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A Legacy across Generations: A Case Study about Multi Channel Utensils Firm

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ABSTRACT
Family businesses often carry a legacy—they reflect the evolving spirit of enterprise across generations. This case follows the journey of a four-generation business that started as a small utensil trade in a rural town and steadily grew into a well-structured, multi-channel venture. What began with a focus on basic survival eventually took shape as a more organized operation with each generation leaving its mark. The second generation moved towards industrial production, setting up mills and adding scale. The third expanded the product base and streamlined operations. Now, the fourth generation is blending tradition with strategy, aiming to boost market reach by merging manufacturing with wholesale segments. Rather than simply preserving what was built, each phase of leadership brought new thinking, adapting to changing times while staying rooted in core values. From ground-level trading to organized supply chains, the business evolved with clear foresight and adaptability. This study offers insight into how family-run enterprises can move beyond stability toward growth and diversification. It underlines how generational shifts can reshape business direction and contribute to building long-lasting, scalable models—especially in rural contexts where resilience meets opportunity.

Keywords: Diversification, Expansion, Family Enterprise, Legacy, Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Every enduring enterprise represents more than a commercial pursuit; it reflects a sustained legacy of entrepreneurial vision, intergenerational learning, and adaptive strategy. This case illustrates how a family business can sustain its relevance through resilience, adaptive capacity, and strategic reinvention. Spanning over a century, this four-generation journey began not in factories or storefronts, but on the streets—with a bicycle, a few aluminum utensils, and a vision. At a time when the struggle was for mere survival, the first generation saw beyond the present. Each transaction represented an incremental step towards establishing a sustainable enterprise that transcended individual lifetimes. When the second generation took over, they brought with them not only energy but strategic insight. They recognized that scale and self-reliance were key to growth. By establishing spinning and rolling mills, they shifted the business into industrial gear—laying a stronger foundation and aligning the enterprise with the country's evolving economic landscape. The third generation entered at a time when markets were expanding and consumer needs were shifting. With professionalism and bold diversification, they transformed the business into a multi-channel enterprise—offering everything from brass and silver utensils to plastic ware and sacred items. Their approach honored tradition while embracing innovation, ensuring the business remained both relevant and respected. Now, the fourth generation entered during a period of rapid technological and market change. Although trained outside the business domain, they demonstrate strong entrepreneurial orientation shaped by family legacy. With plans to build an in-house factory to produce raw materials and finished goods, they envision a future where quality, cost-efficiency, and innovation go hand in hand—turning legacy into leadership. But how did this transformation unfold—so seamlessly, so intentionally?

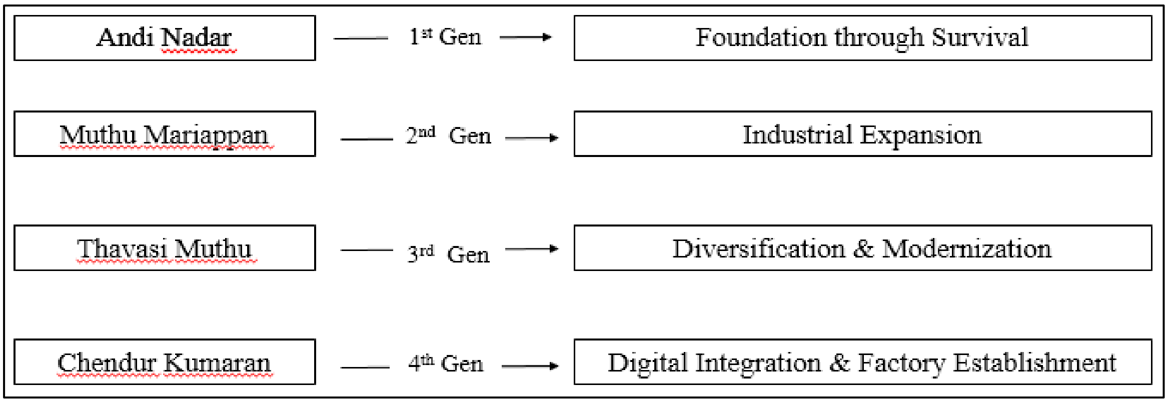

Figure_1: Hereditary enterprise structure of the four – generation family business

First Generation: Foundation through Survival

In the quiet village of Kulathur, nestled deep within the lush heartlands of Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi District, the year 1908 welcomed the birth of a boy whose life would echo across generations—Andi Nadar. The rural setting was characterized by an agrarian economy and strong community networks that shaped early entrepreneurial behaviour. For the families who lived there, life was modest. Days began at sunrise, hands met soil before breakfast, and children learned early that survival was not a given—it was earned. Born into one such farming household, young Andi Nadar's world was one of simplicity and struggle. Formal education was a distant dream, reserved for the fortunate few. Instead, Andi stepped into the muddy furrows of responsibility from a tender age. He tended crops alongside his father, learned to read the sky for rain, and came to understand the weight of hunger during failed harvests. Despite limited resources, the founder demonstrated an emerging entrepreneurial ambition and readiness to pursue non-traditional income opportunities.

By the time he reached his early twenties in 1931, the world outside Kulathur was beginning to change. Andi Nadar, driven by a quiet urgency to uplift his family's circumstances, made a decision that would alter the trajectory of their lives forever. With a modest bundle of aluminum utensils and a bicycle, he began to travel to nearby villages—not as a wandering seller, but as a man fueled by purpose. What Andi Nadar did wasn't common. Rather than waiting in marketplaces, he knocked on doors. He listened to women explain their kitchen needs. He offered utensils on flexible terms, often accepting payment in installments or even barter. This wasn't just commerce—it was connection. His style was relational, not transactional. With every journey, every conversation, every handshake, his approach was relationship – oriented, emphasizing customer trust as a long – term business asset. But in the shadows of innovation lies opposition. Andi Nadar's unconventional approach, initially welcomed by villagers, began to draw resentment from established traders. To them, he was not just competition—he was disruption. His direct-to-door model undercut their margins and challenged the status quo. Whispers turned into warnings. Slowly, his routes grew narrower and his opportunities fewer. Some days he returned home with barely any earnings, yet he refused to abandon the trade. During this period, he observed how customers preferred consistency and reliability over itinerant visits. He began to see that a permanent base could offer the stability his travelling model lacked. These realizations gradually shifted his thinking toward a more grounded business approach.

In 1942, he made a decision that would mark the first major inflection point of the family legacy - he officially transitioned from side seller to full-time entrepreneur. With a bold investment of Rs. 1,000 - an enormous sum for a former farmer - he went all in. His mission had matured: this was no longer about daily wages. This was about building something enduring. As demand grew, so did operational dependency. To scale his trade, Andi Nadar began sourcing utensils from larger merchant dealers. Initially, the arrangement appeared efficient, but systemic issues soon emerged. Product failures became frequent - handles broke, metal warped, and customer complaints increased - revealing a breakdown in supply chain quality control. The underlying cause was clear: vendors supplying substandard inputs, compromising product reliability. Competitors quickly exploited the situation, using rumors to undermine the stakeholder trust he had built over years. Yet Andi responded not with retreat, but with entrepreneurial resilience. He conducted a thorough vendor assessment, identified points of failure, and redesigned his procurement and inspection processes to ensure product consistency. By personally verifying each batch and strengthening his quality assurance mechanisms, he restored not only product reliability but also community confidence. Villagers soon recognized that beyond selling utensils, he upheld a rare managerial trait—accountability grounded in ethical business practice.

Andi Nadar wasn't just selling utensils anymore. He was building a brand—one built on trust, endurance, and quiet revolution. Every cycle through a sunburnt village, every rupee reinvested, every apology turned into action, became part of a larger narrative: the story of a man who dared to believe that dignity, not just survival, was possible for a poor farmer's family. This phase laid the groundwork for a multi – generational enterprise built on persistence, innovation and a strong work ethic. This aligns with survival – based entrepreneurship, where economic necessity initiates entrepreneurial intention (Ahsan et al. 2022).

Second Generation: Charting New Frontiers

In the legacy-soaked air of Kulathur, the baton quietly passed from a visionary trader to an industrious heir. Muthu Mariappan, born in 1938, was not just the next in line—he was the living embodiment of continuity fused with change. Raised in an environment deeply embedded in production and trade activities, Muthu Mariappan learned the language of business not in boardrooms, but in backyard workshops. He grew up watching his father return from long journeys, his cycle loaded with utensils and stories—of customer loyalty, of betrayals by merchants, of lessons stitched together by fire and faith. But what truly stayed with young Muthu Mariappan wasn't just the survival instinct—it was the intention behind it: to create something that would outlive the struggle, something that would endure.

By 1950, barely in his teens, he entered the family business—not as a passive apprentice, but as an observer with a sharp eye and a restless mind. He sought not merely to continue the business but to expand and institutionalize it through industrial operations. While his father had countered market resistance with mobility and personal touch, Muthu Mariappan saw strength in structure. He envisioned transitioning the business from a mobile, trade – based model to a stable, self – sufficient industrial enterprise. In a bold move that startled many in the village, Muthu Mariappan established both a spinning mill and a rolling mill—two monumental steps for a family still remembered for its traveling utensil trade. At a time when machinery was seen as an urban ambition or a wealthy man's game, Muthu Mariappan chose to anchor his dreams in steel. His entrepreneurial intention wasn't about chasing quick returns—it was about engineering value, about owning not just the product but the process.

He understood what few did at the time: vertical integration wasn't just a strategy; it was security. It gave him control over quality, timelines, and customer satisfaction. The move allowed the family business to shift from trading to manufacturing, from dependence to dominance. Of course, the road wasn't paved. Capital was scarce, labor was untrained, and operational knowledge was limited. But with a rare blend of foresight and patience, Muthu Mariappan tackled one challenge at a time—sourcing reliable machinery, nurturing local talent, and building systems that could stand storms.

At the heart of it all was a resilient core belief: that growth must be intentional, not incidental. His decisions weren't reactive—they were preemptive. Every bolt tightened, every mold cast, every worker trained was a brick laid toward permanence. Jobs were created, quality was controlled, and the brand began to echo not just in homes but in minds. The business evolved from being a trader's hustle to an enterprise with identity and infrastructure. Where his father had pedaled, Muthu Mariappan rooted. Where one man-built rapport, the other built reputation. Through steel and strategy, he institutionalized the family's entrepreneurial spirit—laying down the industrial bedrock upon which the next generation would not just walk, but soar. The expansion reflects early entrepreneurial orientation. The expansion reflects early entrepreneurial orientation characterized by proactiveness and risk – taking (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996).

Third Generation: Vision-Driven Diversification and Evolution

By the time Thavasi Muthu was born in 1972, the scent of burning coal from the rolling mill and the rhythm of industrial machines were already part of his everyday atmosphere. Unlike previous generations, he inherited a growing enterprise requiring structural and strategic direction. When he formally joined the business in 1990, Thavasi Muthu brought with him a fresh mindset that blended generational wisdom with contemporary strategy. This wasn't a time for survival or even foundational building—it was a time for positioning. The world was shifting, consumer behavior was evolving, and traditional businesses were either adapting or vanishing. Thavasi Muthu saw the writing on the wall and responded not with hesitation—but with intention.

His approach was rooted in strategic diversification. He understood that no single product line—no matter how well established—could withstand the pressures of changing markets. Under his leadership, the enterprise transitioned from being singularly focused on aluminum utensils to a vertically integrated, multi-product operation, expanding into plastic, silver, brass, bronze, and steel ware. But diversification, for Thavasi Muthu, wasn't just about expansion—it was about resilience and relevance. He envisioned a business that could serve every tier of customer, from modest rural households to premium urban buyers. This required more than just new materials; it demanded a revamp of branding, operations, and customer engagement. Thavasi Muthu introduced SKU-level planning, category management, and price banding—ensuring the enterprise could scale without losing identity.

Internally, he initiated process documentation and professionalization. For a family-run business that had operated largely through legacy knowledge, this was revolutionary. He brought in systems thinking, trained middle-level managers, and began delegating operations—not out of disinterest, but out of a deeper commitment to build something that could outlive any single generation. This was a shift from business as a family identity to business as an institutional legacy.

What truly defined Thavasi Muthu's era was his dual lens of pride and pragmatism. He honored the past—frequently quoting his father's principles and preserving core values around quality and trust—but he was unafraid to let go of outdated practices. He digitized accounting systems, adopted inventory software, and explored early automation—ensuring the business didn't just remain traditional; it evolved through tradition.

Beyond business, Thavasi Muthu also carried a community-centric intention. He supported local schools, helped employees secure housing loans, and ensured his supply chain partners grew along with the enterprise. His vision was not to dominate, but to uplift—an echo of Andi Nadar's original purpose, now expanded across decades and divisions. Under his guidance, the business transformed from an industrial unit into a multi-channel retail and distribution network, with physical outlets, wholesale partners, and early steps into regional exhibitions and trade fairs. He developed a business framework capable of integrating legacy practices with contemporary market demands. Thavasi Muthu wasn't just the third link in a chain—he was the one who turned the chain into a ladder. His intention was clear yet quiet: to make the family enterprise not only thrive in his time, but stand strong in the times to come. Diversification strategies demonstrate dynamic capabilities that enable adaptation to environmental changes (Teece, 2023).

Fourth Generation: Visionary Modernization

The fourth generation, represented by Chendur Kumaran, inherited the family legacy with a renewed strategic vision for modernization. Born in 1998, in an era defined by rapid technological progress and shifting consumer behavior, Chendur represents a unique synthesis of legacy and modernity. While his academic journey led him toward the field of nutrition, his heart remained deeply rooted in the values and aspirations nurtured by his forefathers. Unlike his predecessors who entered the business out of necessity or natural succession, Chendur's entry is more intentional, shaped by both heritage and observation. Having grown up witnessing the disciplined operations, the strategic expansions, and the emotional investments that built the family's reputation, Chendur understood early that this was no ordinary business. It was a living legacy. But Chendur didn't just want to continue what had already been built—he wanted to refine it. His entrepreneurial intention was not born from compulsion but from conviction. He saw the gaps in the existing supply chain structure and envisioned a vertically self-reliant system. Observing the dependency on external raw material vendors—even decades after the spinning and rolling mill was introduced—he realized the vulnerability such reliance posed in a modern industrial economy.

With clarity and ambition, he proposed a game-changing shift: the establishment of a full-fledged factory that would not only produce finished utensils but also manufacture its own raw materials. This leap would transform the business from being partially integrated to entirely self-sufficient—enhancing control over quality, reducing production costs, and paving the way for higher customer satisfaction. His foresight aligned with the larger intention of making the business resilient and scalable. Chendur understood that in a digitally driven world, consumer expectations were evolving rapidly. Speed, quality, and authenticity were no longer differentiators—they were essentials. Therefore, he emphasized product standardization, cost efficiency, and brand identity. To complement this, he started exploring digital platforms—not just as sales channels, but as ecosystems for community engagement, product education, and storytelling. Unlike earlier generations who relied on word-of-mouth and face-to-face interactions, Chendur embraced the reach of online visibility. Yet, he never lost sight of his great-grandfather's principle: "If the quality is right, customers will come to you, no matter where they are." Guided by this principle, he aimed to balance traditional business values with modern strategic transformation.

His dream of the factory became reality in 2019—a culmination of generations of grit, and the beginning of a new chapter. He oversaw the installation of machines that could process raw materials, shape aluminum and brass utensils, and prepare them for both wholesale and retail markets. For the first time, every product bearing their family name was truly made in-house—from core metal to consumer-ready utensil. Chendur's story is one of evolved entrepreneurship—an intention shaped not just by heritage, but by foresight, learning, and bold execution. Although his leadership phase is ongoing, early evidence indicates a transformative approach to sustaining and scaling the enterprise. Digital transformation and backward integration illustrate absorptive capacity and innovation orientation in family firms (Zahra et. al., 2022).

APPENDIX

A1: R. Andi Nadar & Sons Utensils Store

Source: www.google.com

A2: Timeline of entrepreneurial evolution across the generations

Year	Generation	Strategic Milestone	Focus Area
1931	1st	Foundation - Family values & Socioeconomic wealth	Necessity – driven entrepreneurship Survival Entrepreneurship Trust – based customer relations Informal Operations
1955	2nd	Structural Build - Resource Buildup & Learning	Opportunity – driven entrepreneurship Industrialization Vertical Integration Quality & process discipline
1990	3rd	Diversification & Systems - Market Evaluation & Competitive Pressures	Strategic Entrepreneurship Multi – Product Expansion Retail + Wholesale distribution Professionalization & Digitalization of process
2019	4th	Modernization and Full Integration – Long – term family business sustainability	Innovation – Driven Entrepreneurship In – House Manufacturing Digital adoption Brand identity & efficiency focus

Discussion Questions

1. Examine the transformation of entrepreneurial values across the four generations of the family business.
2. Trace and evaluate the diversification strategies employed by the business over time.
3. Identify the key challenges encountered by each generations and evaluate their approaches to overcoming them.
4. Analyze the evolution of entrepreneurial intention across generations and its role in ensuring business continuity.

Teaching Notes

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Synopsis

This case study presents a compelling narrative of a four-generation family business that evolved from humble door-to-door utensil trading into a diversified, multi-channel enterprise. At the heart of this transformation lies the enduring force of entrepreneurial intention—manifested uniquely across each generation, shaped by personal vision, contextual challenges, and evolving market landscapes, served as both a compass and a catalyst for business growth. The first generation laid the foundation through perseverance and relationship-building with customers. The second generation initiated industrial development by introducing infrastructure and systematization. The third generation steered the business toward diversification, aligning offerings with evolving customer preferences and improving operational efficiencies. The fourth generation has begun integrating modern distribution systems, wholesale models, and long-term planning for manufacturing, marking a strategic shift toward market competitiveness. This case highlights how entrepreneurial intention is not static but evolves with time, experience, and generational perspective. It serves as a vital academic tool for students and scholars to explore how intention, when coupled with adaptability, innovation, and family values, can sustain and scale enterprises across generations while staying rooted in legacy.

Academic Level

This case is tailored for final-year UG, and MBA students focusing on Family Business, Entrepreneurship, and Strategy. It provides valuable insights into how family-led businesses manage succession and evolve through generational leadership. Students are encouraged to examine how long-term sustainability is achieved through adaptability and values-driven decision-making. The narrative brings to life how legacy businesses navigate modern market demands while preserving their core identity.

Learning Objectives

1. To understand how leadership transitions were planned and how each generation worked to honor and grow the family's legacy.
2. To assess how the business expanded its reach and diversified its offerings, with each generation contributing unique strategies for growth.
3. To explore how each generation has adapted and upheld challenges to keep the family business strong.
4. To examine how the drive to intention and take risks has evolved from one generation to the next within

the business.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the evolution of entrepreneurial intention across four generations of a family business in Tamil Nadu, India. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants representing each generational stage, focusing on business transitions, decision-making, and innovation practices. To strengthen credibility, data triangulation was used by integrating primary interviews, field observations, and archival records, including business documents and local trade archives. The data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, allowing key patterns related to succession, diversification, and strategic adaptation to emerge. Themes were cross-checked across data sources to ensure internal consistency and contextual accuracy. Ethical protocols were maintained through informed consent, anonymity, and participant verification.

Classroom Experience

The case session was conducted with 60 final-year MBA students and generated significant engagement through interactive and participatory learning methods. Rather than a structured debate, students actively participated in group discussions, comparison-based analyses, and role-playing exercises that allowed them to deeply explore the entrepreneurial intention and transactions within a multi-generational family business context. These activities helped them connect theoretical concepts with real-world scenarios, particularly in the areas of succession planning, innovation, and market expansion. The thoughtfully designed teaching plan ensured a logical progression of the case, allowing key insights and intended learning outcomes to be addressed within the allocated time.

Teaching Plan Time Allocation

Table 1 provides instructors with a reference for efficiently planning and allocating time in their teaching schedules.

Table 1: Teaching Plan

Particulars	Time Allocation	Details
Introducing and Context Setting	15 minutes	Overview of the case background, objectives, and learning outcomes.
Case Study Discussion	20 minutes	Independent reading and small – group reflection
MCQ for Class Participation	10 minutes	Concept recall and comprehension check
Concept Integration	15 minutes	Linking the case with entrepreneurial theories
Discussion Questions Analysis	10 minutes	Group evaluation of assigned reflective questions
Comparative Analysis	10 minutes	Contrast traditional vs. modern business models
Wrap-up	10 minutes	Summary and key takeaways.
Total	90 minutes	

1. Reading Material

To support students in addressing the assignment questions, instructors should encourage them to engage with the reading materials listed in Table 2. These resources will provide valuable guidance, so it is advisable to share the details with students at least one or two days before the case class.

Table 2: Reading Material

Discussion Question No.	Reading Material	Source
1.	Transmission of entrepreneurial values in entrepreneurial families	Kupangwa et al. 2024. Journal of Family Business Management Zellweger et al. 2021. Family Business Review
2.	Diversification in family	Kupangwa et al. 2024. Journal of Small Business

	firms: Systematic review	Management.
3.	Navigating generational transitions in family businesses	Yilmaz et al. 2024. Family Business Review. Sharma & Salvato 2022. Journal of Family Business Strategy.
4.	The role of entrepreneurial intention and resilience in sustainability	Zahra et al. 2022. Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies. Cardella et al. 2020. International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal.

2. MCQs for Classroom Participants

Below are some sample questions for a Google Form quiz aimed at evaluating students' comprehension of the case study and related concepts.

Select the correct answer to complete your participation.

Q1. Who laid the foundation for the family business by starting to trade aluminum utensils?
A) Muthumariappan
B) Andi Nadar
C) Thavasi Muthu
D) Chendur Kumaran

Q2. In what year did the first-generation entrepreneur begin his journey in utensil trading?
A) 1910
B) 1925
C) 1931
D) 1940

Q3. Which generation took a major step forward by diversifying the product range?
A) First generation
B) Second generation
C) Third generation
D) Fourth generation

Q4. The second generation mainly focused on improving which aspect of the business?
A) Branding
B) Industrial Infrastructure
C) Export
D) Retail Chain

Q5. What key factors helped the family business succeed and sustain over four generations?
A) Government regulations
B) Vision, adaptability, and intention
C) Market instability
D) Financial backing from investors

Q6. How did the third generation make a noticeable impact on the family business?
A) Expanded into international markets
B) Introduced innovation in marketing strategies
C) Expanded the product range and increased local presence
D) Focused on mergers and acquisitions

Q7. Which core value consistently guided the business through all generations?
A) Speed
B) Customer Trust
C) Marketing
D) Advertising

Q8. What was the fourth generation's top priority in taking the business forward?
A) Reducing costs and sticking to traditional methods
B) Expanding the product range and entering new markets
C) Setting up a factory for large-scale production
D) Launching a franchise model

Q9. What challenge does the fourth-generation face as they plan to scale the business?

A) Struggling to maintain traditional values
B) Balancing innovation with tradition
C) Tackling global competition
D) Finding external investors

Q10. How would you best describe the business's growth across the four generations?
A) Static and resistant to change
B) Rapid rise followed by decline
C) Steady and adaptive growth across generations
D) Growth focused only within regional markets

3. Discussion Questions (DQ) aligned with Learning Outcomes (LO)

DQ 1: Examine the transformation of entrepreneurial values across the four generations of the family business.
LO 1: This encourages students to reflect on how tradition merges with innovation, helping them appreciate the evolution of leadership philosophies and their relevance in sustaining legacy enterprises.
DQ 2: Trace and evaluate the diversification strategies employed by the business over time.
LO 2: Students will gain insight into how family enterprises respond to shifting market dynamics through strategic expansion, enabling them to analyze growth trajectories effectively.
DQ 3: Identify the key challenges encountered by each generations and evaluate their approaches to overcoming them.
LO 3: Promotes critical thinking and problem-solving by emphasizing context-driven responses to real-world challenges faced by entrepreneurs at different stages of business evolution.
DQ 4: Analyze the evolution of entrepreneurial intention across generations and its role in ensuring business continuity.
LO 4: Aims to deepen students' understanding of how sustained entrepreneurial intention shapes long-term vision, continuity, and adaptability within a multi-generational family enterprise.

4. Analysis of Discussion Questions

Q 1: Examine the transformation of entrepreneurial values across the four generations of the family business.

The transformation of entrepreneurial values across four generations in a family-run enterprise represents a dynamic and context-driven evolution shaped by time, technology, market exposure, and societal changes. Entrepreneurial values do not remain static—they are passed on, reshaped, reinterpreted, and realigned with each generation's intent, knowledge, and environment.

In the first generation, the entrepreneurial values were rooted in necessity-driven survival (Ahsan et al., 2022). The founder valued hard work, honesty, and relationship-building as the business began through door-to-door selling. His intention was grounded in economic necessity, and the value system revolved around self-discipline, sacrifice, and community reputation (Chrisman et al., 2021).

As the business transitioned into the second generation, the values started transforming. Exposure to formal education and emerging technologies led to an innovation mindset, though still within the boundaries of traditional operations. The entrepreneur here valued efficiency and incremental growth, blending old wisdom with selective modernization (Kellermanns et al., 2023). Entrepreneurial intention at this stage moved from survival to structured opportunity exploration (Krueger et al., 2023).

In the third generation, values underwent a significant shift. With globalization and increased market competition, this generation embraced strategic thinking, calculated risk-taking, and diversification. Here, the transformation was guided by entrepreneurial orientation theory, which emphasizes innovation, proactiveness, and risk tolerance as core values for enterprise growth (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). The intention moved toward scalability and market leadership, aligning closely with the concepts of strategic entrepreneurship (Ireland et al., 2021).

The fourth generation brought a digital and consumer-centric perspective. Entrepreneurial values here are influenced by sustainability, technology integration, and social responsiveness. Digital literacy, branding, and long-term impact take precedence. The Theory of Planned Behavior helps explain this shift—where intention is shaped by personal attitude, perceived feasibility, and societal expectations (Ajzen, 1991; Zellweger et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial intention evolved into a vision-based model, prioritizing both economic and societal value creation (Alfredo & Emanuela, 2022).

Throughout all four generations, values transformed from necessity → opportunity → strategy → vision. This journey reflects how entrepreneurial intention matures through exposure, education, and intergenerational learning. Socioemotional Wealth (SEW) Theory also plays a crucial role, showing how emotional bonds, identity, and continuity influence value transformation (Berrone et al., 2022). Each generation reinterprets legacy—not just preserving it, but adapting it. Thus, this case demonstrates that entrepreneurial values evolve not only through external forces but through internal intent, vision, and learning. These values serve as both anchors and catalysts—anchoring legacy while catalyzing transformation.

Q 2: Trace and evaluate the diversification strategies employed by the business over time.

Product Diversification

The business's evolution over four generations provides a compelling illustration of strategic product diversification in response to changing consumer needs and market dynamics. Initially, the founding generation focused on door-to-door utensil sales, operating within a narrow product portfolio that emphasized stainless steel essentials. This grassroots-level approach capitalized on relationship-based selling, aligning with the trust and local knowledge formed the firm's core competencies. As consumer lifestyles modernized, the third generation marked a pivotal shift by introducing diverse categories such as brass, silver utensils, pooja sets, and kitchen appliances. This transition moved the business from purely need-based goods toward aspirational and ceremonial product segments, aligning with the Ansoff Matrix's product development strategy. The diversification not only expanded market reach but also elevated the brand's positioning from utilitarian to lifestyle-focused.

Channel Diversification

The distribution channels of the business reflect a gradual but deliberate progression in reaching customers, aligning with evolving retail trends and consumer convenience expectations. The second generation introduced a brick-and-mortar storefront, marking the shift from personal selling to physical retail presence. This move enhanced accessibility and brand visibility, supporting Kotler's Marketing Mix (4Ps) where 'Place' becomes a strategic element of competitive positioning. The third generation initiated dual-channel distribution—retail and wholesale—which enabled geographic penetration and operational scalability. The firm thus transitioned into a multi-channel distribution model, improving volume while sustaining customer intimacy. The fourth generation is steering toward digital transformation, leveraging social media platforms, WhatsApp Business, and emerging e-commerce opportunities. This shift exemplifies the Omnichannel Retailing Theory, where integrated customer touchpoints allow seamless engagement across both offline and online platforms. It also reflects a response to Technology Acceptance Model, recognizing how user-friendliness and perceived utility drive adoption of new technology in traditional sectors.

Value Chain Diversification

Value chain integration has emerged as a critical driver of competitive advantage in the later generations of the business. The third and fourth generations adopted a more inward-looking strategic posture, identifying inefficiencies in supplier dependency and seeking better cost control mechanisms. Procurement, packaging, and logistics were internalized, enabling the business to standardize quality, reduce lead times, and capture higher margins. This shift resonates with Porter's Value Chain Framework, emphasizing how optimizing primary and support activities can yield sustained advantage. The fourth generation is exploring backward integration, such as setting up in-house manufacturing for select fast-moving goods. This approach is strategically aligned with Transaction Cost Economics, which suggests that reducing reliance on external vendors minimizes uncertainty and operational risk. By managing more stages of its supply chain, the business not only enhances efficiency but also strengthens its capability to innovate and respond swiftly to market feedback. The diversification trajectory of this family business—across product offerings, distribution channels, and internal operations—demonstrates a mature and layered strategic evolution. Anchored in entrepreneurial intent and market responsiveness, each generational shift has introduced a new layer of sophistication.

Q 3: Identify the key challenges encountered by each generations and evaluate their approaches to overcoming them.

Generation	Key Challenge	Evaluation of Approach	Strategy to overcome the Challenge
1st Generation (Founding Stage)	Market Entry & Capital Constraint - Launching the business without access to formal financing, support systems, or established market infrastructure posed significant limitations.	The founding entrepreneur relied on personal networks, engaging in door-to-door sales to cultivate customer relationships. Trust became the primary currency in building credibility and long-term customer loyalty.	Lean Startup Approach: Operated with minimal capital investment by leveraging direct interpersonal connections. Focused on trust-based marketing and a hyperlocal presence to build a reliable customer base.

2nd Generation (Expansion Stage)	Changing Consumer Preferences - Emerging demand for modern kitchen solutions—particularly stainless steel and aluminum—necessitated a shift from traditional materials.	Recognizing evolving household preferences, the second generation embraced market responsiveness. They repositioned the product mix to remain relevant to contemporary users.	Customer-Centric Adaptation: Strategically expanded the product range to include stainless steel and aluminum utensils. This proactive pivot ensured continued engagement with new-age consumers without alienating existing customers.
3rd Generation (Modernization Stage)	Brand Differentiation & Regional Competition - Increasing competition within the sector created pressure to distinguish the brand and product offerings beyond mere functionality.	The third generation adopted a diversification strategy rooted in lifestyle enhancement. The introduction of brass pooja sets, silverware, and kitchen appliances allowed the brand to tap into aspirational and festive consumption trends.	Lifestyle Branding Strategy: Repositioned the brand from functional utility to cultural and aesthetic significance. This shift not only addressed competitive pressures but also elevated the brand's identity and pricing potential.
4th Generation (Digitization Stage)	Technology Transition & Market Reach - The digital economy demanded transformation, with risks of customer attrition if the business didn't modernize its operations.	The fourth generation initiated digital integration by establishing a social media presence, facilitating online orders, and introducing last-mile delivery options.	Digital Transformation: Focused on building digital capabilities through social media engagement, WhatsApp commerce, and e-commerce tools. This approach ensured relevance among digitally native consumers while retaining the brand's core identity.

The insights derived from the generational comparison underscore that entrepreneurial challenges are deeply context-dependent and must be addressed in alignment with prevailing economic, technological, and cultural conditions. No single solution fits all stages, highlighting the importance of adaptive strategic thinking across generations. The first generation exemplified how personal credibility and trust-based selling were essential in the absence of formal marketing or capital. As the enterprise moved into its second and third phases, we observe a shift toward consumer-responsive diversification and brand evolution, reflecting a growing awareness of market trends and customer needs.

The transition into the fourth generation represents a pivot from conventional commerce to digital agility, where technological adoption and market expansion became vital to staying competitive. This generation's embrace of e-commerce and social media illustrates a fundamental move from physical presence to virtual visibility, while exploring backward integration to increase control over the value chain. The case clearly illustrates that each generation balanced legacy with intention—leveraging inherited strengths while embedding new solutions to meet emerging demands. It reinforces that entrepreneurial success is not merely about continuity, but about strategic transformation driven by each generation's ability to read their unique environment and act accordingly.

Q 4: Analyze the evolution of entrepreneurial intention across generations and its role in ensuring business continuity.

Entrepreneurial intention, a critical predictor of entrepreneurial action, finds its most robust theoretical grounding in Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TPB posits that an individual's intention to engage in a particular behavior is influenced by three cognitive factors: attitude toward the behavior (whether one perceives entrepreneurship as favorable or not), subjective norms (the perceived social pressure to engage or not engage in entrepreneurship), and perceived behavioral control (the confidence in one's ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks successfully). When examined across generations in a family business context, TPB serves as a powerful framework to understand how and why entrepreneurial intention shifts over time.

In the first generation, entrepreneurial intention was born out of necessity and survival, not aspiration. The attitude toward entrepreneurship was modest but favorable, rooted in the belief that business could provide a stable livelihood in the absence of formal employment opportunities. Subjective norms were influenced more by external hardship than familial expectation; there was little pressure from others to succeed, yet much personal drive. The perceived behavioral control (PBC) was low—limited resources, lack of formal education, and absence of mentors meant the founder relied on sheer willpower and trust-based customer relationships to get started.

As the second generation took over, intention evolved from survival to responsibility. The attitude now reflected a desire to preserve and grow the family legacy. There was a noticeable shift in subjective norms, as family and community expectations pushed them to be more professional and expand the business. Their PBC improved slightly; with better access to materials, customers, and some retained capital, they were better equipped to manage business uncertainties.

The third generation, entering during modernization and regional competition, showed a proactive attitude toward entrepreneurship. Their desire was not just to maintain but differentiate the brand. Subjective norms became more aspirational—there was an emerging pressure to be not just successful but innovative, as peers and market players had also evolved. Thanks to formal education and greater exposure to external business practices, their PBC was notably higher, allowing for calculated risks such as diversifying into lifestyle-based product segments.

For the fourth generation, entrepreneurial intention is opportunity-driven and strategic. Their attitude is shaped by global entrepreneurial culture, digital ecosystems, and innovation-oriented thinking. Subjective norms are driven by the expectations to keep the legacy alive while transforming it for the digital age. Social media culture and startup ecosystems have instilled a sense of performance and innovation pressure. Most importantly, their PBC is the highest—having grown up in a well-established brand with access to data, technology, and market intelligence, they are confident in navigating both traditional and digital landscapes.

Across generations, entrepreneurial intention has shifted from necessity to opportunity, from survival to innovation, and from limited to empowered control—showcasing how TPB effectively captures the evolving entrepreneurial mindset in sustaining a multi-generational family business.

WRAP UP

The entrepreneurial journey of the family business, spanning four generations—Andi Nadar, Muthumariappan, Thavasi Muthu, and Chendur Kumaran—stands as a testament to the evolving nature of entrepreneurial intention and its critical role in sustaining long-term business continuity.

The founding generation, led by Andi Nadar, established a strong foundation built on an unwavering commitment to product quality and exceptional customer service. Guided by the belief that "exceptional quality naturally attracts loyal customers," he cultivated deep customer trust and loyalty, earning the business a reputation for reliability. His meticulous attention to operational efficiency and cost control ensured consistent profitability, allowing the enterprise to offer competitive pricing without compromising on quality. This deep-rooted commitment to excellence and frugality laid a resilient groundwork for future expansion.

Building upon this legacy, Muthumariappan, representing the second generation, steered the business through an era marked by industrialization and modernization. His leadership combined a sharp focus on technological adoption with prudent financial stewardship. By streamlining operations and making strategic investments, he ensured the business remained resilient and adaptable in a rapidly changing economic landscape. His decision to diversify the product portfolio broadened market reach and enhanced business stability, shielding the enterprise from sector-specific risks and setting the stage for sustainable growth.

Born into an already industrialized environment, Thavasi Muthu of the third generation entered the business with a strategic vision that blended inherited wisdom with contemporary business thinking. Recognizing the need for resilience in a dynamic marketplace, he transitioned the enterprise from a single-product focus to a diversified, multi-material operation encompassing plastics, silver, brass, bronze, and steel ware. He introduced SKU-level planning, professionalized internal operations, and digitized key business processes, ensuring relevance and agility. Balancing reverence for tradition with a spirit of innovation, he expanded into multi-channel retail and deepened the business's community engagement, transforming it from a legacy enterprise into a future-ready institution.

Rooted in the values of his forefathers but propelled by a modern entrepreneurial spirit, the fourth-generation leader, Chendur Kumaran, reimagined the business with a bold vision for full operational independence. He spearheaded the establishment of a fully integrated factory that produced both raw materials and finished goods, thereby strengthening quality control, reducing production costs, and enhancing scalability. Embracing the digital era, he leveraged online platforms not just for sales, but for brand building and community engagement, all while staying true to the founding principle that "quality attracts loyalty." Chendur's leadership marks a transformation driven not only by heritage but by foresight, innovation, and a relentless pursuit of operational excellence.

Conclusion

The evolution of this family business demonstrates that sustaining legacy involves adapting core values to changing contexts through strategic renewal. Across generations, entrepreneurial intention acted as the driving force that kept the business resilient, relevant, and thriving. In family enterprises, sustainability is not just built on past success, but on the courage to adapt, innovate, and reinterpret core values to meet changing times. This journey shows that when each generation embraces its responsibility with foresight and a commitment to excellence, a family business transforms from a simple livelihood into a lasting institution. This case provides empirical insights into how intergenerational intention and adaptability sustain family business longevity. The findings contribute to family business literature by linking legacy preservation with entrepreneurial renewal, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and value – based leadership in emerging market contexts.

Declarations

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate - This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the authors' institution. Informed consent was obtained from the participants involved in the case study prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Consent for Publication - The participants provided informed consent for the publication of the findings presented in this manuscript. All identifying information has been removed or anonymized to protect participants' privacy.

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