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FAMILY-BASED BRAND EQUITY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

KAPITAŁ MARKI BAZUJĄCY NA RODZINNYM CHARAKTERZE PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWA W SEKTORZE USŁUG NOCLEGOWYCH

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Summary: The competitiveness of family-owned companies providing accommodation services is an important factor securing their operations. Among the characteristic features of the family-owned companies are: hospitality, the quality of the services provided and the relations between the guest and the owner which are based on mutual trust. Empirical research in the form of CAWI was carried out between 2017-2018 and covered 83 owners of family-owned businesses. The authors analysed 23 elements characterising the brand of family-owned businesses, including a recognisable logo and name, the quality of the services, trust, openness to guests' needs. The particular aim of the research was to answer the question of the perception of a brand's importance among the owners of such companies. The results showed that in their opinion, the brand is responsible for identifying and distinguishing the company, helping to create the company's image, retaining regular clients and gaining new guests. At the same time, it secures the company's growth by improving its market power, providing its competitive advantage and generating additional income.

Keywords: family companies, brand equity, hospitality industry.

Streszczenie: Konkurencyjność przedsiębiorstw rodzinnych świadczących usługi noclegowe jest istotnym czynnikiem gwarantującym ich funkcjonowanie na rynku. Wśród wyróżników firm rodzinnych wymienić można: gościnność, jakość świadczonych usług oraz relacje między gościem a przedsiębiorcą bazujące na zaufaniu. Badania empiryczne w formie CAWI przeprowadzono w latach 2017-2018 wśród 83 przedstawicieli firm rodzinnych. Analizie poddano 23 elementy charakteryzujące markę firm rodzinnych, w tym m.in. rozpoznawalne logo i nazwę, jakość usługi, zaufanie, otwartość na potrzeby gości. Głównym celem badań była odpowiedź na pytanie o percepcje znaczenia marki przez właścicieli obiektów noclegowych. Wyniki dowiodły, że w opinii ankietowanych marka odpowiada za identyfikację i wyróżnienie przedsiębiorstwa, umożliwia kształtowanie wizerunku, utrzymanie stałych klientów i pozyskanie nowych gości. Jednocześnie zapewnia rozwój przez zwiększenie siły przetargowej, osiągnięcie przewagi konkurencyjnej i zagwarantowanie dodatkowych przychodów.

Słowa kluczowe: firmy rodzinne, kapitał marki, sektor usług noclegowych.

1. Introduction

Tourism is an important sector of the economy for many countries and regions. It can be also perceived as a key development factor. Considerations regarding the improvement of competitiveness of a particular destination or hotel company are fully justified.

Companies providing accommodation services make up a large part of the tourist industry. In Poland, this market has undergone substantial changes over recent years. Firstly, the number of such companies has grown significantly. Secondly, the quality of services has improved. Moreover, new previously unknown projects have appeared, such as apartment hotels and apartment condominiums. Thanks to well-developed complementary facilities, together with hotels they play a key role in the accommodation market (Central Statistical Office, 2016, p. 409). This situation poses a threat to smaller companies which have difficulties in maintaining competitiveness not only through their standards but also through their distribution channels. As a result, they are forced to seek new sources of competitive advantage, one of which – especially in the case of services – can be the family character of many of them.

A very important issue on the tourist services market is the creation of brands and shaping the elements constituting its equity. This is connected on the one hand with the increase in competition, and on the other, with the increase in the requirements of tourists determining the willingness to develop individual relationships based on high quality services, trust and guarantees.

The aim of this study was to identify the elements shaping the brand equity of small companies providing accommodation services on the basis of its family character. To achieve the research goal, a hypothesis was formulated that the family character of small accommodation companies may be perceived as an element of the

brand equity. The second hypothesis was the assumption that strengthening the brand equity of family companies is an element that builds a competitive advantage. In order to verify the hypothesis, the following sequence of our paper was established: analysis of relevant literature on family companies and brand equity, description of the research methodology, and the presentation of results. The final element of the article is a discussion of the results and the formulation of conclusions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Specificity of family companies in the tourist industry

Family-owned enterprises are the oldest forms of companies (Coeurderoy and Lwango 2012) and still play a key role in many countries (Sharma and Sharma, 2011). For all that, there is a lack of formal, commonly-accepted criteria for distinguishing them. The question of defining a family business is a subject of separate analyses (Chua, Chrisman, and Sharma, 1999). For the purpose of this study, it was assumed that a family company is an entity belonging to a given family whose members manage it. The functioning of family companies is a subject of many studies covering a wide range of areas (Hauck et al., 2016, p. 133). For example, socio-emotional factors are identified as one of the key areas, and their characteristics are an important distinguishing factor of family companies (Hauck, et al., 2016, p. 133). It is claimed that there are fundamental differences between family and non-family companies (Sharma and Sharma, 2011, p. 310). However, the existence of the specific characteristics distinguishing family companies is not certain (Ducassy and Prevot, 2010).

In the literature, relatively little attention is paid to the specificity of family companies in the tourist market. There is a research gap in this area, even though in many regions family companies play a key role in building the competitive advantage of this location (Getz, Carlsen, and Morrisson, 2004, p. 3).

Family-owned companies, especially those providing accommodation services, have special characteristics, especially in terms of their management. These features include: easy process of setting up family businesses, lack of specialist qualifications, lack of professional management knowledge and a small scope for using new technologies. Moreover, such companies do not conduct analytical research and are susceptible to potential family conflicts (Petric, 2003, p. 1760).

However, there are two characteristics of such companies that can increase their competitive advantage. Family capital in tourism is not very mobile and owners are willing to invest locally. Such companies are successful in building good relations in their area through commitment to the welfare and development of their employees. Moreover, the social capital of family companies means, to a large extent, the family relations of the owners (Arregie, Hitt, Simon, and Very, 2007).

2.2. Brand equity concept

Over the years there have been a considerable number of attempts at describing and defining brand equity. The wide spectrum of views on that issue results from the different nature of products and markets as well as the objectives behind brand management (Kartono and Rao, 2005; Keller, 1993; Mackay, 2001). Different approaches also result from the fact that brand capital is analyzed in terms of brand-specific inputs and marketing effects compared to products not perceived as a brand (Keller, 2008). The descriptive spectrum includes such concepts as the material elements of a product and added value generated by a brand (Blackston, 1992; Farquhar and Ijiri, 1993; Kamakura and Russel, 1993).

The literature is dominated by two groups of two approaches to brand equity: the financial perspective and emphasizing the value for companies (Simon, Sullivan 1993) and the consumer perspective (Kamakura and Russell, 1993; Rangaswamy Burke, and Oliva, 1993). The first group of definitions sees brand equity as the value of the current and future net surpluses that the owner may obtain as a result of financial inputs /investment (Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, 1998). The second group of theoretical considerations was initiated by Aaker (1991), who defined brand equity as a set of assets and liabilities connected with a brand which add or subtract value from the value generated by a given product (Aaker, 1996).

Another important contribution to the development of the theory of brand equity was Keller's definition of brand equity as marketing effects related to a brand (1993). Assumptions behind that definition pertained to a situation when some results are achieved through marketing actions related to a product because the product is labelled with a brand name, and which are not achieved when the same product or service is not labelled with that brand name.

Definitions of brand equity also pertain to the relation between a given brand to competitors' brands. Brand equity is analyzed as the difference between the assessment of a brand product and a non-brand one having the same features (Edell, 1993, p. 195-196). This pertains to the additional utilities that a product receives thanks to a brand name in comparison to no-name products (Davis and Doughlass, 1995, pp. 4-5; Erdem et al., 1999, pp. 301-302). Another important understanding of brand equity views it through the perspective of consumers' trust that a certain brand enjoys when compared to competitors' brands (Lassar, Mittal, and Sharma, 1995).

Brand equity is analysed in relation to the tourist market. The dual nature of the subject matter of the study, resulting from its specificity, can be seen here. Many studies focus on destinations and their equity (Bianchi and Pike, 2011; Florek, 2015; Hankinson, 2007; Konecnik Ruzzier, Antoncic, and Ruzzier, 2014; Leicht, 2018). These studies show the complexity of the product, which means that there is a wide range of factors responsible for the brand equity of a given place. This, in turn, translates into both the specific character and problems in managing a brand of

a specific area. The second group of research concerns tourist products, namely the functioning of tourism companies and the perception of their product offer. Within this, three groups of companies can be identified: travel agencies, companies offering accommodation services and custodians of tourist hotspots (Chow, Ling, Yen, and Hwang, 2017; Chyong-Ru, Han-Kuei, and Wei-Rong, 2015; El-Adly and Abu El Samen, 2018; Peng and Chen, 2019).

These studies show the complexity of the product, which means that there is a wide range of factors responsible for the brand image of a given place. This translates into both the specific character and problems in managing a brand in a specific area. The second group of research concerns tourism products, namely the functioning of tourism companies and the perception of their product offer. Within this group, three groups of companies can be distinguished: travel agencies, companies offering accommodation services and custodians of tourist hotspots. The question of brand equity is also analyzed from the perspective of the functioning of a family itself and family companies. The impact of a family (in terms views and information from their members) in the process of creating brand equity seems an interesting direction of studies, especially on the tourist market where recommendations/word-of-mouth marketing are so important. It has been found that relatives mainly contribute to the growing level of brand awareness and the perception of its quality (Bravo, Fraj, and Martinez, 2007).

Yet the issue of building family company brand equity should be addressed from the consumer's perspective and the opportunities that the 'owner's family' offers in building relations. While analysing the elements of brand equity as termed by Aaker, one can try to consider the impact that the family nature of a company has on each of them. In the case of many companies, the owner's name serves as part of the business name. The same can be observed on the tourist market. The owners and their families can play an important role in creating the brand, especially in cases of accommodation companies whose distinguishing features are the hospitality and the trust that the owner enjoys (Dębski and Górska-Warsewicz, 2018; Sulkowski and Dębski, 2019). The trust of the founder-owner of the company is the basis for strengthening relations with employees and companies from their environment (Ashley-Cotleur, Kauanui, and Gaurem, 2013).

In spite of the competitive potential resulting from the involvement of family members in creating the brand equity of family-owned tourist companies, this issue enjoys relatively little attention in the literature and is rarely a subject of studies. An exception can be observed in relation to agrotourist farms which are family companies (Getz and Carlsen, 2000; Dorocki, Szymańska, and Zdon-Korzeniowska, 2015). However, there is a lack of research focusing on the opportunities offered by the family character of many accommodation companies which could be used in building their brands.

3. Materials and research methods

Quantitative research was conducted between July 2017 and September 2018. For this purpose, a diagnostic survey using the CAWI technique was applied. The inquiry form, using the 5-point Likert scale, consisted of three parts and included nine subject-related questions. The first one referred to the characteristics of the family companies and included questions related to the type of accommodation companies and its location. The second concerned the brand of the family company, the brand equity and the factors determining the perception of the company. The last part concerned the competitiveness of family companies. This study is based on the results of the first and second parts of the survey. The research covered 83 family companies providing accommodation services: guest houses – 34.9%, lodgings – 31.3%, and agrotourist farms – 15.7%. Other accommodation companies accounted for 18.1% and they included holiday centres, inns, summer rental houses, hotels and short-term studio apartments. The answers to our survey were provided by the owners or managers of the surveyed companies.

In terms of location, most companies under study were located in the following voivodeships: Małopolskie (21.7%), Śląskie (19.3%), Dolnośląskie (15.7%), and Warmińsko-Mazurskie (12.0%). Family accommodation companies located in three voivodships (Pomorskie, Podkarpackie, and Zachodniopomorskie) combined accounted for 24%, while 6.8% of the surveyed companies were located in the remaining provinces.

4. Results

The importance of the brand – in the opinion of the owners of family accommodation companies – is manifested in the perception of the material/tangible elements. Three elements reflecting brand importance: customer-friendly attitude, the right service and the sense of security and comfort achieved an average of more than 4.5 on a 1 to 5 scale (Table 1). Detailed analysis by types of companies shows that these elements are most important most regarding agrotourism farms (4.85; 4.92; 4.69, respectively) (Table 2). The following elements scored between 4.25 and 4.5: response to customers' expectations and requests, guarantee of services provided always at the same level of quality, guarantee of the service quality, and a certain level of the service. As for other elements determining brand prominence, guests attached the least importance (average below 4.0) to risk reduction and shortening of selection time.

In the range from 4.25 to 4.5 the following elements were assessed: response to expectations and requests of customers, guarantee of services provided always at the same level of quality, guarantee of quality of services and a certain level of services. As regards the other elements determining the importance of the brand, the guests paid the least attention (average below 4.0) to reducing the risk and shortening the selection time.

Table 1. Importance of brand to guests in the opinion of owners

Specification	Average value	Answers (1 to 5 scale) *		
		1-3	4	5
Friendly attitude towards guests/customers	4.64	4.8%	26.2%	67.9%
Appropriate customer service	4.60	4.8%	29.8%	64.3%
A sense of security and comfort	4.51	4.8%	39.3%	54.8%
Responding to customers' expectations and requests	4.49	7.1%	34.5%	57.1%
Guarantee of services provided always at the same level of quality	4.47	7.1%	35.7%	56.0%
Guarantee of the service quality	4.37	9.5%	33.3%	56.0%
A defined level of the service	4.31	10.7%	45.2%	42.9%
Trust in a given brand	4.25	16.7%	35.7%	46.4%
Identification of the /company	4.17	23.8%	31.0%	44.0%
The knowledge and experience of employees	4.17	20.2%	36.9%	41.7%
Distinction of company	4.14	19.0%	41.7%	38.1%
Facilitation of choice	4.07	22.6%	41.7%	34.5%
Risk reduction	3.99	29.8%	34.5%	34.5%
Shortening of the selection time	3.88	34.5%	34.5%	29.8%

*Rating on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 means that the factor is unimportant, up to 5 – factor very important.

Source: own research, 2017-2018.

According to the owners of accommodation facilities, the importance of the brand for guests varied depending on the type of company (Table 2). According to the owners of agrotourist farms, the highest value was assigned to such elements as: proper customer service (average 4.92), friendly attitude to guests/customers (4.85), responding to customer expectations and requests (4.85), and a guarantee of the constant level of services (4.85). A sense of security and comfort as well as trust in a given brand were equally highly rated (average over 4.6). According to owners of lodgings, the most important were: friendly attitude to guests/customers (average 4.65), a certain level of services (4.54), proper customer service (4.50), and a sense of security and comfort (4.50). As far as guesthouse owners are concerned, the hierarchy of important elements reflecting the importance of brand to customers was similar to the results recorded for the whole research group. These elements were: a friendly attitude to guests/customers, proper customer service, and a sense of security and comfort.

As regards the choice of the least important factors (those below 4.0), owners of agrotourism farms named only one such factor (identification/recognising the brand), owners of lodgings listed three factors (facilitation the choice/selection, risk reduction and the shortening of the selection time), owners of guesthouses chose two factors (risk reduction and shortening of the selection time), and owners of other accommodation facilities also named two factors (trust in a given brand and shortening of selection time).

Regarding the least important factors (less than 4.0), owners of agrotourism farms mentioned only one of them (identification/recognition of the company), owners of accommodation listed three factors (facilitation of choice/selection, reduction of risk and reduction of choice time), owners of guesthouses chose two factors (reduction of risk and reduction of the selection time) and owners of other accommodation facilities also mentioned two factors (trust in a given brand and reduction of the selection time).

Table 2. Importance of brand to guests in the opinion of owners depending on the type of accommodation services

Specification	Average value for ratings on a 1 to 5 scale*			
	agrotourist farms	other accommodation facilities	lodgings	guest house
Friendly attitude towards guests/customers	4.85	4.60	4.65	4.55
Appropriate customer service	4.92	4.67	4.50	4.52
A sense of security and comfort	4.69	4.47	4.50	4.45
Responding to customers' expectations and requests	4.85	4.53	4.31	4.41
Guarantee of services provided always at the same level of quality	4.85	4.20	4.23	4.38
Guarantee of the service quality	4.62	4.20	4.35	4.21
A defined level of the service	4.08	4.13	4.54	4.31
Trust in a given brand	4.62	3.93	4.27	4.24
Identification of the/company	3.85	4.13	4.42	4.34
The knowledge and experience of employees	4.38	4.07	4.23	4.07
Distinction of company	4.15	4.33	4.12	4.07
Facilitation of choice	4.46	4.13	3.92	4.00
Risk reduction	4.23	4.13	3.88	3.90
Shortening of the selection time	4.23	3.80	3.73	3.90

* Rating on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 means that the factor is unimportant, up to 5 – factor very important.

Source: own research, 2017-2018.

Owners of accommodation companies viewed the importance of the brand through such elements as information about the services, making it easier to attract new clients, building relationships with guests, and maintenance of regular guests (average 4.40-4.41 – Table 3). Equally important were such elements as: information about the offered product, creating the image, identification of the company, ensuring client loyalty, distinction of the company, and increasing profit (average 4.30-4.39). The elements that received the highest number of top ratings (over 55%) were: information about the services and product offer, building relationships with guests, retaining loyal guests, and identification of the company.

When it comes to the least important elements of brand importance, the owners of accommodation companies pointed out: increasing the bargaining power and making it easier to monitor the activities of competitors. These were the elements that received the highest number of the lowest ratings, i.e. in the range of 1 to 3 (34.5% and 41.7%, respectively) and the lowest number of the highest ratings, 5 points (33.3% and 28.6%).

Table 3. Importance of the brand to the owners of the accommodation companies

Specification	Average value	Answers on a 1 to 5 scale*		
		1-3	4	5
Information about the services	4.41	11.9%	29.8%	57,1%
Making it easier to attract new guests	4.41	8.3%	35.7%	54,8%
Building relationships with guests	4.40	13.1%	28.6%	57,1%
Retaining regular guests	4.40	13.1%	28.6%	57,1%
Information about the offer	4.39	11.9%	29.8%	57,1%
Creating the image	4.39	10.7%	33.3%	54,8%
Identification of the company	4.36	11.9%	31.0%	56,0%
Ensuring customer loyalty	4.33	16.7%	29.8%	52,4%
Distinction of the company	4.31	16.7%	27.4%	54,8%
Increase in profit	4.30	17.9%	28.6%	52,4%
The provision of additional revenue	4.27	19.0%	29.8%	50,0%
Information on the quality of services	4.27	17.9%	33.3%	47,6%
Facilitating the acquisition of new customers	4.27	15.5%	38.1%	45,2%
Location information	4.25	15.5%	34.5%	48,8%
Increase of competitive advantage	4.25	17.9%	34.5%	46,4%
Ensuring survival in crisis situations	4.20	21.4%	31.0%	46,4%
Ensuring a defined standard of service and customer service procedures	4.19	21.4%	33.3%	44,0%
Facilitating the sales of services	4.17	22.6%	32.1%	44,0%
Forcing continuous adaptation of the offered product to the needs of guests	4.14	22.6%	33.3%	42,9%
Promoting the geographical location	4.11	23.8%	29.8%	45,2%
Possibility of promotion	4.08	23.8%	34.5%	40,5%
Ensuring development	4.00	26.2%	36.9%	35,7%
Increasing the bargaining power	3.94	34.5%	31.0%	33,3%
Making it easier to monitor the activities of competitors	3.78	41.7%	28.6%	28,6%

* Ratings on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 means that the factor is unimportant, up to 5 – factor very important.

Source: own research, 2017-2018.

The importance of the brand to owners differed according to the type of accommodation companies. Owners of agrotourist farms named the following as the most important: distinction of the company (average 4.92), information about

services (4.62), making it easier to attract new guests (4.54), and building relationships with guests (4.46). In the case of lodgings, the most important were: increasing the bargaining power (4.62), increasing competitive advantage (4.58), identification of the company (4.58), making it easier to attract new guests (4.54), and information about the product offer (4.54). The economic factor related to securing additional income proved no less important (4.50). To owners of guest houses the brand mattered especially in the context of ensuring a defined standard of service and

Table 4. Meaning of brand to owners depending on the type of lodging facility

Specification	Average value of ratings on a 1 to 5 scale*			
	agrotourist farms	other accommodation facilities	lodgings	guest house
Information about the services	4.62	4.20	4.46	4.38
Making it easier to attract new guests	4.54	4.13	4.54	4.38
Building relationships with guests	4.46	4.13	4.38	4.52
Retaining regular guests	4.23	3.87	4.46	4.31
Information about the product offer	4.23	4.20	4.54	4.41
Creating the image	4.38	4.00	4.04	4.34
Identification of the company	4.23	4.20	4.58	4.31
Ensuring customer loyalty	4.00	4.00	4.27	4.24
Distinction of the company	4.92	4.53	4.35	4.41
Increase in profit	4.00	3.67	3.96	4.03
The provision of additional revenue	4.38	3.73	4.50	4.28
Information on the quality of services	4.08	3.87	4.04	4.24
Facilitating the acquisition of new customers	4.54	4.07	4.38	4.52
Location information	4.31	4.47	3.88	4.21
Increase of competitive advantage	4.15	3.93	4.58	4.17
Ensuring survival in crisis situations	4.15	3.93	4.31	4.28
Ensuring a defined standard of service and customer service procedures	4.15	4.27	4.35	4.59
Facilitating the sales of services	4.38	4.20	4.27	4.41
Forcing continuous adaptation of the offer to the needs of guests	4.15	3.87	4.23	4.21
Promoting the geographical location	3.62	3.53	3.85	3.93
Possibility of promotion	4.08	4.13	4.31	4.38
Ensuring development	4.00	3.73	3.92	4.21
Increasing the bargaining power	4.15	3.93	4.62	4.28
Making it easier to monitor the activities of competitors	4,0	4.00	4.00	4.31

* Ratings on a 1 to 5 scale where 1 means that the factor is unimportant, up to 5 – factor very important.

Source: own research, 2017-2018.

customer service procedures (4.59), facilitating the acquisition of new customers (4.52), and building relationships with guests (4.52). In the case of owners of other accommodation companies, none of the above mentioned elements was rated over the average level of 4.5. Owners of agrotourist farms and guest houses pointed out promoting the geographical location while owners of lodgings named increasing profit, securing growth, promoting the geographical location, and information about the location.

The opinions regarding the least important elements of the brand (average below 4.0) also differed depending on the type of accommodation companies. The highest number of answers with a rating below 4.0 was noted in the opinions of the owners of other companies. They named the following elements as unimportant: maintenance of regular guests, increasing profit, securing additional income, surviving crises, enforcing constant adjustment of the product offer to guests' needs, promoting the geographical location, securing growth, and increasing the bargaining power.

5. Discussion and conclusions

When considering the process of creating the brand equity of small family companies providing accommodation services, it is worth noting the challenge of ensuring the presence of such companies in the modern system of online distribution and promotion and creating their image in this environment. It is on the Internet that tourists more and more often seek information about services and where they buy such services via platforms such as Booking.com and Airb&b which act as intermediaries between service providers and end consumers. Tourists also turn to the large platforms such as TripAdvisor, Facebook, or Google where they find reviews of travel services to help them make decisions. Such platforms are tools useful for creating such elements of brand equity as its awareness or perception of its quality. At the same time, good contact with customers may translate into receiving their recommendations.

For small companies, the above-mentioned platforms offer the possibility to build their services into new sales channels and attract new customers, especially those driven by economic reasons, security needs and who seek authenticity. The great importance of customers' opinions forces service providers to manage their reputation online. Small companies operating via platforms face difficulties in creating their own identity and building a local community around their own brand. It is very important for family companies to build their own social networks as it will help users find a place to stay using a personal network of their acquaintances. Actions taken through social media are effective when the information and stories provided are authentic, helpful, and when users find them interesting. This will help tourists to see the value and authenticity of a brand, not just "another place to stay".

Brand owners face the challenge of finding innovative ways to communicate and build a brand. Research findings indicate that for small family businesses, important

aspects that can be used in communication are the authenticity of the meeting the customer, its uniqueness, and mutual trust. Hosts should focus on services that emphasize the credibility of the message (special customer care, meetings with customers etc.). Searching for less mass and more unique experiences and building personal relationships are crucial in word-of-mouth marketing, by taking up marketing activities, managers could engage in activities that would enable customers to experience a family brand. This requires two-way communication with customers, and not just a one-way flow of promotional messages whose credibility is often questioned by the recipients. However, the use of customer feedback helps to strengthen the credibility of the company and encourages trust (Ert, Fleischer, and Magen, 2016).

The research shows that customers perceive the benefits of creating a brand based on the family character of the company. It should not be forgotten, however, that the research focused on entrepreneurs, not on consumers. Further analysis would be very desirable, namely to answer the question: to what extent does the family character of the surveyed objects matter to tourists? It should be remembered that the brand itself and brand equity are closely related to their perception. It seems that building it on the basis of the owner's family may translate into increased brand awareness and perception of its quality. The family can potentially affect the image created by using certain connotations, such as trust or hospitality. Small companies face limitations in competing with larger ones in terms of product parameters, promotion and sales opportunities. This does not mean, however, that they will be rated as inferior by tourists or that they will generate a lower level of customer satisfaction. The respondents indicated such elements as "friendly attitude towards guests", "proper customer service" and "safety" as key to building a brand image. This proves that they are really aware of the differences between small family companies and large facilities. It is the relationship with customers and showing them the company's commitment and hospitality that can balance against lower comfort when compared to larger facilities.

The collected material contains arguments in favour of the verified hypothesis. However, the limitations of the study should not be overlooked. As many as 2500 subjects were asked to complete the questionnaire, but only 83 responses were received. It can be assumed that this was a subject with a higher level of awareness of the potential generated by the family character of a business. If this claim were true, it would have a major impact on possible generalisations of the conclusions drawn from the findings. It should also be taken into account that the respondents come from different parts of Poland (and different competitive environments).

It should be also remembered that recognising the opportunities offered by the family nature of their companies does not necessarily mean taking real steps in this direction. Even a brief discussion of e.g. websites of family-owned accommodation companies shows that the use of a personal motive (the owner) is relatively rare. The ways in which such businesses create value are also an interesting field for future research, the results of which would broaden the comments and discussion presented in this text.

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