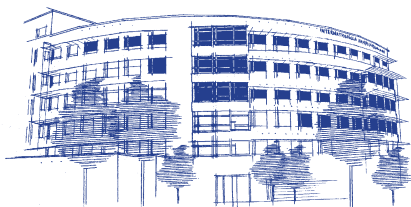# Realizing the value of Family Business Identity as Corporate Brand Element – A Research Model

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Realizing the value of Family Business Identity as Corporate Brand Element – A Research Model[1]

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Summary

Recent publications among family business scholars reveal an emerging interest to investigate questions related to marketing communications and brand management. An underlying question for this research is whether, how, and under what circumstances the portrayal of a family business identity influences corporate brand equity. Research in brand management clarifies the importance of learning how consumer behavior is influenced by brand leveraging beyond the core product or company. Such knowledge support companies' in their search of favorable combinations of information sources in brand communication. This paper outlines a research model for how to advance our knowledge regarding the opportunities for family businesses to leverage their family business identity through brand management. Gaps in extant research and essential questions to consider are identified. As a stepping-stone, the paper defines "family business identity" as a generic corporate brand element eligible for secondary brand association.

Key words: Brand management, Brand equity, Family business, Secondary brand association

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[1] Please note that the current paper is an extended and revised version of Blombäck, A. (2009). Family business - a secondary brand in corporate brand management. *CeFEO working paper series*, 2009:1, Jönköping International Business School.

Introduction

"SC Johnson - A Family Company" - www.scjohnson.com

"From our family to yours… Buon Appetito" - www.sandhurstsfinefoods.com

"NatureBake – A family passion since 1955" - www.naturebake.com

A review of webpages reveal the habit of companies to clarify that they are family businesses (Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, forthcoming). Companies differ in how they do this, both regards to how much and what key characteristics are promoted (Micelotta and Raynard, 2011). For example, companies use the expression "we are a family business", reveal the family name, heritage, photographs anecdotes, and/or point at the number of generations in business. Companies varyingly include such signs of family in the company or product names and in various types of planned communication (e.g. packaging, advertising, and web). The three quotes above illustrate how the references to family business can also be more or less direct. Research indicates that the degree of family ownership influences family business communication (Memili, Eddleston, Zellweger, Kellermans and Barnett, 2010). The current paper draws a parallel between this phenomenon and the topic of brand management.

Brand management denotes decisions concerning market offer and communication with the purpose to affect distinction and associations of a specific entity, to achieve competitive and managerial advantages, and financial gain (Berthon, Ewing and Napoli, 2008; de Chernatony, 2001, Montaña, Guzman & Moll, 2007). A salient part of brand literature deals with the concept of brand equity, which summarizes the value brands play for their owners. Brand equity "stems from the greater confidence that consumers place in a brand than they do in its competitors. This confidence translates into consumers' loyalty and their willingness to pay a premium price for the brand" (Lassar, Mittal and Sharma, 1995, p 11). The use of family business references in marketing communications can be read as part of brand management and the search for such brand equity. That is, an attempt to distinguish,

in a positive way, a firm and/or its offer. Researchers in the field recurrently argue that being known as a family business can be a resource when dealing with consumers (e.g. Carrigan and Buckley, 2008; Craig et al., 2008; Sundaramurthy and Kreiner, 2008). Also, recent publications and a growing number of conference presentations reveal that the intersections of family business and brands is a topic of importance and on the rise (e.g. Binz and Smit, 2011; Blombäck, 2010; Blombäck and Botero, forthcoming; Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, forthcoming; Craig, Dibrell and Davis, 2008; Krappe, Goutas and von Schlippe, 2011; Memili, Eddleston, Zellweger, Kellermanns, and Barnett, 2010; Micelotta and Raynard, 2011; Parmentier, 2011; Zellwegger, Eddleston and Kellermanns, 2010). While several studies indicate a positive relationship between the communication of family business identity and firm performance (Craig, Dibrell and Davis, 2008; Kashmiri & Mahajan, 2010), the causality between the two remains unclear. In consequence, our knowledge on how to efficiently approach brand management in family business can still be improved. To that end, *the current paper lays out a research model to further investigate if family businesses can reach improved corporate brand equity by leveraging their family business identity in marketing communications.* That is, whether the inclusion of family business identity (Zellwegger et al., 2010) as a corporate brand element increases the awareness and image among consumers – ultimately influencing purchase intention, loyalty, and firm performance.

Litz, Pearson and Litchfield (forthcoming, p. 15) conclude that, to maintain its current status the field of family business needs to develop further, for example by engaging in "an increasingly diverse set of topics". Marketing and a brand orientation specifically, is one such topic currently evolving. The Family Business Review special issue on marketing (2011:3), with two articles focused on branding, clearly shows that the topic is gaining grounds in the field. This line of research is meaningful as it extends our understanding of characteristic resources in family businesses (Blombäck and Botero (forthcoming), Craig, Dibrell and

Davis, 2008). Geared towards elaboration on how external stakeholders recognize, assess, and use the family business component in their response to marketing communications, at its core this research stream concerns the basic query of whether being a family business matters to performance. The current paper is motivated by an ambition to support the development of research on family business and branding, soliciting further research addressing the central questions of whether, when and how the family business identity influences consumer behavior. On a more general level, it also calls attention to the need of further investigating idiosyncratic opportunities for family businesses in the marketing management area.

The paper starts with an introduction to branding and customer-based brand equity. Family business identity is then introduced as a generic corporate brand element, eligible for secondary brand association. Based on the identification of gaps in our current knowledge a research model is developed. The discussion takes private individuals and their responses to corporate brands in focus.

Approaching Family Business as a Corporate Brand Element

Brands can be described as complex sets of meanings and beliefs that relate to an entity of some sort. While they are normally manifested through visible communication and tangible objects, brands primarily exist in a "discursive space of meaning rather than the physical space of objects" (Leitch & Motion, 2007, p. 72). Brand management, or branding, comprises the effort to identify core characteristics of an entity (that which is branded) and enable stakeholders to form brand images that distinguish the entity from similar others (Garrity, 2001, Grace & O'Cass, 2002, Simões & Dibb, 2001). Stakeholders that have strong and positive associations towards a brand are more likely to favour this brand and the entity that it represents.

Brand management theory suggests that companies should plan their communications

in order to enable distinction from competitors. In the process of branding, brand owners make use of brand elements or identities (Keller, 1993; Keller et al., 2008). These include things that surround or connect to the branded entity, like brand name, logotype, product design, website, web-address, characters and spokespersons, slogans, jingles, and packaging. Deciding on brand elements is an important part of branding since they establish and conjure recognition for the branded entity, and add meaning in the consumers' minds.

Corporate branding

Family business by definition concerns the characteristics of a company, which means that references to family business bear a clear connection to corporate brand management. Current research pays special attention to corporate brands (e.g. Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Schultz et al., 2005; Hatch and Schultz, 2008). Increasing homogenization and shorter lifecycles of products, increasing visibility of corporations, focus on ethics, and the recognition of brands in service and industrial markets take part in explaining the accentuation of corporate branding. Current markets support Hatch and Schultz (2003, p. 1041) suggestion that "Differentiation requires positioning, not products, but the whole corporation. Accordingly, the values and emotions symbolized by the organization become key elements of differentiation strategies, and the corporation itself moves center stage." In terms of brand management, this implies a move from strictly product centered brand elements and identities to the inclusion of corporate or organizational features. On a general level, three streams of corporate associations are identified; such that reflect expectations on the firm as a societal actor (e.g. environmental responsibility), such that indicate perceived personality traits (e.g. competence), and such that indicate trust (e.g. honesty).

Corporate level brand management concerns the management of all associations related to a specific company and, thus, the sum total of corporate communications (e.g. Balmer & Gray, 2003; Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). Owing to this complexity, to make

corporate brand management possible in practice, companies must focus on a limited set of features or corporate brand elements.

Family Business – a generic corporate brand element

Some brand elements are registered trademark, implying that the brand owner has gone through a formal application process and has exclusive rights to use that particular element (visualized by the symbol ®). Elements that are descriptive or generic in kind cannot be registered, though, as it would hamper the competitive powers of other actors in the industry. Lazar (2005) defines a descriptive term as one "that immediately tells the consumer a characteristic of the product or service". In view of this it is useful to talk about generic brand elements. In contrast to a registered trademark, such elements do not indicate a particular sender, but rather the nature of what is being marketed. Being a family business can be employed in branding as such a generic corporate brand element provided that a family business identity is maintained and communicated (cf. Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, forthcoming; Craig et al., 2008; Zellwegger et al., 2010). The choice to display family involvement as a corporate brand element can be compared to other descriptive signals about the firm, like references to geographical origin ("we are an Italian company"), company philosophy ("we are a socially responsible company"), age ("we are an 80-year old company"), or primary operations ("we are a furniture manufacturer"). Moreover, de Chernatony's (2001, p. 42) atomic model of the brand presents "sign of ownership" as one piece of brand essence.

The communication practices of family businesses themselves, the media and, indeed, the research community also imply that "family business" is an established descriptive term. It is used as a label to distinguish a certain type of firm, which also implies the assumption that there exist certain associations and conceptions related to family businesses. That is, instead of being mere information of ownership, the reference to family business is more

likely used to signal the outcome of such ownership. Concurrently, we might think of family business as a corporate brand element.

Customer-based brand equity

The concept of brand equity is essential in brand management theory since it explains how and to what extent a brand represents value for the brand owner. A basic tenet in the formation of brand equity is that it can only appear when the brand adds value to consumers. In the words of Leone et al. (2006, p. 125), "brand equity can be thought of as the "added value" endowed to a product in the thoughts, words, and actions of consumers". The notion of customer-based brand equity embraces an alternative to the original finance-oriented principles of brand equity (Keller, 1993; Lassar, Mittal, and Sharma, 1995) and signifies the outcome of customers' brand knowledge – a mix of brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 1993; Keller 2008 et al.). Awareness refers here to the customers' ability to recall and recognize the brand. Image refers to the set of brand associations customers hold and denotes a combination of perception and preference for the brand. To foster a positive customer behavior related to the brand, these brand associations should be as strong, favorable and unique as possible (Keller, 1993).

Customer-based brand equity exists when consumers are not only familiar with the brand but also "have a lot of positive and strong associations related to the brand, perceive the brand is of high quality, and are loyal to the brand." (Yoo, Donthu and Lee, 2000, p. 196). Customer-based brand equity appears, thus, when a positive attitude causes a favorable and continuous behavior towards the brand. From a brand management perspective, as illustrated by figure 1, this calls for a process involving recognition of brand elements and communication that can facilitate a positive brand knowledge among consumers.

Yoo et al (2000), further discuss how all marketing efforts have a potential influence on brand equity. Therefore, they suggest, "When making a decision about marketing actions,

managers need to consider their potential impact on brand equity" (p. 197). Ideally, thus, in the selection of brand elements to promote, firms should consider if they have an impact on brand awareness (if it adds to the brand's distinction and recall) and image (if it adds valuable content to the brand's association base).
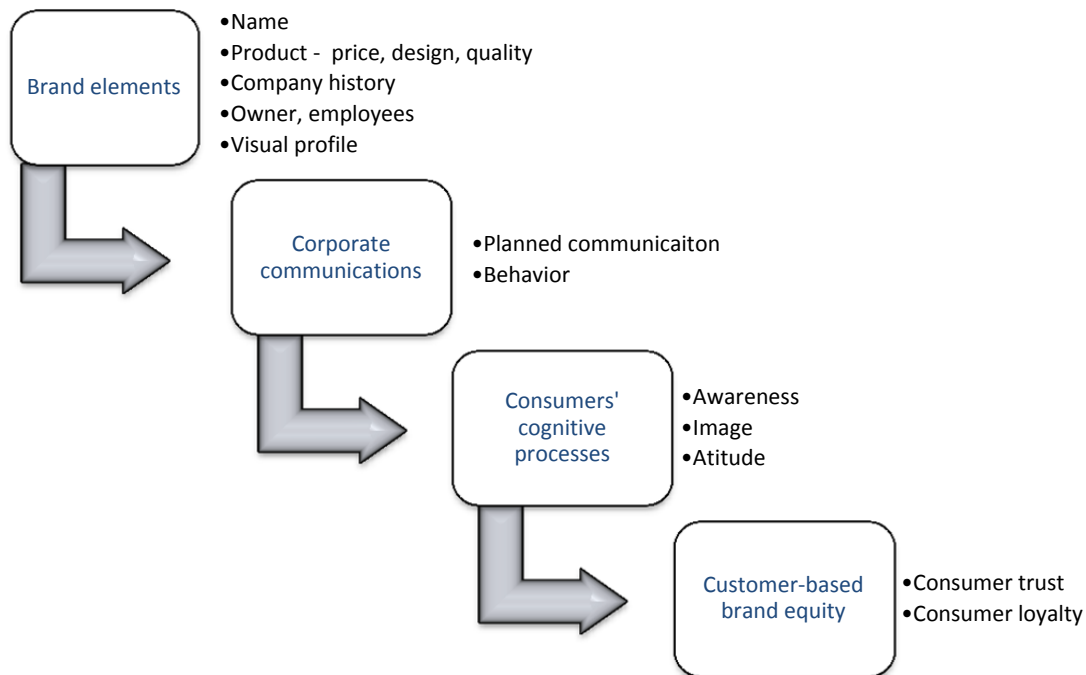
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┌──────────────┐   •Name
│              │   •Product - price, design, quality
│Brand elements│   •Company history
│              │   •Owner, employees
└──────────────┘   •Visual profile
        │
        ▼   ┌──────────────┐
            │  Corporate   │   •Planned communicaiton
            │communications│   •Behavior
            └──────────────┘
                    │
                    ▼   ┌──────────────┐
                        │ Consumers'   │   •Awareness
                        │  cognitive   │   •Image
                        │  processes   │   •Atitude
                        └──────────────┘
                                │
                                ▼   ┌──────────────┐
                                    │Customer-based│   •Consumer trust
                                    │ brand equity │   •Consumer loyalty
                                    └──────────────┘
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Figure 1: Overview: Customer-based brand equity formation

The role of family business identity in corporate branding

One perspective to realize the particularity of family business resides in the identity literature. Starting in the organizational identity literature, Zellweger et al. (2010) suggests that talking about "family firm identity" is a fruitful way to develop our understanding of how family involvement can instigate firm benefits and competitive advantage (cf. familiness – as defined by Habbershon and Williams (1999) and Habbershon, Williams, and MacMillan (2003)). More particularly, researchers that develop the stream on family business and branding employ identity. Craig et al. (2008) introduce the notion of a "family-based brand identity", proposing that this "can be regarded as a rare, valuable, imperfectly imitable, nonsubstitutable resource" (Craig et al., 2008, p. 354). On that note, Parmentier (2011)

exemplifies how brand distinctiveness can be achieved when a family is established as a commercial brand. In essence, research in this area originates in the potential value of communicating the family business character towards consumers. The underlying assumption is that family businesses can render positive distinction and, thus, value from such communication.

FB as a competitive edge

To reach and gain the attention of target audiences companies must primarily communicate their line of business and market offer. Product information is important as it positions the company and its offer in the market, creating distinction from those that sell other types of goods or services. Thinking about family business identity as a brand element enables particular distinction in corporate branding – on the level that takes effect only after the basic offer has been established. The family business identity can then be a means to reach further corporate distinction among direct competitors, but not an element that alone generates a meaningful brand and consumer demand. This argument resembles de Chernatony's (2001, p.36) concentric values model, which distinguishes between category values that achieve distinction and brand values that create a competitive edge. As indicated by Figure 2, "family business" primarily represents a significant brand value, which can grant a competitive edge in a group of firms that are similar in terms offering the same products and category values (cf. Memili et al. (2010), who suggest that family business identity primarily is a means to distinguish from non-family businesses). That is, the family business identity is not enough to make a consumer approach and select a company in the general market place. Its' potential lies instead in the opportunity to provide consumers with a more extensive account of the firm, which can augment the perceived value proposition once the basic decisions of consumption are already made – what to buy, in which market.
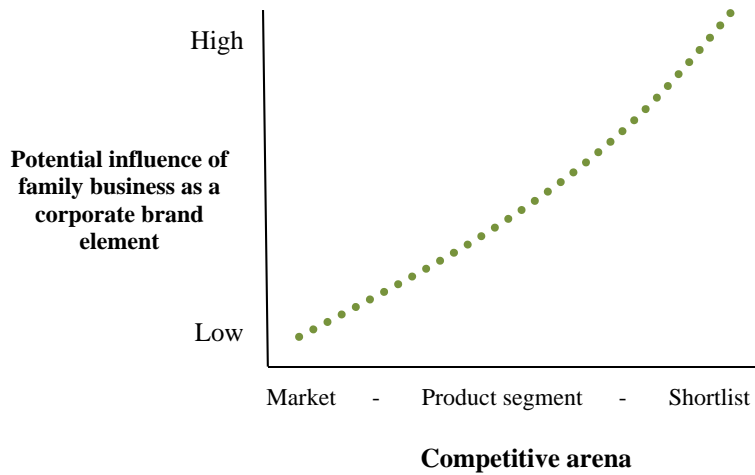
Figure 2: The potential influence of family business as a corporate brand element

Secondary brand association

To explore further the function of a family business identity as a competitive edge in corporate branding, learning about secondary brand associations (Keller, 1993; Keller, 2003; Keller et al. 2008) or image transfer (Gwinner, 1997, Riezebos, 2003) is necessary. The basic idea of these is that "an entity with a strong image and high level of added value can contribute to the forming of the image of another entity" (Riezebos, 2003, p. 77). Thus, the word "secondary" in this case denotes that the associations are supportive (seconding) from the focal brand's point of view as opposed to inferior in general. A similar discussion exists in the notion of halo effects (Thorndike, 1920), which implies that the awareness of one brand attribute influences consumer beliefs about the general quality of a branded offer (c.f. Han, 1989; Kohli et al., 2005). Keller (2003, p 597) use the expression secondary sources of brand knowledge and explains how links from a focal brand to persons, places, things, or other brands can affect the brands' equity by "(1) creating new brand knowledge or (2) affecting existing brand knowledge." In sum, the concepts all reflect how the perceived affiliation of two entities can result in alteration, reinforcement or clarification of a brand's value among consumers. In current markets where companies are increasingly part of complex networks and also subject to harsh competition where good brand positioning is critical, knowledge

about this type of brand leveraging beyond the core product is growing in importance.

Companies' references to being a family business fits well the description of secondary brand association, although on a corporate brand level. Uggla's (2006) recognition of institutions as a secondary source for brand knowledge is useful to further support this idea. In reference to his model of the corporate brand association base, one interpretation is that the family business format represents an institution that bears "deep societal and cultural meaning" (Uggla, 2006, p. 793). Assuming that this is the case, the inclusion of family business identity as part of marketing communications can add to the consumers' brand knowledge and influence attitude (confidence) and behavior (loyalty, willingness to pay a premium price) towards a corporate brand adhering to this description. That is, it could add to the customer-based corporate brand equity.

1. A research model

Previous research has directly explored correlations between the communication of family business identity and financial performance (as measured by return on assets, return on investments, sales growth, and market share). Craig et al. (2008) found that performance is mediated by a customer-oriented strategy. That is, their findings verify how the presence of a family business identity is correlated with competitive orientation, which in its turn influences performance. In a similar vein, Kashmiri & Mahajan, (2010) find that family-named firms have higher performance (as measured in return on assets) and Memili et al. (2010) find a correlation between seeing family as important for marketing and competitive growth in sales and market share. These results are important and interesting in terms of understanding further the influence on business of having salient family business identities. It leaves us, though, with something of a black box as regards the function and value of family business communication in the pursuit of firm performance. The correlation indeed appears to exist, but further research is necessary to learn if there is also causality. Improved understanding for

the influence of family business identity on corporate brand knowledge and equity is important to enable efficient brand management with optimal combinations of brand elements.

The chief aim of the current research model is to lay out questions that can aid our further understanding of if, how and when communication of family business identity influences customer-based brand equity and thereby the performance of the company. As customer-based brand equity signifies consumer responses to brand elements – indicating competitive edge and consumer loyalty – it is one feasible base to further explore effects on performance.

The model centers around one basic rationale, namely that the influence of family business identity communication on performance is conditioned and mediated by the family business identity's influence on consumer attitudes and behavior towards a certain brand (see figure 3). Keller (2003) refers here to the transferability of knowledge and clarifies that secondary sources of association are only valuable if there is a link between the knowledge of the source (in our case family business identity) and the knowledge of the focal brand. If consumers do not take the company's family business identity into consideration in their behavior towards the focal brand the communication of such an identity cannot be said to influence performance.

The model further clarifies that the influence of family business identity on attitude and behavior is further conditioned by two things (see figure 3). Firstly, the recognition by consumers of family business identity in corporate communications. Secondly, the existence of distinct family business associations among consumers.

Extant research specifically investigates whether there is such a thing as a family business image in the market; exploring existing associations to family businesses among consumers (Binz and Smit, 2011; Covin, 1994; Okoroafo and Koh, 2009; Orth & Green,

2009; Carrigan & Buckley, 2008). Smallness, connection to local community, responsibility, high-quality service, limited inflexibility and tradition, are all examples of identified associations. The results indicate that consumer expectations on family businesses differ from those that exist for non-family businesses, for example in regards to the quality of customer service and relationships, trust, and product range (e.g. Orth and Green, 2009). These studies verify that there are key associations connected to family business in the market, which means that the ideas of secondary brand association might be pursued.

The existence of shared associations towards family business, however, does not automatically suggest that these will influences consumers' attitudes towards the focal brand, their decision-making as regards purchase, or their loyalty to the brand. Returning to the description of customer-based brand equity (figure 1), the question remains whether inclusion of family business identity as a distinct brand element in planned communications influences the cognitive processes of consumers – strengthening brand knowledge (awareness and image) and attitudes – and ultimately changes their behavior towards the focal brand. In essence, companies should only be interested in including family business identity as a corporate brand element if it has such effects. Along those lines, Orth and Green (2009) use a critical incident approach with retail store scenarios to explore consumers' image, trust and loyalty to family businesses compared to non-family businesses. While they do find some evidence of a particular family business image, contrary to their hypotheses, they find no support that consumers would be more loyal to family businesses based simply on communication that the company is a family business.

Research that focuses only on associations and attitudes towards family business as such also runs the risk of exaggerating or underestimating the effect of family business communication when it is one part of a wider mix of brand elements. Future research should therefore strive to recognize the relative importance of references to family business on

consumers' brand knowledge and responses to a brand.

In summary, the current model suggests that researchers who seek to add insights about the correlation between communication of family business identity and firm performance should take the underlying logic and conditions into account.
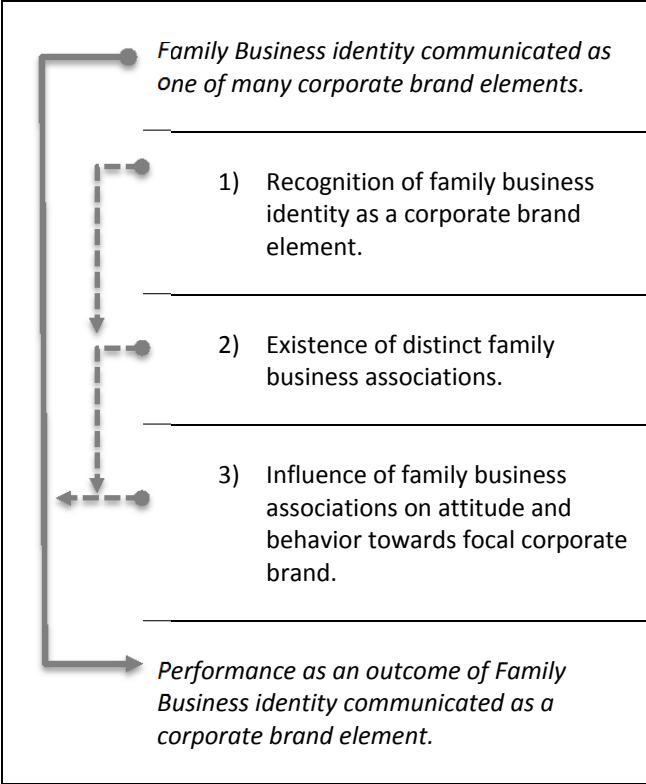

Figure 3: Research model: Capturing influence of family business communication on performance

Research questions

The above research model identifies a basic framework to consider in research on family business identity and brand management if we are to understand further if the inclusion of family business references in communication influence performance outcomes. To enable effective brand and communications management in family businesses, the complexity of markets needs to be addressed. In this section, some research questions of are outlined, which can further shed light on the possible value and function of family business identity as a corporate brand element. The principal question behind the avenues outlined is whether the impact of family business identity communication, on consumer behavior, varies depending

on the present circumstances. The research questions are presented as an extension to each of the three conditions outlined in the research model (figure 4). In figure 4, the research questions are described as independent variables to develop our understanding of each of the three conditions.

RQ related to step 1: the recognition of family business identity

In the light of differences between companies, it is also clear that branding the family business as such is not necessarily a matter of doing or not doing. Companies can vary in terms of how and how much they incorporate the family business identity in branding. A question for further research is whether the recognition of family business identity in communications depends on the type of communication and references used.

Research on culture reveals that the meaning and perceptions of family varies between social contexts. Likewise, the history, familiarity and attitudes towards family business might differ depending on which geographical or cultural focus we consider. In an environment where the family business format is visible through on-going discourses people are more likely to hold associations than in an environment where that is not the case. In view of this, further research should look into whether the recognition of family business identity in communications depends on the culture or country a company resides in.

RQ related to step 2: Existence of the family business associations

Also here the potential differences between cultures and countries are of interest. Depending on the cultural context, not only the existence of distinct associations, but also the type of associations existing might vary. Further research should therefore consider whether the existence of distinct family business associations depend on the culture or country a company resides in.

As individuals, we are influenced by our previous experiences. The individual's

associations to family business can differ depending on previous interactions. A comparison can be made with how country effects on brand image depend on experience with other products from the country (Han, 1989). This introduces another avenue for future research, which also relates to potential value of family business identity in communications. If each individual's personal experiences determine the associations to family business references, is it a reliable brand element?

RQ related to step 3: the influence of family business associations on attitude and behavior

At the very root of brand strategy lays the parameters differentiation and added value (Riezebos, 2003). These parameters reflect the underlying motives of branding and the basic prerequisites for the existence of a brand value to the firm. A particular corporate brand element will only grant competitive advantages if it is able to distinguish a branded entity from its competitors and offer an added value to customers beyond the core offer. In terms of family business, if a very large number of companies in a certain category (e.g. food), in a certain market, proclaim that they are family businesses the additional value of communicating the family business dimension can be debated. This calls for further research on the influence of family business identity in communications on attitude and behavior towards the focal brand. Does it vary depending on the frequency of family business identity communication in a particular market?

Signaling theory (Spence, 1973, Spence 2002) purports that in consequence of information asymmetry; actors will send and interpret signals to assess each other's attractiveness. A company's commitment to social issues can function as a signal to potential employees about working climate, thereby affecting the company's attractiveness as employer (Backhaus, Stone & Heiner, 2002; Greening & Turban, 2000; Williams and Bauer, 1994). Industrial buyers can interpret the orderliness of a manufacturing site as a signal of the

subcontractor's ability to meet with delivery deadlines (Blombäck and Axelsson, 2007). Similarly, price functions as a signal to consumers when they assess the quality of an offer (Brucks, Zeithaml, and Naylor, 2000). A fair assumption is that actors will consider different signals depending on the objective of assessment. For example, depending on what type of interaction they seek with a company. In view of this, research should consider whether the influence of family business identity in communications on attitude and behavior towards the focal brand differ depending on why an individual considers to interact with the company (e.g. as prospective employee, investor, or customer).

In addition, research should consider whether the value/impact of family business identity in communications differs depending on what type of interaction an individual considers with the company (e.g. long-term or short-term). Previous research suggests that family businesses bear associations of trustworthiness. This, however, could be a more important element to signal in situations where consumers are searching for close and/or enduring relationships.

Research shows that the influence of brands and consumer's brand commitment varies depending on the product. A certain product's brand sensitivity can depend on the ability for customers to evaluate the product before purchase, the product's ability to influence customers' identity, and whether the product has primarily hedonic or utilitarian values for users (e.g. Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002; Riezebos, 2003). In the case of secondary brand associations, impact on behavior should depend on the perceived relevance of the brand element to the focal brand. A parallel can be drawn to country image effects, which vary depending on product category (Hsieh et al., 2004). In general, durable goods are more sensitive to country image than nondurable goods (i.e. magnitude of purchase to user). However, the country effect can also vary depending on where the label is used (c.f. Al-Sulaiti & Baker, 1998) (i.e. fit of country image to product). Consider Germany as a case

in point. In view of its reputation on automotive technologies, a German image effect is more likely for cars than for chocolate bars. Similarly, a family business image might be more or less influential depending on what is being sold (e.g. food, cars, clothing, and legal advice).

Basic query and mediating variables:	Independent variables for research:

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of family business identity as part of brand communications is more frequent in certain product categories (for example food and legal advice). Further research would be of interest, though, related to the impact of family business associations identity in communications differs depending on the types of products a company offers (e.g. goods, services, high-involvement or low-involvement products).

A similar question that reappears in discussions on family business and branding is whether there is a difference between consumer and business-to-business markets. In some ways the purchasing behavior of private consumers on the one hand and professional buyers in business on the other hand is different (e.g. Ford et al., 2002). Researchers specifically explore brand management processes in business-to-business markets as something that is different from branding on consumer markets (e.g. Lynch and de Chernatony, 2007). Moreover, when we buy things as private individuals it is oftentimes related to our homes and family life. In view of this, further research might also explore if the impact of family business associations identity in communications differs depending on whether the target audience is consumer or business-to business.
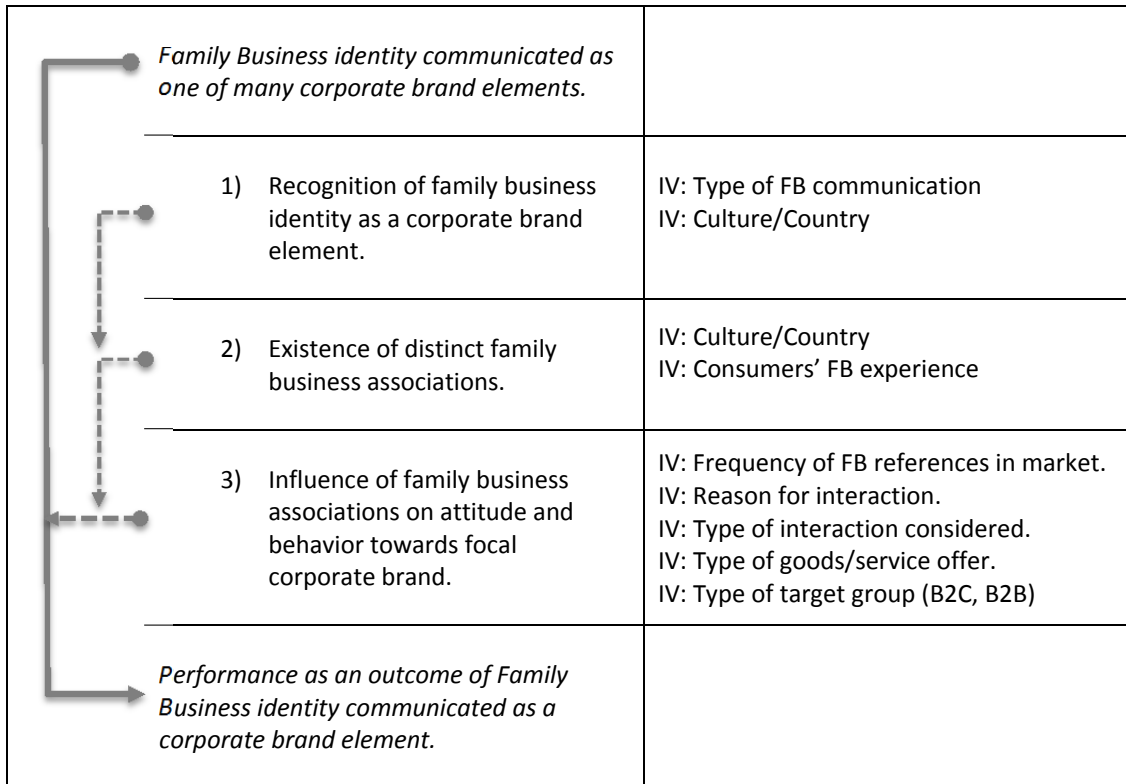
Family Business identity communicated as one of many corporate brand elements.	
1) Recognition of family business identity as a corporate brand element.	IV: Type of FB communication IV: Culture/Country
2) Existence of distinct family business associations.	IV: Culture/Country IV: Consumers' FB experience
3) Influence of family business associations on attitude and behavior towards focal corporate brand.	IV: Frequency of FB references in market. IV: Reason for interaction. IV: Type of interaction considered. IV: Type of goods/service offer. IV: Type of target group (B2C, B2B)
Performance as an outcome of Family Business identity communicated as a corporate brand element.	

Figure 4: Extended research model

Discussion and Conclusion

A baseline argument for family business research is the aim to inform and assist practitioners (Zahra and Sharma, 2004; Sharma, 2004). This ambition is mirrored in researchers' choice to target topics where family businesses either experience a special situation, or demonstrate particular behavior. The exploring of succession, governance and strategic management issues are working examples. The current surge of interest for marketing-related topics in family business research further strengthens the connection to practice but also provides opportunities for contributing to general theory in the area. Researchers have begun to investigate the fact that numerous companies make explicit references to being family business in their corporate and product communications. The special issue on marketing recently published in Family Business Review shows the topic is gaining grounds in the field. To support this development, this paper has reviewed literature and empirical research findings, and presented a research model to continue research from a brand management

perspective. This concluding section presents additional reflections and thoughts on limitations.

The Potential and Particularity of Family Business in Communications

The basic idea of using secondary brand associations in planned communications is that they contribute to the platform of associations distinguishing an entity's uniqueness. In practice, depending on consumer perceptions such attempts can result in beneficial, damaging or even neutral image changes for the target brand. The decision should depend on whether the additional brand element is well recognized and which connotations (positive or negative) are attributed to it. A major constraint in the thought of family business identity as an endorser of corporate brands is that there is no straightforward, unanimous explanation for what it represents. In addition, an expression like family business can never be registered by a single firm. Even if brand images by definition reside with the beholders, organizations holding brands that comprise of registered trademarks can to large extents control brand communications. Consumers' associations to family business, on the other hand, can be influenced by all firms that correspond to the description. While it is possible to identify some features that are repeatedly coupled with family business (e.g. small, unprofessional, flexible), the phrase is neither applied in a consistent manner nor defined in use. Bearing in mind that descriptions of successful brand management frequently refer to consistency and clarity of communications (e.g. De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Keller et al. 2008; Reid, Luxton & Mavondo, 2005), a valid question is to what extent alluding to family business can really benefit the corporate brand. Exploratory research finds that people's image of family business vary. In view of this, the current paper puts focus on our understanding of the function of references to family business in marketing communications (as opposed to the question of whether there is a common image of family business). That is, researching how, when and

why such images might be hurtful or useful for an organization.

Moreover, a person's corporate image can be multifaceted as it is formed through interaction with various sources, organizational, personal and social in kind (Moffitt, 1994; Kazoleas, Kim & Moffitt, 2001; Williams and Moffitt, 1997). One part of the image can be based on the firm's sponsorship of local sports, another on direct experience as a customer, and a third on a friend's story about being mistreated as an employee. Due to these different elements, a persons' image of a certain company either can shift depending on situation or simply be blurred. The challenge for organizations is to acknowledge the multidirectional nature of corporate image and plan its communications accordingly.

Previous research has introduced a number of resources, seemingly unique to family businesses (e.g. Sirmon and Hitt; 2003). They mainly reflect intra-organizational features resulting from the interaction of family and business, commonly referred to as the firm's familiness (Habbershon and Williams, 1999). Employing a brand perspective to the above-described phenomenon, the current paper proposes that we understand family business identity as a corporate brand element that can be used for secondary brand associations. This perspective implies that the ability to describe a firm as family business in a trustworthy way represents an additional type of resource (c.f. Craig et al., 2008). The point this paper wishes to make, though, is not primarily that family businesses are different. Instead, focus lies on the notion of family business, whether and how this can affect marketing outcomes in a firm. Just like brands that have no origin to a certain region (e.g. Asia) can use references alluding to that region if they aspire to gain particular brand associations, firms that are not family businesses might include such references in their communications. The phrase cannot be registered and is therefore available to any company. However, the family business identity is so unique that it cannot easily be copied by a non-family business (Sundaramurthy and Kreiner, 2008).

In a market where distinction becomes tougher by the day, any corporate feature that separates a firm from the whole population is valuable. This is not only true in regards to customers and other external actors but in regards to the internal stakeholders. Although family business represents a descriptive trademark, it might be able to offer distinction. If the thought of family business conjures generally positive and unambiguous associations, references to family business in planned communications can be valuable for the company in terms of brand awareness and building, employee recruitment, market positioning, and management of corporate culture or identity. If, on the other hand, there are strong negative or ambiguous associations to the notion of family business, including it in communications might hurt the focal brand. Similarly, if the notion of family business carries very weak images among most audiences, alluding to it in corporate communications might be counteractive, serving to reduce the clarity and strength of the corporate brand association base. In summary, the incorporation of family business identity in communications is not necessarily beneficial for all companies or situations. The current paper suggest that family businesses ask themselves why, how, where and when references to family business are used.

Zahra and Sharma (2004, p. 331) suggest that the family business field has "had a tendency to borrow heavily from other disciplines without giving back to these fields". They encourage researchers to use insights in the family business milieu to contribute to general theory. Likewise, requests are made for improving the theoretical width in family business research. The current paper responds to both appeals. Firstly, corporate-level marketing continuously gains in importance as the battle for attention and preference among publics escalates. The recognition of a corporate description as brand element is not bounded to family business. Rather, it is a general phenomenon where family business serves as a lucid example of brand leveraging beyond the core product offer. Secondly, the paper adds to the establishment of marketing in the family business field, a subject that is largely missing. One

conclusion is that organizations should carefully consider why, how and when they include family business identity in communications.

When companies make claims to be family businesses, they simultaneously make the claim of not being something else. This adds another dimension to this question. Perhaps we cannot understand fully the meaning and nature of the family business brand unless we investigate the meanings attributed to non-family businesses. That is, researchers need not necessarily focus simply on family businesses when investigating this issue. Mirroring the family business in what is perceived to be non-family business could prove to be as useful. Empirical research with focus on the questions why, why not, and how companies refer to family business in marketing is also of interest. While the current paper takes a rather functional approach to the phenomenon at hand, drawing on brand management as a deliberate process to clearly make the point of family business as a supporting brand (c.f. Balmer, 2001), such research could extend the topic by revealing, for example, the complexity of communication practices and dynamics of organizational identity.

General changes in the economy are also of potential interest in the discussion about family business in brand management. In times of financial turbulence, such as the one world markets and individuals experience since the financial crises in 2008, we might expect that actors on the market (organizations and private consumers alike) increasingly look to decrease uncertainty and to search for trustworthy partners. Given that descriptions of family business recurrently include aspects like long-term focus (Kets de Vries, 1993), loyalty, and stability (e.g. Carrigan and Buckley, 2008), it would be interesting to further research if companies that communicate their being a family business are better off in the aftermath of the crises. That is, are people in general more affected by the family business brand in times of turbulence and uncertainty? Related to this, a pertinent question is whether the frequency of references to family business, and companies' motivation to use them, has changed because of

the financial crises.

The current paper is limited as it lays out a general framework for research rather than testing it through empirical study. Using the model and variables outlined above as direction, additional research should apply both empirical data and specific theory to identify further complexities and nuances of the matter. The model provided primarily urges interested scholars to investigate the connection between family business identity as part of brand communications and customer-based brand equity, by studying more particularly if and how consumers depend on this communication in their attitude formation and decision-making behavior. However, as indicated by previous research (Blombäck and Ramirez-Pasillas, forthcoming; Craig et al., 2008), the communication of family business identity can reflect more than a wish to influence corporate brand equity through an improved brand association base among customers. Consequently, the research focus and model presented in this paper only represents one angle of a wider field. Several promising research avenues are evident, imploring researchers to take internal as well as external orientations to the practice of family business identity communications.

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