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Interpreting Intergenerational Collaboration in the Digital Transformation of Family-Owned Weaving MSMEs: A Phenomenological Study in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara

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ABSTRACT
The digital transformation of traditional craft-based MSMEs (micro, small, and medium enterprises) faces challenges stemming from differences in competencies and values across generations. This study explores the experiences and interpretations of family-run weaving MSMEs in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, as they build collaborations between senior artisans and the younger generation, who serve as digital marketers. A qualitative approach with an interpretive phenomenological design was employed. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation across eight family-based artisan units, and subsequently analyzed via phenomenological reduction to identify textural and structural dimensions. The findings reveal three primary themes: the negotiation between cultural heritage values and digital demands; "reverse mentoring" through intergenerational knowledge exchange; and family harmony as a form of social capital in navigating technological change. This study asserts that digital transformation entails more than just the adoption of technology; it involves the renegotiation of roles, cultural values, and intergenerational solidarity, while simultaneously expanding the discourse on Socioemotional Wealth (SEW) within the context of traditional societies.

Keywords: intergenerational collaboration; digital transformation; MSME weaving enterprises; interpretive phenomenology; socioemotional wealth (SEW).

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1. Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the traditional craft sector serve as the backbone of the creative economy rooted in local wisdom and acting as a primary pillar of the national economy. In Indonesia, this sector absorbs more than 97% of the workforce and contributes significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In Bima, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), weaving is not merely an economic commodity; it is a manifestation of cultural identity, social status, and philosophical values passed down through generations along the matrilineal line (Li, 2022; Putri et al., 2025). Each Bima weaving motif, such as Sara Bali, Bima Pae, Mpi, and Ragi carries a cosmological narrative that connects the weaver to their ancestors and the universe.

However, digital disruption accelerated by the pandemic and shifting consumer behavior has compelled micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the weaving sector to transform in order to maintain their market relevance (Vial, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021; Sagala & Őri, 2024). The adoption of e-commerce, social media marketing, design digitalization, and live shopping has become essential for survival in an increasingly competitive and fragmented market (Yuwono et al., 2024; Saura et al., 2023; Ben Slimane et al., 2022; Wiyarti, 2025). Digital transformation is no longer merely an option; it has become a survival strategy for traditional MSMEs that previously relied on physical marketplaces and local social networks.

The primary challenge in the digital transformation of family-based MSMEs (micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises) is a multidimensional intergenerational gap. The older

generation artisans aged 45–65 holds control over production skills, the preservation of sacred motifs, and traditional relationship networks; however, they often possess low digital literacy and exhibit resistance to change. Conversely, the younger generation Millennials and Gen Z, aged 20–35 are well-versed in the digital ecosystem, social media algorithms, and global market trends, yet they frequently lack an understanding of the profound philosophy embedded within every strand of woven fabric (Gadomska-Lila, 2020). This gap creates latent tension that can hinder the digital transformation process if not managed judiciously.

Existing literature has largely examined the digital transformation of MSMEs through the lenses of business strategy, technological readiness, e-commerce adoption, or economic impact (Nambisan et al., 2017; Vial, 2019). Some studies have also highlighted the role of technology in the preservation of cultural heritage (Li, 2022; Putri et al., 2025). However, there remains limited research focusing on micro-level dynamics specifically, how the meaning of intergenerational collaboration is subjectively experienced by the members of family businesses themselves. The quantitative approach that dominates the literature tends to reduce the complexity of human experience into measurable variables, thereby overlooking the emotional and cultural dimensions that lie at the very heart of traditional family businesses.

Family businesses possess unique characteristics that distinguish them from non-family enterprises. The concept of "Socioemotional Wealth" (SEW) introduced by Gomez-Mejia and colleagues posits that socioemotional wealth (encompassing family control, identification with the firm, social ties, the preservation of legacy, and the fulfillment of emotional needs) serves as a primary driver of business decisions, often at the expense of pure economic rationality (Kalm & Gómez-Mejía, 2016; Martínez-Alonso et al., 2018; Gast et al., 2018). Emotions, kinship, and the preservation of family heritage frequently dominate strategic considerations. Consequently, the adoption of technology within family businesses cannot be viewed solely through a utilitarian lens; rather, it must be understood as a social process imbued with deep meaning (Saura et al., 2023; López-Nicolás et al., 2024).

This study seeks to address this gap in the literature by employing a phenomenological analytical framework. Phenomenology enables the researcher to "return to the phenomenon itself" and explore the essential meanings of the experiences undergone by those involved in family-run weaving MSMEs (micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises). The study aims to answer the primary research question: How do individuals in family-run weaving MSMEs in Bima interpret their experiences of intergenerational collaboration during their digital transformation process? This question is broken down into three sub-questions: (1) How is the meaning of weaving reconstructed within a digital ecosystem? (2) How is the shift in intergenerational authority experienced during the process of digital learning? (3) How does family harmony function as social capital within the context of digital transformation?

Digital transformation in traditional craft MSMEs

Digital transformation is defined as the process of integrating digital technology into all aspects of a business, fundamentally changing how it operates and delivers value to customers (Vial, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021; Sagala & Őri, 2024). In the context of MSMEs (micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises), digital transformation encompasses the digitalization of production processes, digital marketing, technology-driven supply chain management, and the development of new business models that leverage digital platforms (Verhoef et al., 2021; Vial, 2019; Calderon-Monge & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2024). Nambisan et al. (2017) emphasize that digital innovation possesses a unique characteristic known as "combinatoriality," whereby digital technology can be combined with physical artifacts to create new value.

For MSMEs in the traditional craft sector, digital transformation presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, digitalization opens access to previously unreachable global markets, enables richer storytelling through visual content, and facilitates collaboration with international designers. On the other hand, it threatens the authenticity of products, reduces the sacred value of crafts to mere visual commodities, and creates competitive pressures that MSMEs with limited resources may struggle to keep pace with (Li, 2022; Putri et al., 2025).

Family business and Socioemotional Wealth (SEW)

Family businesses represent the most dominant form of business organization globally, accounting for over 90% of all registered businesses. The unique characteristic of a family business lies in the overlap between the family system and the business system, which creates a complex dynamic between economic logic and emotional logic (Martínez-Alonso et al., 2018). The concept of Socioemotional Wealth (SEW) discussed in family business literature and further refined by subsequent researchers explains that business-owning families often prioritize the preservation of non-economic wealth, such as family reputation, autonomy, emotional bonds, and legacy over purely financial considerations (Gast et al., 2018; Kalm & Gómez-Mejía, 2016).

In the context of digital transformation, SEW (socioemotional wealth) plays a dual role. On one hand, concerns regarding the loss of family control or the erosion of cultural heritage can act as barriers to the adoption of technology (Martínez-Alonso et al., 2018; Filser et al., 2018). On the other hand, strong emotional bonds and a long-term commitment to the continuity of the family business can serve as catalysts for investing in digital learning, a process that requires both time and patience (Saura et al., 2023; Stasa & Machek, 2023). Chirico and Salvato (2016) point out that social capital within a family business, a key component of SEW can facilitate knowledge transfer and adaptation to change.

Intergenerational collaboration and reverse mentoring

Intergenerational collaboration within family businesses is a complex phenomenon involving the transfer of knowledge, the negotiation of power, and the reconciliation of values. Traditionally, the transfer of knowledge in family businesses has been unidirectional flowing from the older generation to the younger generation through processes of socialization and implicit learning. However, the digital era has inverted this logic through the phenomenon of "reverse mentoring," in which the younger generation acts as mentors to the older generation regarding digital literacy, market trends, and new technologies (Gadomska-Lila, 2020).

Reverse mentoring not only facilitates the transfer of technical skills but also reconfigures power dynamics within families and businesses. The younger generation, previously in a subordinate position, now holds epistemic authority in the digital domain, while the older generation retains authority in the realms of production and cultural philosophy (Gadomska-Lila, 2020). Successful collaboration requires humility from both sides, a willingness to learn, and a mutual recognition of each other's competencies (Gadomska-Lila, 2020).

Phenomenology in business and family studies

Phenomenology, as a philosophical tradition developed by Husserl and subsequently adapted by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and contemporary researchers such as Smith and Moustakas, offers a unique methodological framework for understanding human lived experiences. In the context of business and family studies, phenomenology enables researchers to explore the subjective meanings individuals attribute to the phenomena they

experience, which often remain obscured in quantitative data (Noon, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), developed by Smith (Noon, 2018), is particularly well-suited for this study because it emphasizes how individuals construct meaning from their experiences, while acknowledging that the researcher's own interpretation is inevitably involved in the process. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how operators of family-run weaving MSMEs (micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises) perceive digital transformation, not as an objective event, but as an experience deeply imbued with emotional, cultural, and relational significance.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design. This approach was selected to explore participants' lived experiences and understand how they make sense of intergenerational collaboration in the context of digital transformation (Noon, 2018). IPA involves a double hermeneutic process in which participants seek to make sense of their own experiences, while the researcher interprets how participants make sense of those experiences (Nowell et al., 2017).

Location and Participants

The study was conducted in family-owned weaving industry centers in Bima Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, particularly in the Wawo and Bolo districts, which are recognized as traditional weaving production centers. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) weaving MSMEs that had been operating for at least 10 years; (2) active involvement of at least two generations, with parents serving as artisans or business owners and their children managing digital activities or marketing; and (3) engagement in digital-based marketing or production activities for at least two years. A total of eight family business units, comprising 16 individuals (eight older-generation and eight younger-generation participants), participated in this study. The selection of eight family business units was considered consistent with the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which emphasizes in-depth exploration rather than statistical generalization. This sample size was considered adequate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of individual experiences while capturing diverse intergenerational perspectives on collaboration and digital transformation. By involving both older and younger generations from each family business unit, the study sought to identify similarities and differences in how participants interpreted their experiences based on their respective roles and involvement in the family business.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a one-month period (September 2026) using three techniques: (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting 60–90 minutes per session, with a total of 32 interview sessions (two sessions per participant); (2) participant observation conducted over 20 days to examine intergenerational interactions during production, packaging, and digital promotion activities; and (3) documentation involving photographs, social media screenshots, and family business archives. The interviews focused on participants' experiences, challenges, emotions, and perceptions of technology adoption. Older-generation participants were interviewed in the Bima language with the assistance of a local interpreter, whereas younger-generation participants were interviewed in Indonesian. The interpreter translated the older participants' statements into Indonesian and cross-checked the consistency between the questions asked and the responses provided to ensure accurate

interpretation. Before the interviews, participants were informed about the research objectives and procedures and asked to provide their consent to participate. Participants' identities were anonymized using codes or initials to maintain confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed phenomenological procedures guided by Noon (2018), comprising five stages: (1) *Epoche*, in which the researcher acknowledged and reflected on initial assumptions to prevent them from dominating the interpretation; (2) *Horizontalization*, which involved identifying significant statements from interview transcripts and grouping them according to similarities in meaning; (3) Textural Description, which elaborated on participants' experiences through verbatim quotations and descriptive narratives; (4) Structural Description, which interpreted how these experiences were shaped by their surrounding contexts, relationships, and dynamics; and (5) Synthesis of Essence, which integrated the textural and structural descriptions to formulate superordinate themes. In this study, *epoche* and *horizontalization* were employed as means of reflexivity and data organization rather than as procedures intended to eliminate the researcher's interpretative role. This approach is consistent with the characteristics of IPA, which emphasizes a double hermeneutic process in understanding how participants make sense of their experiences.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Data trustworthiness was assessed based on four criteria: (1) *Credibility*, established through member checking (confirming interpretations with participants) and source triangulation; (2) *Transferability*, supported by thick description, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to their own contexts; (3) *Dependability*, maintained through an audit trail documenting each stage of the analysis; and (4) *Confirmability*, ensured through researcher reflexivity, which explicitly acknowledges the researcher's positionality and potential biases (Nowell et al., 2017).

3. Results And Discussion

Based on a rigorous phenomenological data reduction process, this study identified the essence of intergenerational collaboration in the digital transformation of family-owned weaving MSMEs in Bima, which was organized into three superordinate themes. Each theme is presented through textural descriptions (what participants experienced) and structural descriptions (how these experiences occurred), supported by verbatim quotations from participants.

Theme 1: Negotiating Meaning between Sacred Heritage and Digital Algorithms

Textural Description

For the older generation, Bima weaving is not merely a piece of fabric but a spiritual medium that connects weavers with their ancestors. Certain motifs, such as Sara Bali, may only be woven in specific ritual contexts and are subject to strict rules regarding who is permitted to wear them. Initially, digital transformation was perceived as a threat to this sacredness. Mrs. R (58 years old), a senior weaver, explained:

"At first, I was very upset when my child photographed the weaving process and uploaded it to TikTok. To me, weaving is a prayer; it has its rituals and prohibitions. The fabric is not merely an image for strangers to look at on their phones. But my child said, 'Mama, if people cannot see it on their phones, who will buy it and appreciate your prayers? Who will know that Bima weaving is special?' I gradually began to understand that the phone screen does not destroy it; instead, it opens a new window. A window that allows people from Jakarta, Surabaya, and even abroad to see the beauty of our weaving."

The younger generation perceived digitalization not as the abandonment of tradition but as a means of amplifying cultural heritage preservation. R's daughter, F (26 years old), explained:

"I understand that Mama has her concerns. However, I also realize that if Bima weaving does not enter the digital world, it may gradually disappear. Young people in major cities know very little about Bima weaving. They know batik and ulos, but what about Bima weaving? Almost no one knows about it. Therefore, TikTok and Instagram are my ways of introducing Mama's heritage to the world. I do not photograph the fabrics indiscriminately. I ask Mama first which motifs may be photographed and which may not. I have learned that there are boundaries that must be respected."

Structural Description

An intensive and ongoing process of meaning negotiation took place between the two generations. The younger generation learned to avoid photographing certain motifs indiscriminately, particularly those governed by customary rules, while the older generation learned that social media algorithms require aesthetically appealing visuals and engaging storytelling (Li, 2022; Putri et al., 2025). This negotiation was not always smooth, involving tensions, emotional moments, and disagreements. Nevertheless, through continuous dialogue, both generations developed a new understanding: digitalization represents an adaptive form of cultural preservation. Weaving is no longer reduced to merely a piece of fabric but is transformed into a cultural narrative that remains alive in the digital space.

Theme 2: Reverse Mentoring – Shifting Authority and Reciprocal Learning

Textural Description

Within the traditional Bima family structure, authority and knowledge are predominantly held by parents. Children are expected to learn and imitate rather than question or teach their elders. However, digital transformation fundamentally challenges this structure. Reverse mentoring emerges organically, with younger family members taking on the role of "teachers" to guide their parents in using online marketplaces, developing copywriting content, analyzing market trends, and managing digital advertisements (Gadomska-Lila, 2020).

Mr. H (60 years old), a traditional weaver who has practiced his craft for 40 years, shared his experience:

"Honestly, I initially felt embarrassed. I am an older person who has spent decades weaving, yet I had to be taught by my own child how to use WhatsApp Business. It felt as though the world had turned upside down. But my child was patient. They said, 'Dad, this is not about being old or young. It is about using new tools. You are an expert in weaving, and I am an expert in using a mobile phone. We can learn from each other.' Gradually, I began to understand. Now, I can reply to customers' messages myself, send product photos, and even create engaging WhatsApp status updates. My child said, 'You are quite good at this now, Dad.' I laughed, but deep down, I felt proud."

The younger generation interpreted this process as a new form of devotion to their parents. S (24 years old), Mr. H's child, explained:

"Teaching Dad how to reply to customers' messages on WhatsApp is like when he taught me to spin threads. It requires patience, taking things slowly, and repeating the process until he can do it. I feel proud when Dad says, 'You are quite clever at making money through the air.' To me, that is the highest form of praise. I may not weave like my mother, but I can help sell her woven products throughout Indonesia. That is how I contribute to my family."

Structural Description

In this context, reverse mentoring involves more than the transfer of technical skills; it represents a process of reconciling power relations and fostering mutual recognition. The older generation must be willing to learn from the younger generation, while the younger generation must respect the older generation's authority in the domains of production and cultural philosophy. This collaboration reflects a shared understanding that technology is merely a tool, while the essence of the family business remains rooted in local wisdom. Such interactions foster harmony, in which younger family members feel that their expertise is valued, while the older generation gains confidence that their cultural heritage is entrusted to digitally literate children (Gadomska-Lila, 2020).

Theme 3: Family Harmony as Digital Social Capital

Textural Description

Technology adoption in non-family businesses is often met with resistance due to concerns about job displacement, system complexity, or uncertain outcomes. However, in the context of family-owned weaving MSMEs in Bima, kinship ties and trust serve as a buffer against resistance to technology adoption (Chirico & Salvato, 2016; Stasa & Machek, 2023). The older generation does not fear being "replaced" by machines or digitally skilled younger family members because they understand that their children's ultimate goal is to strengthen the family business.

Mrs. M (55 years old) expressed this conviction:

"I am not afraid that the internet will take away my livelihood because it is my own child who manages it. My own flesh and blood. If someone else were managing it, I might be afraid. But this is my child, whom I breastfed and raised. They would never betray me. If we incur losses because of an advertising mistake, that is a risk we have to accept. What matters is that we learn together. Family is a place where we can make mistakes without being judged."

The younger generation shared a similar perspective. D (28 years old) explained:

"If I worked for someone else's company, making even a small mistake could get me fired. But in the family business, when I make a mistake managing advertisements, Mom and Dad do not get angry. They say, 'It's okay, let's try again.' This makes me confident enough to experiment and try new things. I know that my family is there to support me."

Structural Description

Intergenerational solidarity as a form of social capital was perceived to support the digital transformation process. Mistakes in managing advertisements or losses resulting from inaccurate market targeting were interpreted as "family learning costs" rather than grounds for dismissal or blame. Strong emotional bonds, as a component of Socioemotional Wealth (SEW), function as a safety net that provides families with the flexibility to take risks in pursuing innovation (Kalm & Gómez-Mejía, 2016; Gast et al., 2018). In this context, SEW is perceived not only as a potential constraint but also as a factor that supports digital transformation (Chirico & Salvato, 2016; Stasa & Machek, 2023).

Phenomenological Essence: Digital Transformation as the Renegotiation of Collective Identity

Through a synthesis of the three themes, this study identified the phenomenological essence of intergenerational collaboration in the digital transformation of family-owned weaving MSMEs: digital transformation is not merely a process of technology adoption but also a process of renegotiating the family's collective identity as custodians of cultural heritage in a global era. This process involves reconstructing the meaning of weaving (from sacred heritage to global recognition), reconciling authority (from unidirectional to multidirectional

relationships), and strengthening solidarity (from kinship ties to digital social capital). These three dimensions are interconnected and form an ecosystem that enables family-owned weaving MSMEs to undergo transformation without losing their cultural identity.

The findings contribute significantly to three areas of literature: digital transformation in MSMEs, family business and SEW, and intergenerational collaboration.

First, these findings enrich the literature on digital transformation in MSMEs by demonstrating that, in the context of traditional crafts, digitalization is not merely a technical process but also a cultural process involving the negotiation of meaning between traditional values and global market demands. Previous studies have tended to view digitalization as a neutral phenomenon that can be adopted by any organization (Nambisan et al., 2017; Vial, 2019). However, this study demonstrates that digitalization among family-owned weaving MSMEs in Bima is a meaning-laden process in which older and younger generations actively reconstruct the meaning of weaving to make it relevant to the digital ecosystem without compromising its authenticity. These findings are consistent with Li (2022) and Putri et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of a cultural approach to the digitalization of traditional industries.

Second, these findings extend the understanding of Socioemotional Wealth (SEW) in family businesses. Previous literature has often suggested that family ties may constrain business rationality and innovation due to concerns about losing family control or heritage (Martínez-Alonso et al., 2018; Gast et al., 2018). However, the context of weaving MSMEs in Bima suggests otherwise: family ties and local cultural values serve as catalysts that mitigate anxiety about digital disruption (Saura et al., 2023; López-Nicolás et al., 2024). Family harmony functions as a form of digital social capital that enables families to take risks in pursuing innovation. These findings support and extend the arguments of Chirico and Salvato (2016) and Stasa and Machek (2023) regarding the positive roles of social capital and emotions in family businesses.

Third, this study offers a new perspective on intergenerational collaboration through the phenomenon of reverse mentoring. Previous studies on reverse mentoring have largely focused on large corporate settings, where mentoring is formal and structured (Gadomska-Lila, 2020). This study demonstrates that, in traditional family businesses, reverse mentoring occurs organically, driven by practical needs and emotional bonds. The resulting shift in authority does not necessarily generate conflict but rather facilitates reconciliation, as both generations mutually recognize each other's competencies. These findings are consistent with Verhoef et al. (2021) and Gadomska-Lila (2020), who emphasize the importance of multidirectional approaches to knowledge transfer in the digital era.

Theoretical Implications

This study proposes a new concept, namely Digital Socioemotional Capital (DSEC), which refers to the capacity of family businesses to leverage emotional bonds and internal trust as resources for digital transformation. DSEC extends beyond the predominantly defensive perspective of Socioemotional Wealth (SEW) by demonstrating that socioemotional wealth can also serve as a source of innovation and adaptation.

Practical Implications

The government and relevant agencies in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), particularly the Department of Industry and the Department of Cooperatives and MSMEs, are encouraged to design digital assistance programs using a family-inclusive approach (family-inclusive digital empowerment) rather than an individualistic approach. Training programs should involve both older and younger generations simultaneously, with learning modules tailored to the needs of

each generation. Furthermore, these programs should be sensitive to local cultural values and avoid imposing digitalization models that conflict with local wisdom.

Social Implications

This study demonstrates that digital transformation can serve as a means of cultural preservation when implemented through an appropriate approach. Family-owned weaving MSMEs in Bima demonstrate that tradition and modernity are not necessarily dichotomous; rather, they can work synergistically to create new value.

4. Conclusion

Digital transformation in family-owned weaving MSMEs in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, is not merely a process of adopting technological tools but rather a phenomenological journey involving the renegotiation of meanings, roles, and values. Intergenerational collaboration is understood as a bridge between preserving sacred cultural heritage and responding to the demands of global algorithms. Through reverse mentoring and social capital in the form of family harmony, resistance to technology can be overcome. The essence of this phenomenon lies in digital transformation as a process of renegotiating the family's collective identity as custodians of cultural heritage in the global era.

This study contributes to the family business literature by demonstrating that, in the context of traditional communities, Socioemotional Wealth (SEW) functions as a facilitator rather than an obstacle to digital transformation. The concept of Digital Socioemotional Capital (DSEC) proposed in this study offers a new framework for understanding the dynamics of digitalization in family businesses.

The government and relevant agencies are encouraged to design assistance programs based on a family-inclusive approach (*family-inclusive digital empowerment*), in which older and younger generations receive training together to develop a shared vision. Such programs should be sensitive to local cultural values and avoid imposing digitalization models that conflict with local wisdom.

This study is limited to the context of family-owned weaving MSMEs in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, particularly the kinship characteristics and intergenerational collaboration dynamics observed among the participating families. Therefore, the application of these findings to other cultural contexts and family businesses should be approached with caution, taking into account differences in social and cultural characteristics. Future research is encouraged to: (1) empirically examine the concept of Digital Socioemotional Capital using a quantitative approach with larger samples across various regions of Indonesia; (2) explore the role of the third generation (grandchildren) in the digital transformation of family businesses; (3) compare intergenerational collaboration dynamics across family businesses in different sectors, beyond traditional crafts; and (4) conduct longitudinal studies to understand how intergenerational collaboration evolves over time.

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