

### **FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

How many family members are actively involved in the company?

- Only me (1)
- 2–3 (2)
- 4 or more (3)

### **INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY**

Does your company carry out commercial activities abroad (e.g., production, sales, etc.)?

- Yes, within the European Union (1)
- Yes, outside the European Union (2)
- Yes, both within and outside the European Union (3)
- No (4)

### **GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

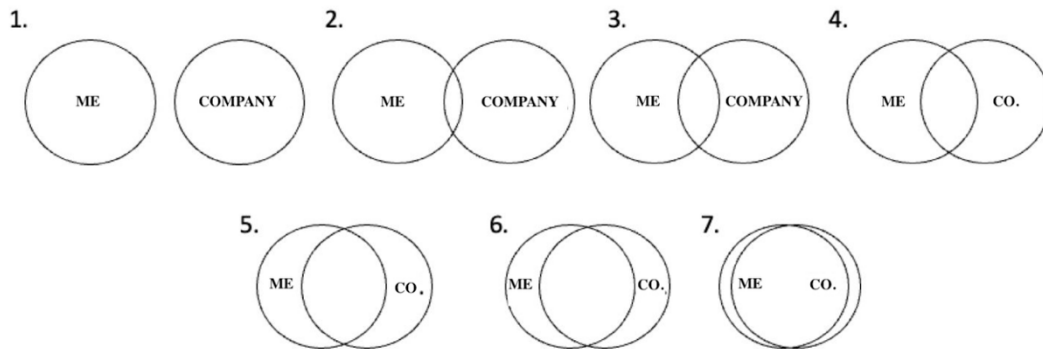
Where is your company's headquarters located?

### COMPANY IDENTIFICATION

Based on the image shown below, thinking about your relationship with your company and how much you identify with it, which of the following images best represents you?

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5) 6 (6) 7 (7)

COMPANY IDENTIFICATION (image)



End of Block: BLOCK 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

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Start of Block: BLOCK 2: COMPANY AND SUSTAINABILITY QUESTIONS

In this section you will find statements reflecting different opinions about sustainability. Some may reflect your views, others less so. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 your level of agreement with the following statements:

(1 – Strongly disagree; 5 – Strongly agree)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I believe that integrating sustainability into business processes can generate competitive advantages and opportunities for innovation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe it is useful to integrate sustainability into business management, even if it requires resources and actions that are not always economically sustainable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that Italy and its companies show greater commitment to sustainability compared to countries with less stringent environmental regulations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I believe it is not useful to observe sustainable practices in other countries to improve our business strategies.

I believe that sustainability is an abstract concept that does not always have a concrete impact on business management.

I believe it is not useful to observe sustainable practices of other companies to improve our business strategies.

I believe that investing in sustainability is important, even if it increases costs in the short term.

I believe that Italian companies adopt more advanced sustainability practices than many other countries, thereby enhancing their reputation.

I believe that adopting sustainable practices in business is too complex in relation to potential benefits.

I believe that adopting sustainable practices in companies is positive, but the costs can limit their diffusion.

In this section you will find statements concerning factors that may influence sustainability choices and strategies. Some may reflect your views, others less so. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 your level of agreement with the following statements:  
(1 – Strongly disagree; 5 – Strongly agree)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The obligation to comply with European environmental regulations significantly influences the sustainability practices adopted by my company.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company's market positioning improves thanks to investments in sustainability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The values transmitted by my family influence the way I consider the company's impact on society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Investing in renewable energy allows my company to reduce operating costs in the long term.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Access to financial incentives makes sustainability an economically advantageous choice for the company.

Educating consumers about sustainability can accelerate the adoption of more responsible practices in my company.

The person I am today influences my decisions regarding sustainability.

My company's reputation with customers and stakeholders improves thanks to concrete commitment to sustainability.

My company's decisions on sustainability are influenced by consumers' willingness to pay more for sustainable products.

Awareness campaigns directed at consumers play a key role in shaping my company's sustainability strategies.

Compliance with European environmental regulations is crucial to maintaining my company's competitiveness in international markets.

The values transmitted by my company influence my attention to the environment surrounding the business.

Being recognized as a sustainable company does not give my company a real competitive advantage over its competitors.

Consumers do not play a significant role in shaping my company's sustainability decisions.

Personal beliefs have only a minimal impact on my company's sustainability strategies.

Commitment to sustainability does not have a significant influence on my company's reputation with customers and stakeholders.

The growing demand for sustainable products from consumers drives my company to adopt more responsible practices.

Family values have minimal impact on my company's sustainability strategies.

The introduction of stricter regulations encourages the adoption of sustainable practices in my company.

Complying with European environmental regulations is just an additional cost for my company with no real business benefits.

Being recognized as a sustainable company offers my company a competitive advantage over competitors.

Personal experiences I have lived influence my sustainability choices.

In this section you will find statements about practices and strategies that may be adopted within the company. Some may reflect your experience, others less so. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 to what extent these statements reflect the reality of your company:  
(1 – Strongly disagree; 5 – Strongly agree)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
My company adopts strategies to reduce the consumption of raw materials through reuse and recycling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company provides employees with fair benefits and working conditions to improve their well-being.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company ensures production continuity to maintain jobs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company adopts measures to reduce production waste and improve energy efficiency.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company supports local projects to strengthen ties between the business and the community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company supports business growth while balancing sustainability and profitability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>My company adopts technologies to reduce the environmental impact of its activities and limit emissions.</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>My company invests in sustainable solutions only if they are compatible with the company's financial stability.</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>My company promotes initiatives that support employees' professional growth.</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>My company adopts sustainable strategies to reduce operating costs and improve market competitiveness.</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>My company collaborates with associations to have a positive social impact in the local area.</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>My company adopts processes to extend the life cycle of materials used in production.</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## **Family Business Sustainable Questionnaire (FBSQ): first Italian version**

### PRESENTAZIONE

#### **BENVENUTO/A NEL QUESTIONARIO “IMPRESE DI FAMIGLIA E SOSTENIBILITÀ: UNO STUDIO ESPLORATIVO”**

Egr. Sig. / Gent.le Sig.ra La informiamo che stiamo conducendo uno studio dal titolo: “Imprese di famiglia e sostenibilità: uno studio esplorativo”, organizzato dal Gruppo di ricerca di Psicologia Sociale, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano. Per questo motivo Le proponiamo di partecipare allo studio che sarà condotto sotto la responsabilità della Dott.ssa Daniela Poli Martinelli sotto la responsabilità scientifica della Prof.ssa Maura Pozzi. Prima che Lei decida se accettare o rinunciare, La invitiamo a leggere con attenzione questo documento, qualora Lei desideri avere ulteriori informazioni e chiarimenti potrà rivolgersi alla Dott.ssa Daniela Poli Martinelli (daniela.polimartinelli@unicatt.it, +39 3466061706) o alla Prof.ssa Maura Pozzi (maura.pozzi@unicatt.it, +39 02 7234 4469) che Le dedicheranno tutto il tempo necessario per chiarire ogni Suo dubbio, fermo restando che Lei potrà rivolgersi in qualsiasi momento anche agli operatori coinvolti nell’esecuzione dello studio.

La partecipazione è completamente volontaria. Inoltre, se in un qualsiasi momento Lei dovesse cambiare idea e volesse ritirarsi dalla procedura di valutazione, è libero/a di farlo.

**Premesse e scopo dello studio** *Scopo:* La ricerca mira a condurre un’analisi esaustiva delle motivazioni e dei meccanismi che influenzano le decisioni di sostenibilità all’interno delle imprese familiari, con l’obiettivo di sviluppare una teoria che delinea sia il processo attraverso il quale le FB adottano scelte sostenibili. *Disegno dello Studio:* Per raggiungere lo scopo di tale ricerca si propone l’utilizzo di un questionario formulato ad hoc. *Durata prevista dello Studio:* 4 mesi. *Numero di soggetti partecipanti:* tra i 400 e i 500 partecipanti. Per avere maggiori informazioni relative allo studio, la invitiamo a scaricare il foglio informativo della ricerca (Modulo foglio informativo trattamento dati consenso informato).

#### **Io sottoscritto/a:**

**DICHIARO QUANTO SEGUE:** Ai sensi del Decreto Legislativo n.196/2003 e del GDPR - Reg. UE 2016/679, avendo ricevuto apposita informativa sul trattamento dei dati personali e in relazione a quanto indicato in merito al trattamento di tali informazioni, esprimo il mio libero consenso, barrando la casella di seguito indicata, alla raccolta, al trattamento e alla comunicazione dei dati personali per tutte le finalità e nelle modalità indicate nella presente informativa.

- FORNISCO IL CONSENSO (1)
  
- NON FORNISCO IL CONSENSO (2)

**CONSENSO INFORMATO DICHIARO INOLTRE QUANTO SEGUE:** 1. ho letto e compreso il foglio informativo di cui questo modulo è parte integrante; 2. ho avuto la possibilità di porre domande via mail o telefono e di chiedere spiegazioni alla Dottoressa Daniela Poli Martinelli e alla Professoressa Maura Pozzi dalle quali ho ricevuto risposte soddisfacenti; 3. mi sono state illustrate nel foglio informativo la natura, lo scopo e la durata dello studio, le procedure che saranno seguite, il trattamento previsto per i partecipanti e il tipo di collaborazione che ad essi sarà richiesta; 4. ho compreso che la partecipazione allo studio è libera e volontaria e che in qualsiasi momento posso decidere di ritirarmi / ritirare il mio Rappresentato dallo studio senza essere in alcun modo esposto a conseguenze negative e senza che siano compromessi i miei / suoi diritti e il mio / suo rapporto con il personale coinvolto; Tutto ciò premesso, accetto la proposta di partecipare allo studio descritto nel presente documento.

ACCONSENTO (1)

NON ACCONSENTO (2)

**Fine blocco: PRESENTAZIONE E CONSENSO INFORMATO**

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**Inizio blocco: BLOCCO 1: DEMOGRAFICHE**

**GENERE** Genere:

Maschio (1)

Femmina (2)

Genere non-binario / Terzo genere (3)

Preferisco non dirlo (4)

**ETA'** Et :

18-34 anni (1)

35-49 anni (2)

50-64 anni (3)

65+ anni (4)

TITOLO DI STUDIO Titolo di studio:

- Post-laurea (dottorato, master, specializzazione) (1)
- Laurea (vecchio ordinamento), laurea magistrale o a ciclo unico (o di 2° livello) (2)
- Diploma universitario, laurea triennale (o di 1° livello) (3)
- Diploma di scuola media superiore (4-5 anni) (4)
- Qualifica di scuola media superiore (2-3 anni, Istituto professionale, Istituto formazione professionale, IeFP. ecc.) (5)
- Qualifica di scuola media inferiore (6)
- Nessuna qualifica di studio (7)

GENERAZIONE Riguardo alla gestione dell'azienda di famiglia di cui fa parte, in quale di queste situazioni si collocherebbe?

- Sono erede di primo grado dell'azienda di famiglia (prima di me la gestiva mio/a padre/madre o zio/zia) (1)
- Sono erede di secondo grado dell'azienda di famiglia (l'azienda era gestita da mio nonno/nonna prima di essere passata ai miei genitori/zii e, successivamente, a me) (2)
- Sono erede di terzo grado (o superiore) dell'azienda di famiglia (l'azienda è stata fondata dalla mia famiglia e la gestione è passata attraverso due o più generazioni prima di me) (3)

RUOLO Qual è il suo ruolo in azienda?

- CEO/direzione generale (1)
  - Proprietario/ Co-proprietario (2)
  - Responsabile di area/ Manager (3)
  - Dipendente con funzioni decisionali (4)
  - Altro (con funzioni decisionali) (5)
- 

- Altro (senza funzioni decisionali) (6)
- 

SETTORE. In quale settore opera la sua azienda?

- Manifatturiero/ Industria (1)
  - Servizi (2)
  - Commercio/ Distribuzione (3)
  - Agroalimentare (4)
  - Moda e Tessili (5)
  - Edilizia/ Costruzioni (6)
  - Altro (specificare) (7)
-

DIPENDENTI Da quanti dipendenti è composta la sua azienda?

- 1-9 dipendenti (1)
- 10-49 dipendenti (2)
- 50-249 dipendenti (3)
- 250 o più dipendenti (4)

FATTURATO Qual è il fatturato annuo approssimativo della sua azienda?

- Meno di 500.000 euro (1)
- 500.000 - 2 milioni euro (2)
- 2 milioni - 10 milioni euro (3)
- Oltre 10 milioni euro (4)

COINV. FAMILIARE Quanti membri della famiglia sono attivamente coinvolti nell'azienda?

- Solo lei (1)
- 2-3 (2)
- 4 o più (3)

RAPPORTI ESTERO. La sua azienda svolge attività commerciali all'estero (ad es. produzione, vendite, ecc.)?

- Sì, all'interno dell'Unione Europea (1)
- Sì, al di fuori dell'Unione Europea (2)
- Sì, sia all'interno che all'esterno dell'Unione Europea (3)
- No (4)

AREA GEOGRAFICA. In quale area ha sede principale la sua azienda?

▼ Abruzzo (1) ... Veneto (20)

IDENT. AZIENDA. In base all'immagine riportata sotto, pensando al rapporto che ha con la sua azienda e a quanto si identifica con essa, quale delle immagini qui presentate la rappresenta meglio?

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

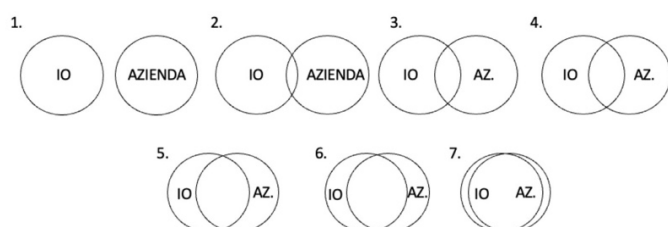
4 (4)

5 (5)

6 (6)

7 (7)

IDENT. AZIENDA (immagine)



ATTEG-CONF. SOCIALE. In questa sezione troverà affermazioni che riflettono diverse opinioni sulla sostenibilità. Alcune potrebbero rispecchiare la Sua visione,

altre meno. Indichi in una scala da 1 a 5 il suo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni (1 - per niente d'accordo; 5 - del tutto d'accordo).

	Per niente d'accordo (1)	Abbastanza in disaccordo (2)	Né in accordo né in disaccordo (3)	Abbastanza d'accordo (4)	Del tutto d'accordo (5)
Ritengo che integrare la sostenibilità nei processi aziendali possa generare vantaggi competitivi e opportunità di innovazione.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ritengo utile integrare la sostenibilità nella gestione aziendale, anche se richiede risorse e interventi che non sempre risultano economicamente sostenibili.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ritengo che l'Italia e le sue aziende dimostrino un impegno maggiore nella sostenibilità rispetto ai paesi con normative ambientali meno rigorose.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ritengo non sia utile osservare le pratiche sostenibili di altri paesi per migliorare le nostre strategie aziendali.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ritengo che la sostenibilità sia un concetto astratto che non sempre ha un impatto concreto sulla gestione aziendale.

Ritengo non sia utile osservare le pratiche sostenibili di altre aziende per migliorare le nostre strategie aziendali.

Ritengo che investire in sostenibilità sia importante, anche se comporta un aumento dei costi nel breve periodo.

Ritengo che le aziende italiane adottino pratiche di sostenibilità più avanzate rispetto a molti altri Paesi, contribuendo a valorizzare la loro reputazione.

Ritengo che l'adozione di pratiche sostenibili in azienda sia troppo complesso in rapporto ai potenziali benefici.

Ritengo che adottare pratiche sostenibili in azienda sia positivo ma i costi possono limitarne la diffusione.



MOTIV-VAL-CONSUM. In questa sezione troverà affermazioni che riguardano elementi che possono influenzare le scelte e le strategie di sostenibilità. Alcune potrebbero rispecchiare la Sua visione, altre meno. Indichi in una scala da 1 a 5 il

suo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni (1 - per niente d'accordo; 5 - del tutto d'accordo).

	Per niente d'accordo (1)	Abbastanza in disaccordo (2)	Né in accordo né in disaccordo (3)	Abbastanza d'accordo (4)	Del tutto d'accordo (5)
L'obbligo di conformarsi alle normative ambientali europee influenza in modo significativo le pratiche di sostenibilità adottate dalla mia azienda.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il posizionamento nel mercato della mia azienda migliora grazie agli investimenti in sostenibilità.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I valori trasmessi dalla mia famiglia influenzano il mio modo di considerare l'impatto dell'azienda sulla società.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Investire in energia rinnovabile permette alla mia azienda di ridurre i costi operativi nel lungo periodo.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

L'accesso ad agevolazioni economiche rende la sostenibilità una scelta economicamente vantaggiosa per l'azienda.

Educare i consumatori alla sostenibilità può accelerare l'adozione di pratiche più responsabili nella mia azienda.

La persona che sono oggi influisce sulle mie decisioni in materia di sostenibilità.

La reputazione presso clienti e stakeholder della mia azienda aumenta grazie all'impegno concreto nella sostenibilità.

Le decisioni della mia azienda in materia di sostenibilità sono influenzate dalla disponibilità dei consumatori a pagare di più per prodotti sostenibili.

Le campagne di sensibilizzazione rivolte ai consumatori giocano un ruolo chiave nell'orientare le strategie di sostenibilità della mia azienda.



L'adeguamento alle normative ambientali europee è cruciale per mantenere la competitività della mia azienda nei mercati internazionali.



I valori trasmessi dalla mia azienda influenzano la mia attenzione all'ambiente che circonda l'azienda.



Essere riconosciuti come un'azienda sostenibile non offre alla mia azienda un reale vantaggio competitivo rispetto i concorrenti.



I consumatori non hanno un ruolo rilevante nell'orientare le decisioni aziendali sulla sostenibilità della mia azienda.

Le convinzioni personali hanno solo un impatto minimo sulle strategie di sostenibilità della mia azienda.

L'impegno nella sostenibilità non ha un'influenza significativa sulla reputazione della mia azienda presso clienti e stakeholder.

La crescente domanda di prodotti sostenibili da parte dei consumatori spinge la mia azienda a adottare pratiche più responsabili.

I valori familiari hanno un impatto minimo sulle strategie di sostenibilità della mia azienda.

L'introduzione di normative più stringenti favorisce l'adozione di pratiche sostenibili nella mia azienda.

Adeguarsi alle normative ambientali europee per la mia azienda è solo un costo aggiuntivo senza reali vantaggi aziendali.

Essere riconosciuti come un'azienda sostenibile offre alla mia azienda un vantaggio competitivo rispetto ai concorrenti.

Le esperienze personali che ho vissuto influenzano le mie scelte di sostenibilità.

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COMPORAMENTI. In questa sezione troverà affermazioni che riguardano alcune pratiche e strategie che possono essere adottate all'interno dell'azienda. Alcune potrebbero rispecchiare le Sue esperienze, altre meno. Indichi in una scala

da 1 a 5 il in che misura queste affermazioni riflettono la realtà della sua azienda  
(1 - per niente d'accordo; 5 - del tutto d'accordo).

	Per niente d'accordo (1)	Abbastanza in disaccordo (2)	Né in accordo né in disaccordo (3)	Abbastanza d'accordo (4)	Del tutto d'accordo (5)
La mia azienda adotta strategie per ridurre il consumo di materie prime attraverso il riutilizzo e il riciclo.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La mia azienda offre ai dipendenti benefit e condizioni di lavoro eque per migliorare il loro benessere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La mia azienda garantisce la continuità produttiva per mantenere posti di lavoro.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La mia azienda adotta misure per ridurre gli sprechi di produzione e migliorare l'efficienza energetica.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

La mia azienda sostiene progetti locali per rafforzare il legame tra l'azienda e la comunità.

La mia azienda sostiene la crescita aziendale bilanciando sostenibilità e redditività.

La mia azienda adotta tecnologie per ridurre l'impatto ambientale delle nostre attività e limitare le emissioni.

La mia azienda investe in soluzioni sostenibili solo se compatibili con la solidità finanziaria dell'azienda.

La mia  
azienda  
promuove  
iniziative che  
favoriscono  
la crescita  
professionale  
dei  
dipendenti.

La mia  
azienda  
adotta  
strategie  
sostenibili  
per ridurre i  
costi  
operativi e  
migliorare la  
competitività  
nel mercato.

La mia  
azienda  
collabora con  
associazioni  
per avere un  
impatto  
sociale  
positivo sul  
territorio.

La mia  
azienda  
adotta  
processi per  
estendere il  
ciclo di vita  
dei materiali  
utilizzati  
nella  
produzione.

## Family Business Sustainable Questionnaire (FBSQ): final version

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Start of block: PRESENTATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

### PRESENTATION

#### WELCOME TO THE FBSQ QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Sir/Madam,

We would like to inform you that we are conducting a study entitled: “*Family Businesses and Sustainability: An Exploratory Study*”, organized by the Social Psychology Research Group, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan.

For this reason, we invite you to participate in the study, which will be carried out under the responsibility of Dr. Daniela Poli Martinelli and under the scientific supervision of Prof. Maura Pozzi.

Before you decide whether to accept or decline, we kindly ask you to carefully read this document. Should you wish to receive further information or clarifications, you may contact Dr. Daniela Poli Martinelli ([daniela.polimartinelli@unicatt.it](mailto:daniela.polimartinelli@unicatt.it), +39 3466061706) or Prof. Maura Pozzi ([maura.pozzi@unicatt.it](mailto:maura.pozzi@unicatt.it), +39 02 7234 4469), who will be available to answer any questions and provide clarifications. You may also contact the operators involved in the study at any time. Participation is completely voluntary. Furthermore, if at any point you change your mind and wish to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so.

#### Background and Purpose of the Study

- **Purpose:** The research aims to carry out an in-depth analysis of the motivations and mechanisms that influence sustainability-related decisions within family businesses, with the objective of developing a theory outlining the process through which FBs adopt sustainable choices.
- **Study Design:** To achieve this goal, the research uses an ad hoc questionnaire.
- **Expected Duration of the Study:** 4 months.
- **Number of participants:** Between 400 and 500 participants.

For more detailed information on the study, please download the information sheet on research participation (Data processing and informed consent information sheet).

## **DECLARATION OF CONSENT TO DATA PROCESSING**

I, the undersigned, DECLARE THE FOLLOWING:

In accordance with Legislative Decree No. 196/2003 and the GDPR – EU Reg. 2016/679, having received the information sheet on the processing of personal data and with reference to the details provided therein, I freely give my consent, by ticking the box below, to the collection, processing, and communication of personal data for all the purposes and in the manner indicated in this information sheet.

- I GIVE MY CONSENT (1)
  - I DO NOT GIVE MY CONSENT (2)
- 

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

I ALSO DECLARE THE FOLLOWING: (1) I have read and understood the information sheet, of which this document is an integral part. (2) I have had the opportunity to ask questions via email or phone and to request clarifications from Dr. Daniela Poli Martinelli and Prof. Maura Pozzi, from whom I received satisfactory answers. (3) I have been informed in the information sheet about the nature, purpose, and duration of the study, the procedures that will be followed, the treatment expected for participants, and the type of collaboration required. (4) I understand that participation in the study is free and voluntary and that at any time I can decide to withdraw myself/my representative from the study without being subject to any negative consequences and without compromising my/his/her rights or my/his/her relationship with the personnel involved.

Having understood the above, I agree to participate in the study described in this document.

- I AGREE (1)
- I DO NOT AGREE (2)

**End of Block: PRESENTATION AND INFORMED CONSENT**

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**Start of block: BLOCK 1: DEMOGRAPHICS**

### **GENDER**

What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / Third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

## **AGE**

What is your age?

- 18–34 years (1)
- 35–49 years (2)
- 50–64 years (3)
- 65+ years (4)

## **EDUCATION**

What is your highest level of education?

- Postgraduate (PhD, Master's, Specialization) (1)
- University degree (old system), Master's degree or single-cycle degree (2nd level) (2)
- University diploma, Bachelor's degree (1st level) (3)
- High school diploma (4–5 years) (4)
- Short professional track (2–3 years, e.g., professional institute, vocational training, IeFP, etc.) (5)
- Middle school qualification (6)
- No educational qualification (7)

## **GENERATION**

Regarding the management of the family business you are part of, which of the following situations best describes you?

- I am a first-generation heir of the family business (before me it was managed by my father/mother or uncle/aunt) (1)
- I am a second-generation heir of the family business (it was managed by my grandparents before being passed to my parents/uncles and then to me) (2)
- I am a third-generation (or higher) heir of the family business (the company was founded by my family and passed through two or more generations before me) (3)

## **ROLE**

What is your role in the company?

- CEO/General Management (1)
- Owner/Co-owner (2)
- Area Manager/Executive (3)
- Employee with decision-making functions (4)
- Other (with decision-making functions) (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (without decision-making functions) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTOR**

Which sector does your company operate in?

- Manufacturing/Industry (1)
- Services (2)
- Trade/Distribution (3)
- Agri-food (4)
- Fashion and Textiles (5)
- Construction/Building (6)
- Other (please specify) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

**EMPLOYEES**

How many employees does your company have?

- 1–9 employees (1)
- 10–49 employees (2)
- 50–249 employees (3)
- 250 or more employees (4)

**TURNOVER**

What is the approximate annual turnover of your company?

- Less than €500,000 (1)
- €500,000 – €2 million (2)
- €2 million – €10 million (3)
- Over €10 million (4)

**FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

How many family members are actively involved in the company?

- Only me (1)
- 2–3 (2)
- 4 or more (3)

**INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY**

Does your company carry out commercial activities abroad (e.g., production, sales, etc.)?

- Yes, within the European Union (1)
- Yes, outside the European Union (2)
- Yes, both within and outside the European Union (3)
- No (4)

## GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Where is your company's headquarters located?

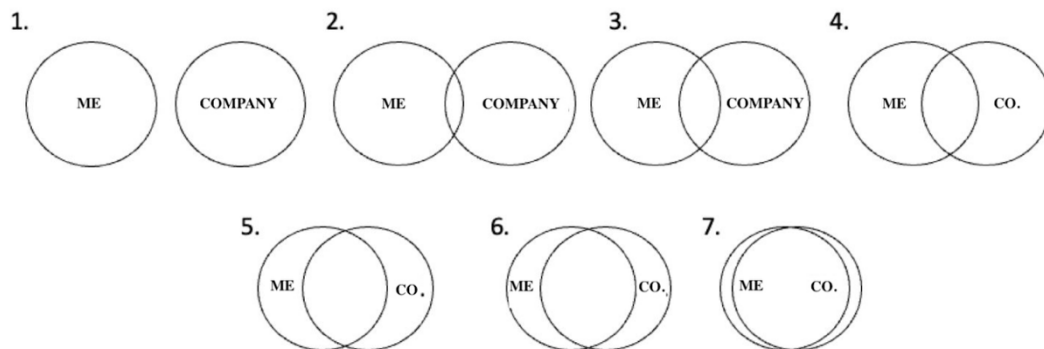
▼ Abruzzo (1) ... Veneto (20)

## COMPANY IDENTIFICATION

Based on the image shown below, thinking about your relationship with your company and how much you identify with it, which of the following images best represents you?

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5) 6 (6) 7 (7)

COMPANY IDENTIFICATION (image)



End of Block: BLOCK 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

Start of Block: BLOCK 2: COMPANY AND SUSTAINABILITY QUESTIONS

In this section you will find statements reflecting different opinions about sustainability. Some may reflect your views, others less so. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 your level of agreement with the following statements:

(1 – Strongly disagree; 5 – Strongly agree)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I believe that integrating sustainability into business processes can generate competitive advantages and opportunities for innovation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe it is useful to integrate sustainability into business management, even if it requires resources and actions that are not always economically sustainable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that Italy and its companies show greater commitment to sustainability compared to countries with less stringent environmental regulations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I believe it is not useful to observe sustainable practices in other countries to improve our business strategies.

I believe that sustainability is an abstract concept that does not always have a concrete impact on business management.

I believe it is not useful to observe sustainable practices of other companies to improve our business strategies.

I believe that investing in sustainability is important, even if it increases costs in the short term.

I believe that Italian companies adopt more advanced sustainability practices than many other countries, thereby enhancing their reputation.

I believe that adopting sustainable practices in business is too complex in relation to potential benefits.

In this section you will find statements concerning factors that may influence sustainability choices and strategies. Some may reflect your views, others less so. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 your level of agreement with the following statements:  
(1 – Strongly disagree; 5 – Strongly agree)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The obligation to comply with European environmental regulations significantly influences the sustainability practices adopted by my company.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company's market positioning improves thanks to investments in sustainability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The values transmitted by my family influence the way I consider the company's impact on society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Investing in renewable energy allows my company to reduce operating costs in the long term.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Access to financial incentives makes sustainability an economically advantageous choice for the company.

Educating consumers about sustainability can accelerate the adoption of more responsible practices in my company.

The person I am today influences my decisions regarding sustainability.

My company's reputation with customers and stakeholders improves thanks to concrete commitment to sustainability.

My company's decisions on sustainability are influenced by consumers' willingness to pay more for sustainable products.

Awareness campaigns directed at consumers play a key role in shaping my company's sustainability strategies.

Compliance with European environmental regulations is crucial to maintaining my company's competitiveness in international markets.

The values transmitted by my company influence my attention to the environment surrounding the business.

Consumers do not play a significant role in shaping my company's sustainability decisions.

Personal beliefs have only a minimal impact on my company's sustainability strategies.

Commitment to sustainability does not have a significant influence on my company's reputation with customers and stakeholders.

The growing demand for sustainable products from consumers drives my company to adopt more responsible practices.

Family values have minimal impact on my company's sustainability strategies.

The introduction of stricter regulations encourages the adoption of sustainable practices in my company.

Being recognized as a sustainable company offers my company a competitive advantage over competitors.

Personal experiences I have lived influence my sustainability choices.



A horizontal scale consisting of five empty circles, used for rating the statement.

In this section you will find statements about practices and strategies that may be adopted within the company. Some may reflect your experience, others less so. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 to what extent these statements reflect the reality of your company:  
(1 – Strongly disagree; 5 – Strongly agree)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
My company adopts strategies to reduce the consumption of raw materials through reuse and recycling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company provides employees with fair benefits and working conditions to improve their well-being.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company ensures production continuity to maintain jobs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company adopts measures to reduce production waste and improve energy efficiency.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company supports local projects to strengthen ties between the business and the community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My company supports business growth while balancing sustainability and profitability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My company adopts technologies to reduce the environmental impact of its activities and limit emissions.

My company invests in sustainable solutions only if they are compatible with the company's financial stability.

My company promotes initiatives that support employees' professional growth.

My company adopts sustainable strategies to reduce operating costs and improve market competitiveness.

My company collaborates with associations to have a positive social impact in the local area.

My company adopts processes to extend the life cycle of materials used in production.

## **Family Business Sustainable Questionnaire (FBSQ): final Italian version**

### PRESENTAZIONE

### **BENVENUTO/A NEL QUESTIONARIO "IMPRESE DI FAMIGLIA E SOSTENIBILITÀ: UNO STUDIO ESPLORATIVO"**

Egr. Sig. / Gent.le Sig.ra La informiamo che stiamo conducendo uno studio dal titolo: "Imprese di famiglia e sostenibilità: uno studio esplorativo", organizzato dal Gruppo di ricerca di Psicologia Sociale, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano. Per questo motivo Le proponiamo di partecipare allo studio che sarà condotto sotto la responsabilità della Dott.ssa Daniela Poli Martinelli sotto la responsabilità scientifica della Prof.ssa Maura Pozzi. Prima che Lei decida se accettare o rinunciare, La invitiamo a leggere con attenzione questo documento, qualora Lei desideri avere ulteriori informazioni e chiarimenti potrà rivolgersi alla Dott.ssa Daniela Poli Martinelli (daniela.polimartinelli@unicatt.it, +39 3466061706) o alla Prof.ssa Maura Pozzi (maura.pozzi@unicatt.it, +39 02 7234 4469) che Le dedicheranno tutto il tempo necessario per chiarire ogni Suo dubbio, fermo restando che Lei potrà rivolgersi in qualsiasi momento anche agli operatori coinvolti nell'esecuzione dello studio.

La partecipazione è completamente volontaria. Inoltre, se in un qualsiasi momento Lei dovesse cambiare idea e volesse ritirarsi dalla procedura di valutazione, è libero/a di farlo.

**Premesse e scopo dello studio** *Scopo:* La ricerca mira a condurre un'analisi esaustiva delle motivazioni e dei meccanismi che influenzano le decisioni di sostenibilità all'interno delle imprese familiari, con l'obiettivo di sviluppare una teoria che delinei sia il processo attraverso il quale le FB adottano scelte sostenibili. *Disegno dello Studio:* Per raggiungere lo scopo di tale ricerca si propone l'utilizzo di un questionario formulato ad hoc. *Durata prevista dello Studio:* 4 mesi. *Numero di soggetti partecipanti:* tra i 400 e i 500 partecipanti. Per avere maggiori informazioni relative allo studio, la invitiamo a scaricare il foglio informativo della ricerca (Modulo foglio informativo trattamento dati consenso informato).

### **Io sottoscritto/a:**

**DICHIARO QUANTO SEGUE:** Ai sensi del Decreto Legislativo n.196/2003 e del GDPR - Reg. UE 2016/679, avendo ricevuto apposita informativa sul trattamento dei dati personali e in relazione a quanto indicato in merito al trattamento di tali informazioni, esprimo il mio libero consenso, barrando la casella

di seguito indicata, alla raccolta, al trattamento e alla comunicazione dei dati personali per tutte le finalità e nelle modalità indicate nella presente informativa.

- FORNISCO IL CONSENSO (1)
- NON FORNISCO IL CONSENSO (2)

**CONSENSO INFORMATO DICHIARO INOLTRE QUANTO SEGUE:** 1. ho letto e compreso il foglio informativo di cui questo modulo è parte integrante; 2. ho avuto la possibilità di porre domande via mail o telefono e di chiedere spiegazioni alla Dottoressa Daniela Poli Martinelli e alla Professoressa Maura Pozzi dalle quali ho ricevuto risposte soddisfacenti; 3. mi sono state illustrate nel foglio informativo la natura, lo scopo e la durata dello studio, le procedure che saranno seguite, il trattamento previsto per i partecipanti e il tipo di collaborazione che ad essi sarà richiesta; 4. ho compreso che la partecipazione allo studio è libera e volontaria e che in qualsiasi momento posso decidere di ritirarmi / ritirare il mio Rappresentato dallo studio senza essere in alcun modo esposto a conseguenze negative e senza che siano compromessi i miei / suoi diritti e il mio / suo rapporto con il personale coinvolto; Tutto ciò premesso, accetto la proposta di partecipare allo studio descritto nel presente documento.

- ACCONSENTO (1)
- NON ACCONSENTO (2)

Fine blocco: **PRESENTAZIONE E CONSENSO INFORMATO**

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Inizio blocco: **BLOCCO 1: DEMOGRAFICHE**

**GENERE** Genere:

- Maschio (1)
- Femmina (2)
- Genere non-binario / Terzo genere (3)
- Preferisco non dirlo (4)

ETA' Età:

- 18-34 anni (1)
- 35-49 anni (2)
- 50-64 anni (3)
- 65+ anni (4)

TITOLO DI STUDIO Titolo di studio:

- Post-laurea (dottorato, master, specializzazione) (1)
- Laurea (vecchio ordinamento), laurea magistrale o a ciclo unico (o di 2° livello) (2)
- Diploma universitario, laurea triennale (o di 1° livello) (3)
- Diploma di scuola media superiore (4-5 anni) (4)
- Qualifica di scuola media superiore (2-3 anni, Istituto professionale, Istituto formazione professionale, IeFP. ecc.) (5)
- Qualifica di scuola media inferiore (6)
- Nessuna qualifica di studio (7)

GENERAZIONE Riguardo alla gestione dell'azienda di famiglia di cui fa parte, in quale di queste situazioni si collocherebbe?

- Sono erede di primo grado dell'azienda di famiglia (prima di me la gestiva mio/a padre/madre o zio/zia) (1)
- Sono erede di secondo grado dell'azienda di famiglia (l'azienda era gestita da mio nonno/nonna prima di essere passata ai miei genitori/zii e, successivamente, a me) (2)
- Sono erede di terzo grado (o superiore) dell'azienda di famiglia (l'azienda è stata fondata dalla mia famiglia e la gestione è passata attraverso due o più generazioni prima di me) (3)

RUOLO Qual è il suo ruolo in azienda?

- CEO/direzione generale (1)
- Proprietario/ Co-proprietario (2)
- Responsabile di area/ Manager (3)
- Dipendente con funzioni decisionali (4)
- Altro (con funzioni decisionali) (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Altro (senza funzioni decisionali) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

SETTORE. In quale settore opera la sua azienda?

- Manifatturiero/ Industria (1)
- Servizi (2)
- Commercio/ Distribuzione (3)
- Agroalimentare (4)
- Moda e Tessili (5)
- Edilizia/ Costruzioni (6)
- Altro (specificare) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

DIPENDENTI. Da quanti dipendenti è composta la sua azienda?

- 1-9 dipendenti (1)
- 10-49 dipendenti (2)
- 50-249 dipendenti (3)
- 250 o più dipendenti (4)

FATTURATO Qual è il fatturato annuo approssimativo della sua azienda?

- Meno di 500.000 euro (1)
- 500.000 - 2 milioni euro (2)
- 2 milioni - 10 milioni euro (3)
- Oltre 10 milioni euro (4)

COINV. FAMILIARE Quanti membri della famiglia sono attivamente coinvolti nell'azienda?

- Solo lei (1)
- 2-3 (2)
- 4 o più (3)

RAPPORTI ESTERO. La sua azienda svolge attività commerciali all'estero (ad es. produzione, vendite, ecc.)?

- Sì, all'interno dell'Unione Europea (1)
- Sì, al di fuori dell'Unione Europea (2)
- Sì, sia all'interno che all'esterno dell'Unione Europea (3)
- No (4)

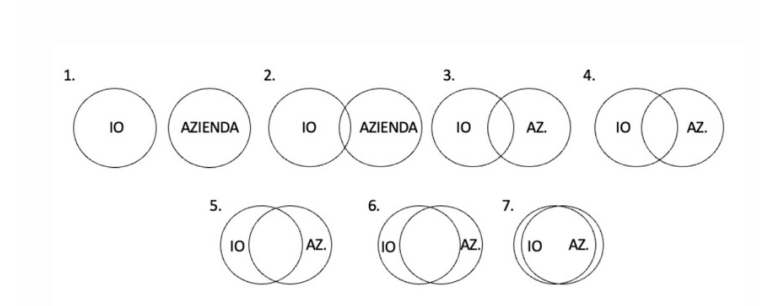
AREA GEOGRAFICA. In quale area ha sede principale la sua azienda?

▼ Abruzzo (1) ... Veneto (20)

**IDENT. AZIENDA.** In base all'immagine riportata sotto, pensando al rapporto che ha con la sua azienda e a quanto si identifica con essa, quale delle immagini qui presentate la rappresenta meglio?

- 1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- 7 (7)

**IDENT. AZIENDA**



**ATTEG-CONF. SOCIALE.** In questa sezione troverà affermazioni che riflettono diverse opinioni sulla sostenibilità. Alcune potrebbero rispecchiare la Sua visione, altre meno. Indichi in una scala da 1 a 5 il suo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni (1 - per niente d'accordo; 5 - del tutto d'accordo).

	Per niente d'accordo (1)	Abbastanza in disaccordo (2)	Né in accordo né in disaccordo (3)	Abbastanza d'accordo (4)	Del tutto d'accordo (5)
Ritengo che integrare la sostenibilità nei processi aziendali possa generare vantaggi competitivi e opportunità di innovazione.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ritengo utile integrare la sostenibilità nella gestione aziendale, anche se richiede risorse e interventi che non sempre risultano economicamente sostenibili.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ritengo che l'Italia e le sue aziende dimostrino un impegno maggiore nella sostenibilità rispetto ai paesi con normative ambientali meno rigorose.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ritengo non sia utile osservare le pratiche sostenibili di altri paesi per migliorare le nostre strategie aziendali.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ritengo che la sostenibilità sia un concetto astratto che non sempre ha un impatto concreto sulla gestione aziendale.

Ritengo non sia utile osservare le pratiche sostenibili di altre aziende per migliorare le nostre strategie aziendali.

Ritengo che investire in sostenibilità sia importante, anche se comporta un aumento dei costi nel breve periodo.

Ritengo che le aziende italiane adottino pratiche di sostenibilità più avanzate rispetto a molti altri Paesi, contribuendo a valorizzare la loro reputazione.

Ritengo che l'adozione di pratiche sostenibili in azienda sia troppo complesso in rapporto ai potenziali benefici.

MOTIV-VAL-CONSUM. In questa sezione troverà affermazioni che riguardano elementi che possono influenzare le scelte e le strategie di sostenibilità. Alcune potrebbero rispecchiare la

Sua visione, altre meno. Indichi in una scala da 1 a 5 il suo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni (1 - per niente d'accordo; 5 - del tutto d'accordo).

	Per niente d'accordo (1)	Abbastanza in disaccordo (2)	Né in accordo né in disaccordo (3)	Abbastanza d'accordo (4)	Del tutto d'accordo (5)
L'obbligo di conformarsi alle normative ambientali europee influenza in modo significativo le pratiche di sostenibilità adottate dalla mia azienda.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il posizionamento nel mercato della mia azienda migliora grazie agli investimenti in sostenibilità.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I valori trasmessi dalla mia famiglia influenzano il mio modo di considerare l'impatto dell'azienda sulla società.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Investire in energia rinnovabile permette alla mia azienda di ridurre i costi operativi nel lungo periodo.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

L'accesso ad agevolazioni economiche rende la sostenibilità una scelta economicamente vantaggiosa per l'azienda.

Educare i consumatori alla sostenibilità può accelerare l'adozione di pratiche più responsabili nella mia azienda.

La persona che sono oggi influisce sulle mie decisioni in materia di sostenibilità.

La reputazione presso clienti e stakeholder della mia azienda aumenta grazie all'impegno concreto nella sostenibilità.

Le decisioni della mia azienda in materia di sostenibilità sono influenzate dalla disponibilità dei consumatori a pagare di più per prodotti sostenibili.

Le campagne di sensibilizzazione rivolte ai consumatori giocano un ruolo chiave nell'orientare le strategie di sostenibilità della mia azienda.

L'adeguamento alle normative ambientali europee è cruciale per mantenere la competitività della mia azienda nei mercati internazionali.

I valori trasmessi dalla mia azienda influenzano la mia attenzione all'ambiente che circonda l'azienda.

I consumatori non hanno un ruolo rilevante nell'orientare le decisioni aziendali sulla sostenibilità della mia azienda.

Le convinzioni personali hanno solo un impatto minimo sulle strategie di sostenibilità della mia azienda.

L'impegno nella sostenibilità non ha un'influenza significativa sulla reputazione della mia azienda presso clienti e stakeholder.

La crescente domanda di prodotti sostenibili da parte dei consumatori spinge la mia azienda a adottare pratiche più responsabili.

I valori familiari hanno un impatto minimo sulle strategie di sostenibilità della mia azienda.

L'introduzione di normative più stringenti favorisce l'adozione di pratiche sostenibili nella mia azienda.

Essere riconosciuti come un'azienda sostenibile offre alla mia azienda un vantaggio competitivo rispetto ai concorrenti.

Le esperienze  
personali che ho  
vissuto  
influenzano le  
mie scelte di  
sostenibilità.



COMPORAMENTI. In questa sezione troverà affermazioni che riguardano alcune pratiche e strategie che possono essere adottate all'interno dell'azienda. Alcune potrebbero rispecchiare le Sue esperienze, altre meno. Indichi in una scala da 1 a 5 il in che misura queste affermazioni riflettono la realtà della sua azienda (1 - per niente d'accordo; 5 - del tutto d'accordo).

	Per niente d'accordo (1)	Abbastanza in disaccordo (2)	Né in accordo né in disaccordo (3)	Abbastanza d'accordo (4)	Del tutto d'accordo (5)
La mia azienda adotta strategie per ridurre il consumo di materie prime attraverso il riutilizzo e il riciclo.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La mia azienda offre ai dipendenti benefit e condizioni di lavoro eque per migliorare il loro benessere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La mia azienda garantisce la continuità produttiva per mantenere posti di lavoro.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La mia azienda adotta misure per ridurre gli sprechi di produzione e migliorare l'efficienza energetica.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

La mia  
azienda  
sostiene  
progetti  
locali per  
rafforzare il  
legame tra  
l'azienda e la  
comunità.

La mia  
azienda  
sostiene la  
crescita  
aziendale  
bilanciando  
sostenibilità e  
redditività.

La mia  
azienda  
adotta  
tecnologie  
per ridurre  
l'impatto  
ambientale  
delle nostre  
attività e  
limitare le  
emissioni.

La mia  
azienda  
investe in  
soluzioni  
sostenibili  
solo se  
compatibili  
con la  
solidità  
finanziaria  
dell'azienda.

La mia azienda promuove iniziative che favoriscono la crescita professionale dei dipendenti.

La mia azienda adotta strategie sostenibili per ridurre i costi operativi e migliorare la competitività nel mercato.

La mia azienda collabora con associazioni per avere un impatto sociale positivo sul territorio.

La mia azienda adotta processi per estendere il ciclo di vita dei materiali utilizzati nella produzione.

## Contingency tables

**Contingency Tables**

Gender	Age				Total
	18-34 y.o.	35-49 y.o.	50-64 y.o.	65+ y.o.	
Female	14	36	48	17	115
Male	31	146	266	170	613
Total	45	182	314	187	728

**Contingency Tables**

Gender	Education							Total
	High school diploma (4-5 anni)	Bachelor's degree (1st level)	Master's degree (2nd level)	No educational qualification	Post-graduate qualification	Middle school diploma	Short professional track (2-3 anni)	
Female	37	16	31	2	16	8	5	115
Male	253	62	116	15	54	49	64	613
Total	290	78	147	17	70	57	69	728

**Contingency Tables**

Gender	Generation			Total
	First-generation heir	Second-generation heir	Third-generation heir	
Female	95	16	4	115
Male	532	71	10	613
Total	627	87	14	728

**Contingency Tables**

Gender	Role				Total
	CEO/General Management	Employee with decision-making functions	Owner/Co-owner	Area Manager/Executive	
Female	74	4	12	25	115
Male	474	8	70	61	613
Total	548	12	82	86	728

**Contingency Tables**

Gender	Company identification (imagine)							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Female	7	7	15	43	21	9	13	115
Male	26	19	53	209	138	71	97	613
Total	33	26	68	252	159	80	110	728

**Contingency Tables**

Age	Company identification (imagine)							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
18-34 y.o.	5	8	7	6	4	4	11	45
35-49 y.o.	15	8	25	79	40	12	3	182
50-64 y.o.	13	10	30	144	89	27	1	314
65+ y.o.	0	0	6	23	26	37	95	187
Total	33	26	68	252	159	80	110	728

Contingency Tables

Generation	Company identification (imagine)							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
First-generation heir	27	20	53	223	139	74	91	627
Second-generation heir	5	6	14	28	20	4	10	87
Third-generation heir	1	0	1	1	0	2	9	14
Total	33	26	68	252	159	80	110	728

Contingency Tables

Age	Role				Total
	CEO/General Management	Employee with decision-making functions	Owner/Co-owner	Area Manager/Executive	
18-34	5	11	7	22	45
35-49	58	1	59	64	182
50-64	305	0	9	0	314
65+	180	0	7	0	187
Total	548	12	82	85	728

## Descriptive statistics and normality tests for the eleven FBSQ factors

	Attitudes	Social Comparison	Family values	Personal values	Normative Pressures (M)	Reputational Motivation (M)	Economic Advantages (M)
Mean	3.75	3.80	4.27	3.95	3.99	3.93	4.21
Median	3.80	3.75	4.33	4.00	4.33	4.33	4.33
DS	0.722	0.371	0.567	0.603	0.848	0.734	0.517
Min.	1.40	2.25	2.00	2.33	1.00	1.67	2.33
Max.	4.80	4.75	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Skewness	-1.35	-0.396	-0.937	-0.281	-1.30	-0.718	-0.786
Std. Error of Skewness	0.0906	0.0906	0.0906	0.0906	0.0906	0.0906	0.0906
Kurtosis	1.62	0.674	0.343	-0.724	1.11	-0.215	-0.146
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.181	0.181	0.181	0.181	0.181	0.181	0.181
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.871	0.948	0.881	0.927	0.839	0.899	0.874
Shapiro-Wilk p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

	Environmental Behaviour	Social Behaviour	Economic Behaviour	Role of Consumer/Client
Mean	4.01	4.09	4.02	4.20
Median	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.20
DS	0.666	0.657	0.640	0.383
Min.	2.00	2.50	2.25	3.20
Max.	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Skewness	-0.235	-0.415	-0.304	-0.218
Std. Error of Skewness	0.0906	0.0906	0.0906	0.0906
Kurtosis	-1.10	-0.980	-1.04	-0.253
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.181	0.181	0.181	0.181
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.932	0.926	0.932	0.965
Shapiro-Wilk p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

## Confirmatory Factor Analysis 11-Factor Model

lavaan 0.6-19 ended normally after 158 iterations

Estimator	ML
Optimization method	NLMINB
Number of model parameters	137
Number of observations	728
Model Test User Model:	
Test statistic	1416.654
Degrees of freedom	724
P-value (Chi-square)	0.000
Model Test Baseline Model:	
Test statistic	14639.647
Degrees of freedom	820
P-value	0.000
User Model versus Baseline Model:	
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.950
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.943
Loglikelihood and Information Criteria:	
Loglikelihood user model (H0)	-28186.073
Loglikelihood unrestricted model (H1)	-27477.746
Akaike (AIC)	56646.146
Bayesian (BIC)	57275.017
Sample-size adjusted Bayesian (SABIC)	56840.000
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation:	
RMSEA	0.036
90 Percent confidence interval - lower	0.033
90 Percent confidence interval - upper	0.039
P-value H <sub>0</sub> : RMSEA ≤ 0.050	1.000
P-value H <sub>0</sub> : RMSEA ≥ 0.080	0.000
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual:	
SRMR	0.039
Parameter Estimates:	
Standard errors	Standard
Information	Expected
Information saturated (h1) model	Structured

Latent Variables:

	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z )	Std.lv	Std.all
Atteggiamenti =~						
ATTEG_1	1.000			0.841	0.922	
ATTEG_2	0.680	0.033	20.304	0.000	0.572	0.654
ATTEG_5R	0.813	0.032	25.696	0.000	0.683	0.763
ATTEG_7	0.898	0.030	29.825	0.000	0.755	0.834
ATTEG_9R	0.609	0.032	19.268	0.000	0.512	0.630
Confronto Sociale =~						
CONF_SOC_3	1.000			0.685	0.813	
CONF_SOC_4R	-0.546	0.043	-12.765	0.000	-0.374	-0.503
CONF_SOC_6R	-0.670	0.049	-13.779	0.000	-0.459	-0.541
CONF_SOC_8	0.945	0.048	19.621	0.000	0.648	0.776
ValoriFam =~						
VALF_3	1.000			0.525	0.730	
VALF_12	0.827	0.066	12.455	0.000	0.434	0.617
VALF_18R	0.919	0.071	12.910	0.000	0.482	0.683
ValoriPers =~						
VALP_7	1.000			0.532	0.711	
VALP_15R	0.790	0.066	11.904	0.000	0.420	0.548
VALP_22	1.108	0.083	13.395	0.000	0.589	0.774
Pressioni Normative =~						
MOTIVnorm_1	1.000			0.830	0.846	
MOTIVnorm_11	0.883	0.037	23.795	0.000	0.733	0.800
MOTIV_norm_19	0.962	0.039	24.517	0.000	0.799	0.823
Reputazione =~						
MOTIVrep_2	1.000			0.672	0.787	
MOTIVrep_8	0.866	0.052	16.512	0.000	0.583	0.680
MOTIVrep_16R	1.068	0.061	17.605	0.000	0.718	0.809
VantaggiEco =~						
MOTIVvantagg_4	1.000			0.439	0.642	
MOTIVvantagg_5	0.919	0.089	10.282	0.000	0.404	0.550
MOTIVvantgg_21	0.853	0.081	10.589	0.000	0.375	0.580
RuoloConsumatore =~						
CONSUM_6	1.000			0.079	0.143	
CONSUM_10	5.501	1.714	3.210	0.001	0.433	0.711
CONSUM_9	5.870	1.829	3.210	0.001	0.462	0.676
CONSUM_14R	3.570	1.138	3.136	0.002	0.281	0.449
CONSUM_17	3.311	1.067	3.103	0.002	0.261	0.405
Comportamenti Ambientali =~						
COMA_1	1.000			0.798	0.984	
COMA_4	0.571	0.031	18.565	0.000	0.456	0.579
COMA_7	0.525	0.030	17.497	0.000	0.419	0.555
COMA_12	0.966	0.017	58.313	0.000	0.771	0.966

ComportamentiSociali =~

COMS_2	1.000			0.752	0.978	
COMS_5	0.597	0.033	18.163	0.000	0.449	0.568
COMS_9	0.559	0.034	16.611	0.000	0.420	0.533
COMS_11	1.013	0.016	64.637	0.000	0.762	0.982

ComportamentiEconomici =~

COME_3	1.000			0.723	0.954	
COME_6	0.550	0.035	15.607	0.000	0.398	0.511
COME_8	0.576	0.034	16.776	0.000	0.417	0.540
COME_10	1.062	0.021	50.809	0.000	0.768	0.987

Covariances:

	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z )	Std.lv	Std.all
Atteggiamenti ~						
ConfrontoSocil	-0.033	0.025	-1.331	0.183	-0.057	-0.057
ValoriFam	-0.041	0.020	-2.008	0.045	-0.092	-0.092
ValoriPers	0.002	0.020	0.097	0.922	0.004	0.004
PressioniNrmtv	-0.010	0.029	-0.338	0.735	-0.014	-0.014
Reputazione	-0.036	0.024	-1.498	0.134	-0.065	-0.065
VantaggiEco	-0.013	0.018	-0.733	0.464	-0.036	-0.036
RuoloConsumatr	0.003	0.003	0.921	0.357	0.044	0.044
CmprtmntAmbntl	-0.018	0.026	-0.698	0.485	-0.027	-0.027
ComportamntScl	-0.038	0.025	-1.528	0.127	-0.060	-0.060
ComprtmntEcnmc	0.001	0.024	0.028	0.978	0.001	0.001
ConfrontoSociale ~						
ValoriFam	0.120	0.019	6.371	0.000	0.333	0.333
ValoriPers	-0.125	0.019	-6.534	0.000	-0.342	-0.342
PressioniNrmtv	0.376	0.031	12.023	0.000	0.662	0.662
Reputazione	-0.130	0.022	-5.871	0.000	-0.283	-0.283
VantaggiEco	0.176	0.019	9.056	0.000	0.583	0.583
RuoloConsumatr	0.006	0.003	1.752	0.080	0.103	0.103
CmprtmntAmbntl	-0.030	0.023	-1.331	0.183	-0.056	-0.056
ComportamntScl	0.004	0.021	0.188	0.851	0.008	0.008
ComprtmntEcnmc	0.001	0.021	0.059	0.953	0.002	0.002
ValoriFam ~						
ValoriPers	-0.103	0.016	-6.511	0.000	-0.368	-0.368
PressioniNrmtv	0.145	0.022	6.603	0.000	0.334	0.334
Reputazione	-0.047	0.017	-2.710	0.007	-0.133	-0.133
VantaggiEco	0.069	0.014	5.061	0.000	0.299	0.299
RuoloConsumatr	-0.004	0.002	-1.560	0.119	-0.093	-0.093
CmprtmntAmbntl	0.004	0.018	0.215	0.830	0.009	0.009
ComportamntScl	-0.024	0.017	-1.407	0.159	-0.062	-0.062
ComprtmntEcnmc	0.010	0.017	0.623	0.534	0.027	0.027

ValoriPers ~~						
PressioniNrmtv	-0.163	0.023	-7.192	0.000	-0.370	-0.370
Reputazione	0.045	0.017	2.609	0.009	0.126	0.126
VantaggiEco	-0.076	0.014	-5.474	0.000	-0.326	-0.326
RuoloConsumatr	0.003	0.002	1.299	0.194	0.073	0.073
CmprtmntAmbntl	0.025	0.018	1.339	0.180	0.058	0.058
ComportamntScl	-0.015	0.017	-0.862	0.389	-0.037	-0.037
ComprtmntEcnmc	-0.004	0.017	-0.221	0.825	-0.010	-0.010
PressioniNormative ~~						
Reputazione	-0.107	0.025	-4.237	0.000	-0.192	-0.192
VantaggiEco	0.218	0.023	9.452	0.000	0.597	0.597
RuoloConsumatr	0.001	0.003	0.462	0.644	0.022	0.022
CmprtmntAmbntl	-0.060	0.027	-2.230	0.026	-0.090	-0.090
ComportamntScl	-0.027	0.025	-1.068	0.286	-0.043	-0.043
ComprtmntEcnmc	-0.023	0.024	-0.964	0.335	-0.039	-0.039
Reputazione ~~						
VantaggiEco	-0.040	0.016	-2.556	0.011	-0.135	-0.135
RuoloConsumatr	-0.002	0.003	-0.850	0.395	-0.043	-0.043
CmprtmntAmbntl	0.033	0.022	1.490	0.136	0.062	0.062
ComportamntScl	0.015	0.021	0.707	0.479	0.029	0.029
ComprtmntEcnmc	-0.019	0.020	-0.927	0.354	-0.038	-0.038
VantaggiEco ~~						
RuoloConsumatr	0.004	0.002	1.743	0.081	0.116	0.116
CmprtmntAmbntl	-0.012	0.017	-0.706	0.480	-0.034	-0.034
ComportamntScl	-0.008	0.016	-0.504	0.614	-0.024	-0.024
ComprtmntEcnmc	-0.009	0.015	-0.588	0.557	-0.028	-0.028
RuoloConsumatore ~~						
CmprtmntAmbntl	0.003	0.003	1.022	0.307	0.048	0.048
ComportamntScl	0.003	0.003	1.128	0.259	0.054	0.054
ComprtmntEcnmc	0.004	0.003	1.523	0.128	0.077	0.077
ComportamentiAmbientali ~~						
ComportamntScl	-0.004	0.023	-0.191	0.848	-0.007	-0.007
ComprtmntEcnmc	-0.022	0.022	-1.015	0.310	-0.038	-0.038
ComportamentiSociali ~~						
ComprtmntEcnmc	-0.007	0.021	-0.346	0.729	-0.013	-0.013

Covariances:

	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z )	Std.lv	Std.all
.ATTEG_1	0.124	0.015	8.447	0.000	0.124	0.149
.ATTEG_2	0.437	0.025	17.695	0.000	0.437	0.572
.ATTEG_5R	0.335	0.020	16.392	0.000	0.335	0.418
.ATTEG_7	0.250	0.017	14.350	0.000	0.250	0.304
.ATTEG_9R	0.398	0.022	17.866	0.000	0.398	0.602
.CONF_SOC_3	0.241	0.021	11.289	0.000	0.241	0.339
.CONF_SOC_4R	0.413	0.023	17.789	0.000	0.413	0.747

.CONF_SOC_6R	0.510	0.029	17.498	0.000	0.510	0.708
.CONF_SOC_8	0.278	0.021	12.926	0.000	0.278	0.398
.VALF_3	0.241	0.022	10.863	0.000	0.241	0.467
.VALF_12	0.305	0.021	14.703	0.000	0.305	0.619
.VALF_18R	0.266	0.021	12.659	0.000	0.266	0.533
.VALP_7	0.277	0.023	11.824	0.000	0.277	0.495
.VALP_15R	0.412	0.025	16.365	0.000	0.412	0.700
.VALP_22	0.232	0.025	9.149	0.000	0.232	0.400
.MOTIVnorm_1	0.274	0.023	11.963	0.000	0.274	0.285
.MOTIVnorm_11	0.302	0.021	14.060	0.000	0.302	0.359
.MOTIV_norm_19	0.304	0.023	13.124	0.000	0.304	0.323
.MOTIVrep_2	0.277	0.025	10.961	0.000	0.277	0.380
.MOTIVrep_8	0.396	0.026	15.142	0.000	0.396	0.538
.MOTIVrep_16R	0.272	0.028	9.874	0.000	0.272	0.345
.MOTIVvantagg_4	0.276	0.021	12.940	0.000	0.276	0.588
.MOTIVvantagg_5	0.376	0.025	15.329	0.000	0.376	0.697
.MOTIVvantgg_21	0.276	0.019	14.659	0.000	0.276	0.663
.CONSUM_6	0.295	0.016	18.910	0.000	0.295	0.979
.CONSUM_10	0.183	0.019	9.890	0.000	0.183	0.494
.CONSUM_9	0.254	0.023	11.251	0.000	0.254	0.543
.CONSUM_14R	0.313	0.018	16.982	0.000	0.313	0.799
.CONSUM_17	0.346	0.020	17.458	0.000	0.346	0.836
.COMA_1	0.021	0.008	2.647	0.008	0.021	0.032
.COMA_4	0.412	0.022	18.847	0.000	0.412	0.665
.COMA_7	0.394	0.021	18.875	0.000	0.394	0.692
.COMA_12	0.043	0.008	5.602	0.000	0.043	0.068
.COMS_2	0.025	0.007	3.851	0.000	0.025	0.043
.COMS_5	0.423	0.022	18.896	0.000	0.423	0.677
.COMS_9	0.445	0.024	18.927	0.000	0.445	0.716
.COMS_11	0.022	0.007	3.234	0.001	0.022	0.036
.COME_3	0.051	0.008	6.231	0.000	0.051	0.089
.COME_6	0.447	0.024	18.911	0.000	0.447	0.738
.COME_8	0.422	0.022	18.878	0.000	0.422	0.708
.COME_10	0.015	0.009	1.739	0.082	0.015	0.025
Atteggiamenti	0.707	0.045	15.694	0.000	1.000	1.000
ConfrontoSocil	0.469	0.039	12.025	0.000	1.000	1.000
ValoriFam	0.275	0.030	9.146	0.000	1.000	1.000
ValoriPers	0.283	0.031	8.996	0.000	1.000	1.000
PressioniNrmtv	0.689	0.052	13.358	0.000	1.000	1.000
Reputazione	0.452	0.041	11.030	0.000	1.000	1.000
VantaggiEco	0.193	0.025	7.629	0.000	1.000	1.000
RuoloConsumatr	0.006	0.004	1.631	0.103	1.000	1.000
CmprtmntAmbntl	0.637	0.035	18.015	0.000	1.000	1.000
ComportamntScl	0.565	0.032	17.898	0.000	1.000	1.000
ComprtmntEcnmc	0.523	0.031	16.888	0.000	1.000	1.000

## Confirmatory Factor Analysis 6-Factor Model

lavaan 0.6-19 ended normally after 110 iterations

Estimator	ML
Optimization method	NLMINB
Number of model parameters	97
Number of observations	728
Model Test User Model:	
Test statistic	7017.872
Degrees of freedom	764
P-value (Chi-square)	0.000
Model Test Baseline Model:	
Test statistic	14639.647
Degrees of freedom	820
P-value	0.000
User Model versus Baseline Model:	
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.547
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.514
Loglikelihood and Information Criteria:	
Loglikelihood user model (H0)	-30986.682
Loglikelihood unrestricted model (H1)	-27477.746
Akaike (AIC)	62167.364
Bayesian (BIC)	62612.624
Sample-size adjusted Bayesian (SABIC)	62304.619
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation:	
RMSEA	0.106
90 Percent confidence interval - lower	0.104
90 Percent confidence interval - upper	0.108
P-value H <sub>0</sub> : RMSEA ≤ 0.050	0.000
P-value H <sub>0</sub> : RMSEA ≥ 0.080	1.000
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual:	
SRMR	0.092

Parameter Estimates:

Standard errors	Standard
Information	Expected
Information saturated (h1) model	Structured

Latent Variables:

	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z )	Std.lv	Std.all
Atteggiamenti =~						
ATTEG_1	1.000			0.840	0.922	
ATTEG_2	0.681	0.034	20.306	0.000	0.572	0.655
ATTEG_5R	0.814	0.032	25.710	0.000	0.684	0.764
ATTEG_7	0.898	0.030	29.757	0.000	0.755	0.834
ATTEG_9R	0.610	0.032	19.281	0.000	0.513	0.631
Confronto Sociale =~						
CONF_SOC_3	1.000			0.692	0.821	
CONF_SOC_4R	-0.536	0.042	-12.681	0.000	-0.371	-0.499
CONF_SOC_6R	-0.656	0.048	-13.633	0.000	-0.454	-0.535
CONF_SOC_8	0.934	0.048	19.564	0.000	0.646	0.774
Valori =~						
VALF_3	1.000			0.416	0.578	
VALF_12	0.810	0.085	9.545	0.000	0.337	0.479
VALF_18R	0.869	0.087	9.998	0.000	0.361	0.512
VALP_7	-1.012	0.095	-10.636	0.000	-0.421	-0.562
VALP_15R	-0.963	0.095	-10.127	0.000	-0.400	-0.522
VALP_22	-1.031	0.097	-10.641	0.000	-0.428	-0.563
Motivazioni estrinseche =~						
MOTIVnorm_1	1.000			0.817	0.833	
MOTIVnorm_11	0.882	0.038	23.133	0.000	0.721	0.787
MOTIV_norm_19	0.966	0.040	24.035	0.000	0.789	0.813
MOTIVrep_2	-0.224	0.041	-5.487	0.000	-0.183	-0.215
MOTIVrep_8	-0.171	0.041	-4.140	0.000	-0.139	-0.163
MOTIVrep_16R	-0.219	0.043	-5.152	0.000	-0.179	-0.202
MOTIVvantagg_4	0.345	0.032	10.856	0.000	0.282	0.412
MOTIVvantagg_5	0.344	0.034	10.030	0.000	0.281	0.383
MOTIVvantgg_21	0.322	0.030	10.734	0.000	0.263	0.408
Ruolo Consumatore =~						
CONSUM_6	1.000			0.079	0.145	
CONSUM_10	5.425	1.680	3.229	0.001	0.431	0.707
CONSUM_9	5.847	1.811	3.229	0.001	0.464	0.678
CONSUM_14R	3.542	1.123	3.155	0.002	0.281	0.449
CONSUM_17	3.302	1.057	3.123	0.002	0.262	0.408
Comportamenti sostenibili =~						
COMA_1	1.000			0.798	0.984	
COMA_4	0.571	0.031	18.569	0.000	0.456	0.579
COMA_7	0.526	0.030	17.497	0.000	0.419	0.555
COMA_12	0.966	0.017	58.286	0.000	0.771	0.966

COMS_2	-0.019	0.036	-0.530	0.596	-0.015	-0.020
COMS_5	-0.016	0.037	-0.439	0.661	-0.013	-0.016
COMS_9	-0.012	0.037	-0.323	0.747	-0.010	-0.012
COMS_11	0.004	0.036	0.098	0.922	0.003	0.004
COME_3	-0.036	0.036	-1.009	0.313	-0.029	-0.038
COME_6	-0.013	0.037	-0.350	0.726	-0.010	-0.013
COME_8	-0.014	0.036	-0.375	0.708	-0.011	-0.014
COME_10	-0.038	0.037	-1.049	0.294	-0.031	-0.039

Covariances:

	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z )	Std.lv	Std.all
Atteggiamenti ~						
ConfrontoSocil	-0.034	0.025	-1.344	0.179	-0.058	-0.058
Valori	-0.019	0.016	-1.201	0.230	-0.055	-0.055
Motvzn_strnsch	-0.009	0.029	-0.312	0.755	-0.013	-0.013
RuoloConsumatr	0.003	0.003	0.921	0.357	0.044	0.044
Cmprtmnt_sstnb	-0.018	0.026	-0.697	0.486	-0.027	-0.027
ConfrontoSociale ~						
Valori	0.127	0.017	7.551	0.000	0.441	0.441
Motvzn_strnsch	0.393	0.032	12.398	0.000	0.694	0.694
RuoloConsumatr	0.006	0.003	1.749	0.080	0.102	0.102
Cmprtmnt_sstnb	-0.030	0.023	-1.317	0.188	-0.055	-0.055
Valori ~						
Motvzn_strnsch	0.164	0.020	8.207	0.000	0.482	0.482
RuoloConsumatr	-0.004	0.002	-1.826	0.068	-0.117	-0.117
Cmprtmnt_sstnb	-0.012	0.015	-0.823	0.411	-0.037	-0.037
Motivazioni_estrinseche ~						
RuoloConsumatr	0.002	0.003	0.776	0.438	0.038	0.038
Cmprtmnt_sstnb	-0.059	0.026	-2.247	0.025	-0.091	-0.091
RuoloConsumatore ~						
Cmprtmnt_sstnb	0.003	0.003	1.010	0.312	0.048	0.048

Variances:

	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z )	Std.lv	Std.all
.ATTEG_1	0.125	0.015	8.472	0.000	0.125	0.150
.ATTEG_2	0.436	0.025	17.685	0.000	0.436	0.571
.ATTEG_5R	0.335	0.020	16.367	0.000	0.335	0.417
.ATTEG_7	0.250	0.017	14.347	0.000	0.250	0.305
.ATTEG_9R	0.397	0.022	17.856	0.000	0.397	0.602
.CONF_SOC_3	0.232	0.021	10.791	0.000	0.232	0.326
.CONF_SOC_4R	0.415	0.023	17.812	0.000	0.415	0.751
.CONF_SOC_6R	0.515	0.029	17.545	0.000	0.515	0.714
.CONF_SOC_8	0.280	0.022	12.927	0.000	0.280	0.402
.VALF_3	0.343	0.022	15.578	0.000	0.343	0.665
.VALF_12	0.380	0.022	17.013	0.000	0.380	0.770
.VALF_18R	0.368	0.022	16.615	0.000	0.368	0.738

.VALP_7	0.383	0.024	15.861	0.000	0.383	0.684
.VALP_15R	0.429	0.026	16.485	0.000	0.429	0.728
.VALP_22	0.396	0.025	15.854	0.000	0.396	0.683
.MOTIVnorm_1	0.295	0.023	12.901	0.000	0.295	0.306
.MOTIVnorm_11	0.319	0.022	14.654	0.000	0.319	0.380
.MOTIV_norm_19	0.319	0.023	13.746	0.000	0.319	0.339
.MOTIVrep_2	0.696	0.037	18.953	0.000	0.696	0.954
.MOTIVrep_8	0.716	0.038	19.008	0.000	0.716	0.974
.MOTIVrep_16R	0.755	0.040	18.968	0.000	0.755	0.959
.MOTIVvantagg_4	0.389	0.021	18.543	0.000	0.389	0.830
.MOTIVvantagg_5	0.460	0.025	18.629	0.000	0.460	0.853
.MOTIVvantagg_21	0.347	0.019	18.556	0.000	0.347	0.834
.CONSUM_6	0.295	0.016	18.905	0.000	0.295	0.979
.CONSUM_10	0.186	0.019	9.961	0.000	0.186	0.500
.CONSUM_9	0.252	0.023	11.057	0.000	0.252	0.540
.CONSUM_14R	0.313	0.018	16.960	0.000	0.313	0.798
.CONSUM_17	0.345	0.020	17.420	0.000	0.345	0.834
.COMA_1	0.021	0.008	2.671	0.008	0.021	0.032
.COMA_4	0.412	0.022	18.846	0.000	0.412	0.665
.COMA_7	0.394	0.021	18.875	0.000	0.394	0.692
.COMA_12	0.043	0.008	5.575	0.000	0.043	0.067
.COMS_2	0.591	0.031	19.079	0.000	0.591	1.000
.COMS_5	0.624	0.033	19.079	0.000	0.624	1.000
.COMS_9	0.622	0.033	19.079	0.000	0.622	1.000
.COMS_11	0.602	0.032	19.079	0.000	0.602	1.000
.COME_3	0.574	0.030	19.078	0.000	0.574	0.999
.COME_6	0.605	0.032	19.079	0.000	0.605	1.000
.COME_8	0.596	0.031	19.079	0.000	0.596	1.000
.COME_10	0.605	0.032	19.078	0.000	0.605	0.998
Atteggiamenti	0.706	0.045	15.675	0.000	1.000	1.000
ConfrontoSocil	0.479	0.039	12.145	0.000	1.000	1.000
Valori	0.173	0.024	7.233	0.000	1.000	1.000
Motvzn_strnsch	0.668	0.051	13.122	0.000	1.000	1.000
RuoloConsumatr	0.006	0.004	1.642	0.101	1.000	1.000
Cmprtmnt_sstnb	0.637	0.035	18.009	0.000	1.000	1.000

