



## Family Business and Creation of Brand Communities

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Brand management is an important factor in every business, especially in family businesses. Through brands, firms can build and communicate their reputation with their stakeholders. For family businesses, revealing the family identity in branding influences both the internal and external stakeholders of the family businesses. There is a lot of evidence that shows the relationship between family businesses and their stakeholders, but limited studies are showing how these family business branding creates a community among its stakeholders.

**Purpose:** The focus of the paper is to identify the variables that influences how family business branding creates communities among its different stakeholders, considering all stakeholders such as customers, employees, suppliers, and society holistically.

**Methods:** The study used a secondary data collection approach based on the family business perspectives found in existing literature on how family businesses contribute to the creation of a community and influence the formation of a brand community.

**Results:** Different studies show the connection between these revelations of family brand identity and the impact on the creation of a community among its stakeholders. Family firms differ from other non-family businesses in the creation of a family firm identity, bringing trust, reputation, image, authenticity, and integrity and influence behavior among internal and external stakeholders.

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## 1. Introduction

Family business is one of the predominant business forms in this society. There was no need for a separate term as family and business because most of the businesses belonged to the family in ancient times. Over a period of time, the ownership is separated into owner-investors, and owner-managers (Duranton and Sery, 2020). Family businesses have long-term heritage and a history to tell, and business with such a sense of history, values, beliefs, and identity add to their authenticity among the stakeholders (Brown *et al.*, 2003; Kates, 2004). Thus, the family identity in business has commercial benefits and can be used in business branding strategies only when they are willing to reveal their family identity to the receivers (Beck *et al.*, 2020). Studies found that communicating family identity and community engagement activities can lead to a long-term connection to its stakeholders, establish a family firm identity, and also encourage the next generations to be in the family business (Trehan, Kemp, M., & Glover, 2020). This active engagement among the communities can bring many benefits to both family businesses and the communities as well (Trehan, Kemp, M., & Glover, 2020). This community

may be a group that admires the brand and the creation of this kind of community is identified for the growth of the family business (Getz, 2005; O'guinn, 2001). Brand communities constitute primary stakeholders; they are the key players in every firm. Without their contribution the firm cannot survive; they may be the shareholders, employees, customers, and suppliers (Clarkson 1995; Benn, Abratta, and O'Leary; 2016).

Therefore, family businesses that reveal their family identity through engagement activities influence the lives of the stakeholders and disclose more targets related to their communities than non-family businesses (Lumpkin and Bacq, 2022; Worek *et al.*, 2018). This paves the way for economic development that leads to economic transformation, offering different opportunities for families as well as the people around them (Lucky *et al.*, 2011). Such community creation and long-term developmental goals of the family businesses lead to an exceptional position among the communities compared to non-family businesses (Trehan, Kemp, M., & Glover, 2020). According to Uhlaner *et al.*, (2004), businesses that have a family nature contribute positively to their employees, suppliers, and customers through some moderating variables such as the

generation of the owner; company tenure in the community; community size; company size; and inclusion of the family surname in the business name. Interaction effects were also tested for industry type and gender. For customers, a brand community is a mixed relationship between customers and the firm, customers and the products, and those between customers and the brand (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002).

There is a lot of evidence that shows the relationship between family businesses and their stakeholders, but limited studies are showing how these family business branding creates a community among its stakeholders. Moreover, most of the studies are carried out in isolation, and no comprehensive study has been undertaken by considering all stakeholders holistically. Therefore, in order to carry out empirical studies on how brand communities are created by family businesses, compiling all the variables that influence the stakeholders based on research outcomes would be beneficial. This paper compiles some evidence showing how family business branding creates communities among its different stakeholders, such as customers, employees, suppliers, and society. The rest of the article is organized as follows: section 2 discusses the review of relevant literature; section 3 on methodology, section 4 on findings, and section 5 is on discussions.

## 2. Review of Literature

This part of the paper presents the relevant review of existing literature on brand community, brand community creation practices, how they influence, and the evidence from family businesses. The group of people who have a favorable attachment to the brand is known as the brand community (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001; Fassin (2009). So, each business must recognize its brand community, interact with them frequently, and create suitable strategies for developing a community and connection with its stakeholders (Lucky *et al.*, 2011). The various brand strategies used to create an identity vary from business form to business form. These elements should go hand in hand with the overall brand identity. If they do not, the brand is incomplete and uncoordinated. Brand identity represents the essence of the brand through several elements. These elements include: Brand name, Brand characters, Brand essence, Visual symbols and logotype, Geographic and historical roots, Brand and its creators advertising (Kapferer, 2008).

Through these kinds of practices, if any stakeholders feel a sense of belonging to the brand and the other community members, they can be classified as brand community. A brand should organize a plan for creating a sense of community feeling among its stakeholders by greeting, regulating, appreciating, mingling, assisting etc. All of these will strengthen the community consciousness (Hollenbeck,

Juric & Tang, 2017; Sorensen & Drennan, 2017). One of the basic objectives of many brands is creating followers for them through various means. Most of the studies are related to the online brand community creation for the brands. (Hollenbeck, Juric & Tang, 2017; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017; Khan & Khattak, 2017).

Research done on family businesses has shown that various stakeholders have varying degrees of leverage over businesses and can persuade leaders of the company to start and carry out community development initiatives (Singh & Mittal, 2019). Among the key players, a variety of elements, such as brand satisfaction, loyalty, and finally brand trust, affect the creation of communities (Leninkumar, 2014; Zamry and Nayan, 2020; Matzler and Renzl, 2006). Consumer loyalty elevates a brand's status and fosters a feeling of community (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2005).

Communication of family firm image to the stakeholders seems to be better when more business partners are from the family (Beck, Prügl & Walter, 2020). They communicate the family nature of the firm more intensively. Family businesses present their family ownership or business in a variety of ways. Some even use this to market to another group and keep their true family identity hidden (Astrachan *et al.*, 2018). Using websites, ads, and blogs to highlight the family business brand identity is one such strategy (Martnez *et al.*, 2019). Family names, histories, cultures, and values are a few examples of the elements that family businesses use to communicate these identities. A family business that shares its family identity with its stakeholders does so by using a variety of media, including text, audio, and visual, in addition to direct marketing and personal interactions (Astrachan *et al.*, 2018). These family firms create a community around them and leverage the benefits associated with it. Wellbeing of the stakeholders is a primary concern of family businesses more than the non family businesses (Zellweger & Nason, 2008). Family firms intensify their efforts to preserve their reputation among their customers and are more socially responsible than non family firms (Astrachan, 2018). Satisfaction with customers has a substantial impact on brand community participation and is very beneficial for business performance (Tsai *et al.*, 2012).

By adhering to Sharma's (2004) suggestion to utilize stakeholder theory to analyze family firm performance, Zellweger & Nason (2008) contend that family firms demonstrate an inbuilt incentive to serve the expectations of various stakeholders. Organizational identity theory was utilized by Memili *et al.*, (2010) and Zellweger *et al.*, (2012) to examine how family business firms' family image affects their performance. Botero *et al.* (2018) investigated the associations people have with the word "family firm" using signaling theory and found that customers have a favorable perception of it.

Research outcomes indicate the relationship between family businesses and their stakeholders, but how these influences stakeholders in creating them as a brand community is not completely understood.

### 3. Methodology

The primary objective of this paper is to combine the key findings from previous research on the ways in which family businesses foster community creation and impact on establishment of brand communities. The study used a secondary data collection approach based on the family business perspectives found in existing literature. For that purpose, out of 54 journals, twenty Scopus-indexed journals, twenty-five ABDC indexed papers, and a few reports were used. The development of family business communities from the perspectives of suppliers, customers, and employees are the main topics covered in the existing body of literature currently in publication.

### 4. Findings

Studies done on family businesses have shown that various stakeholders have varying degrees of influence over enterprises and can influence the leaders of such businesses to start and carry out community development initiatives (Singh & Mittal, 2019). Family firms increasingly communicate their family firm identity, thus projecting a family firm image with the intention of creating a strong family firm reputation in the minds of major stakeholders. Because of the particular history of family ownership, identity, and family members who have over time embodied the family and company values as described in stories that have become ingrained in the minds of employees, clients, and other stakeholders, a family business brand is largely inimitable (Blombäck, 2013; Krappe, Goutas, & Von Schlippe, 2011).

Family business contributes to the communities in different ways making financial help through donations, sharing skills and expert advice, supporting the small businesses, and creating environmental friendly products (Uhlener *et al.*, 2004). Family business consists of different stakeholders such as internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include the employees of the firm and the family members while customers and the society constitute the external stakeholders (Deferne, Michel & Groote, 2023).

#### 4.1. Community Creation among Customers

Customers are considered an important stakeholder community. According to Khan & Khattak (2017) brand

communities are organizations that include the brand itself and customers. As customers express their feelings and offer crucial insights for decisions on brand identity, expression, and communication, meaning-seeking and exchanging are also crucial to brand community management (Quinton, 2013; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Khan & Khattak (2017) tested practices in social media platforms, analyzing customer communities, value creation and brand relationships. Customers, as a brand community, have a sense of authenticity and this authenticity leads to brand development (Mudzakkir and Nurfarida, 2015; Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019).

McAlexander *et al.*, (2003), empirically explored the positive influence of community integration of consumers and customers' brand loyalty on further purchasing intentions. Many empirical studies have agreed on the influence of family firm identity on customers' trust in the brand (Dos *et al.*, 2020). Dos *et al.*, (2020) suggest that a firm that communicates its family firm identity positively influences the customers and makes them brand advocates through purchasing intention and creates brand trust. Customers have higher expectations of family businesses when purchasing products rather than non-family businesses (Astrachan, 2018; Bargoni *et al.*, 2023). Members of the brand community can spread positive word of mouth about the brand, and it is a successful approach for doing so, especially among brand champions (Yeh & Choi, 2011). Anaya *et al.*, analyzed that customers' brand community trust positively affects the purchasing intention among customers. For many customers, a good family name may communicate values like trust, integrity, honesty, and dependability. (Mayo and Fielder, 2006).

#### 4.2. Community Creation among Employees

Family businesses play a large role in the creation of employment opportunities, with about a fifth of family businesses in India providing larger employment opportunities (PwC India Family Business Survey, 2019). Employee-based brand communities are important because employee personal growth leads to employee satisfaction; employees and a sense of brand community increase their belief in both brand and other performance (Xiong and King, 2020). However, the importance of the employee-based brand community has rarely been taken into account. Through enhanced reputation, family businesses provide many valuable opportunities to their employees and their family members for professional and personal growth (Trehan, Kemp, M., & Glover, 2020). Azoury *et al.*, (2013) confirmed that family firms contribute to higher engagement among employees and provide a good working environment along with better compensation than non-family businesses.

Employers receive different levels of attractiveness from family businesses separately (Astrachan, 2018). There is a positive association between employee engagement and family firms (Azoury *et al.*, 2013). Family businesses always maintain a long-term successful relationship and a sense of security with employees than non-family firms (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006). There is the least chance of firing employees in family firms, even in crises, which fosters commitment among the employees towards the firm (Azoury *et al.*, 2013). In addition to this, several factors lead to the formation of employee communities, specifically employee trust influenced by employee engagement and internal branding (Saparina, 2021; Deferne *et al.*, 2022). This trust will create a brand community among employees.

### 4.3. Community Creation among Suppliers

Uhlaner *et al.*, (2004), investigated family businesses in relation to a wide variety of constituent or stakeholder groups. From their observations comments from different family businesses indicated that they continued to buy from the same suppliers that their first generation did. They have personal relations with the suppliers and have helped ones who have some financial difficulties. The purchasing strategies of suppliers and different support services from the side of family businesses have led to an increase in mutual trust between suppliers. This in turn leads to the formation of communities (Mutonyi *et al.*, 2016). Supplier who deliver their produce to firms expect to be paid consistency in procurement, receive quick payment and serve as the source of the whole product. Price satisfaction is considered as an influencing factor in long-term supplier-buyer relationships (Mutonyi *et al.*, 2016; Robert, Robert, and Thomas, 1993). These factors contribute to making suppliers a brand community.

## 5. Discussions

Researching family business branding and its influence on the community development would be of great relevance to society at large. The research question discussed in this paper is to find out how family businesses contribute to the creation of community and its influence on the formation of brand community among its stakeholders. By revealing their family business nature to their stakeholders, they are trying to create a brand community around them.

### 5.1. Theoretical Contribution

By analyzing the effects of community formation on branding efforts, this paper contributes to existing theory on marketing in general, and branding in particular. The

results show that the stakeholders in family businesses, such as employees, customers and suppliers, play a significant role as brand community. By substantiating the characteristics of internal and external stakeholders, it contributes to various stakeholder theories. This compilation of the various factors influencing stakeholders would be a useful contribution to the existing literature to carry out empirical studies on brand community creation, using an appropriate research framework based on this outcome.

### 5.2. Managerial Implications

This study enhances the knowledge of how the creation of a brand community among stakeholders results in brand engagement, future purchase intent, and brand development. Researchers and marketers can develop strategies to build brand communities among their suppliers, employees, and customers. They might also investigate how these communities help them position their brand more favorably in the marketplace. The business owners will gain insight into the opinions and feelings of their stakeholders, aiding in the development of an effective marketing plan. The purpose of the family businesses communicating their families' identities to their stakeholders, preventing them from being misled by these promotional actions, can be clearly laid down for customers, suppliers, workers, and local communities. This will help customers to be conscious of their consumption. Promoting family business branding, if it develops community, will benefit suppliers through regular and ethical sourcing, care for employees' welfare generating more employment opportunities and generous contributions to the local community benefiting society at large. Owners of family businesses can reap the benefits of brand community and ensure the continuity of businesses over generations. Policymakers will be able to come up with suitable policies based on this research outcome

## 6. Conclusion and Direction for Future Research

It is evident that family businesses create a community around them, and there are opportunities for these owners to leverage the commercial benefits by intensively revealing their family business identity to their stakeholders and creating a brand community around them as well. Family business groups participate in creating communities among their stakeholders in various ways. Compared to non-family businesses, family firms ensure the wellbeing of their stakeholders. Many variables contribute to the creation of communities among the stakeholders. However, there is no conceptual model to research the extent of the influence of family businesses on brand community

creation. Further study may be carried out to develop a conceptual framework, incorporating all the variables that can be indicators to measure community creation. Whether family businesses that reveal their identity create a better community and perform better than those who do not reveal their family identity or those who are non-family businesses is also not known. Studies in this direction will add to the existing literature and be beneficial to policymakers and family business owners to make appropriate decisions and strategies.

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### Authorship contribution

The first author as principal investigator, has conceptualized and designed the study. The data collection, analysis and interpretation of results and manuscript preparation is done jointly.

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### Conflict of interest

We declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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