

**ANTECEDENTS AND INFLUENCES OF CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP: CASE STUDY
OF A FINNISH FAMILY FIRM**

By

Ahmad Arslan (Professor, Department of Marketing, Management & International Business, Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, Finland)

Email: ahmad.arslan@oulu.fi

Pia Hurmelinna-Laukkanen (Professor, Department of Marketing, Management & International Business, Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, Finland)

Email: pia.hurmelinna-laukkanen@oulu.fi

Lauri Haapanen (University Lecturer, Department of Marketing, Management & International Business, Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, Finland)

Email: lauri.haapanen@oulu.fi

Deborah Callaghan, (Senior Lecturer, Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, UK)

Email: D.L.Callaghan@ljmu.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

The current chapter addresses the antecedents and influences of corporate citizenship in a family owned firm. Drawing from a case study of a Finnish family firm in the medical supplies sector, we contribute to the extant literature by focusing on antecedents such as lack of shareholder pressure, founder's vision and experiences, and intergenerational aspirations, and by linking these to reputational advantage. We also try to explore if reputational advantages have any specific linkage with type of customer for the firm (i.e. public sector customers vs. private sector customers). The Nordic context is significant and appears as a major factor in our study. The increasing role of private sector in maintaining the welfare state and contributing to societal wellbeing emerges in the findings as an influential factor. This adds a rather novel aspect to the literature on socioemotional wealth. Moreover, honest tax paying also emerged as an important attribute associated with corporate citizenship in the case firm. Finally, our study supports the notion that for family-owned firms to receive reputational advantage and long-term competitiveness, adopting a long-term perspective of its corporate citizenship role, rather than merely focusing on short-term monetary gains, is an imperative.

Keywords: Corporate citizenship, Family firms, Medical Supplies Sector, and Nordic Context.

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate citizenship is most commonly defined as “the extent to which businesses meet the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities imposed on them by stakeholders” (Maignan and Ferrell, 2000: 284). Firms that embrace corporate citizenship are typically characterized by having a more strategic (long term) orientation, complemented by a willingness to contribute to wider society (Crane and Matten, 2016). In general, corporate citizenship has been noted to result in increased support for the firm from relevant stakeholders (e.g. Crane and Matten, 2016) and is also shown to result in heightened levels of employee engagement (e.g. Glavas and Piderit, 2009) and positive performance effects.

Many prior studies have argued that family owned firms are often better corporate citizens compared to their corporate counterparts (e.g. Deephouse and Jaskiewicz, 2013; Compapiano and De Massis, 2015; Binz *et al.*, 2017). One of the reasons for this is the inclination of family firms to view business

from a long-term perspective rather than to place emphasis on short-term financial gains, which often comes at the cost of others or resources. The founders of family firms often emphasize their legacy (Hammond *et al.*, 2016) which has been highlighted to play a key role in shaping the strategy, structure, and long-term focus of such firms (e.g. Kelly *et al.*, 2000). In many cases, family firms and their founders have intergenerational history, or desire to create and own one (e.g. Neubauer and Lank, 2016). This long-term perspective can act as a powerful motivator for corporate citizenship and can lead these firms to go beyond short-term monetary gains as the only measure of success. It also pushes them towards a socioemotional wealth model (Berrone *et al.*, 2012). In sum, prior literature has referred to issues like non-financial wealth, social advancement, status in society, and other reputational advantages as important elements for family firms (Binz *et al.*, 2017). In fact, it has been suggested that the reputational advantage that stems from corporate citizenship behaviour is the main source of competitiveness for family firms (Deephouse and Jaskiewicz, 2013; Compapiano and De Massis, 2015; Binz *et al.*, 2017).

This brings us to the focus of this study. Block and Wagner (2014: 477) suggest that the “literature pertaining to CSR (corporate social responsibility) in family firms can be categorized as: (1) empirical papers analysing CSR performance in family firms and (2) papers seeking to explain the different motives of family firms for pursuing non-family stakeholder-oriented goals.” Our view is somewhat different, as we look at both drivers and influences for corporate citizenship in family firms. In particular, we aim to increase understanding of the interplay reputational advantage, socioemotional wealth, founder’s experiences and vision, and intergenerational aspirations, with corporate citizenship behaviour in family firms. We undertake an exploratory case study of a family owned firm in Nordic context (in Finland), that operates in a very competitive medical supplies service sector. The main client-base of the case firm includes both public sector organisations, including hospitals and health care centres, and private sector health care centres and other private organisations. We are particularly interested in studying how corporate citizenship in the case firm interrelates with reputational advantage as well as with the founder’s vision and experience. We also focus on the socioemotional wealth associated with reputational advantage for family firms and examine how it plays a role in this specific context (cf., e.g., Berrone *et al.*, 2012; Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, the current chapter attempts to analyse influences of corporate citizenship on customer behaviour by focusing on potential differences between public and private sector customers of case firm. By doing so, we attempt to fill a gap in existing literature, as customer segmentation in above-mentioned categories has not been specifically addressed in the context of corporate citizenship by family firms. Finally, as the case firm operates in the medical supplies service sector,

we believe that it offers a very good empirical setting to analyse factors such as reputational advantage, founder's vision and experience on corporate citizenship in the context of the family firm. In combination, these elements bring new insight into the discussion on corporate citizenship and family firms, narrowing the existing gaps in the field.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The next section offers a theoretical overview, where key themes relevant to the topic are conceptually addressed. This is followed by a presentation of case study and findings. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications, limitations and future research directions.

2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Corporate citizenship refers to firms dealing specifically with 'social' aspects of corporate responsibility (Waddock and Smith, 2000). Corporate citizenship consists of different actions including both commercial and philanthropic activities with the goals of ensuring profitability while at the same time, going beyond mere compliance with minimum legal requirements. This involves engaging in ethical behaviour resulting in benefits for greater community (Matten *et al.*, 2003). Many businesses are increasingly engaging in corporate citizenship associated activities due to the positive reputational advantages that are associated with it (Gardberg and Fombrun, 2006; Saeed and Arshad, 2012; Compapiano and De Massis, 2015; Binz *et al.*, 2017) despite contradictory evidence of the potential financial or organisational benefits yielded through long-term reputational advantage (e.g. Galbreath, 2006; Halme and Laurila, 2009; Crane and Matten, 2016).

In prior research, family firms are established to be different from non-family firms in a variety of ways (Gudmondson *et al.*, 1999; Zahra *et al.*, 2004; De Masis *et al.*, 2015), and this also extends to how they engage in corporate citizenship. Although it has been noted that "family firms can be responsible and irresponsible regarding CSR at the same time" (Block and Wagner, 2014: 475), there are certain aspects of family firms that can potentially foster corporate citizenship behaviour. These aspects have been addressed in existing literature, covering, for example, relative lack of shareholder pressure for profit maximisation in the short term (Carney *et al.*, 2015; Miller *et al.*, 2018), and founder's vision, family values, and intergenerational aspirations (e.g. Jackiewicz *et al.*, 2015; Baschieri *et al.*, 2017). Relatedly, it has been established that family firms tend to take a long-term perspective on financial outcomes and that they have higher commitment to their local communities (Aronoff and Ward, 2016; Baschieri *et al.*, 2017). We offer brief theoretical discussion on each of these related but distinctive aspects in the following sections.

2.1 Limited shareholder pressure in family firms

Prior literature has indicated that shareholder pressure for short term gains and profit maximisation can lead to profit-centric and short-term behaviour in certain listed firms (e.g. Crane and Matten, 2016; Gavana *et al.*, 2017). As family firms hold the desire to leave a healthy legacy to future generations, this often results in them being more resistant to actions that may harm their links with the broader community. (e.g. Cruz *et al.*, 2014; Aronof and Ward, 2016). Moreover, it has been argued that this relatively closer relationship with the broader community sometimes results in family firms taking a more active stance in corporate citizenship activities because they see the survival and long-term viability of the family firm to be connected to the betterment of the local community (Crane and Matten, 2016; Baschieri *et al.*, 2017). While it is not always family firms that take upon such endeavours as charitable giving, donations to local institutions, housing support or subsistence markets (see Block and Wagner, 2014), it is this close relationship with community that generally enables family firms to build social capital (e.g. Arregle *et al.*, 2007; Le Breton-Miller *et al.*, 2015 and Miller, 2016). Family firms are found to be relatively more enlightened, favouring long-term oriented strategies that foster lasting relationships with customers and wider community through their corporate citizenship. (Lumpkin *et al.*, 2010; LeBretton- Miller *et al.*, 2015). However, what is still to be revealed is how the nature of the customer base and specific socio-political context influences corporate citizenship strategies of firms. This aspect is addressed later in our case study as well.

2.2 Role of the family values

Next to shareholder pressure, prior literature has also highlighted that (family) value orientation in family firms tends to positively influence corporate citizenship-oriented behaviour (e.g. Hammann *et al.*, 2009; Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016). Likewise, the ability of founders (owners) to enforce their personal values upon the family firms' strategic orientation (Koiranen, 2002; Aronoff and Ward, 2016) has been found as an important and contributory factor for corporate citizenship orientation (Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016). Relevant literature further suggests that family businesses exhibit values that reflect intergenerational aspirations. This makes them more embedded in their local communities (Koiranen, 2002; Aronoff and Ward, 2016), which further reinforces the importance and significance of these values. Family firms are inclined to undertake corporate citizenship initiatives due to a sense of responsibility towards local community as well as safeguarding intergenerational aspiration, as such initiatives ensure help and support from a range of stakeholders (e.g. Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016; Binz *et al.*, 2017). Hence, family values behind such firms' strategies play a significant role in the drive for corporate citizenship-oriented behaviour

in such firms. It should further be noted that family values have strong link to the aspects of founder's background and experiences, as well as intergenerational aspirations; which are discussed in the next section.

2.3 Intergenerational aspirations, socioemotional wealth and founder's role

Intergenerational aspirations, not just at level of values, but at practical level also, are strongly linked to overall reputation of a business as well as the family owners themselves, as reputation determines success or failure of business especially in this context (e.g. Koiranen, 2002; Deephouse and Jaskiewicz, 2013). Block and Wagner (2014: 477) note that "family firms emphasize harmony and strive to maintain the heritage of their founders." This is a relatively important feature of corporate citizenship behaviour that has broad-level influence. The first level of influence is from the business founder themselves, as the value that they place on corporate citizenship underpins the firm's corporate citizenship strategy. For example, Binz *et al.*, (2017) describe how families with 'other-oriented' attitudes, or stewardship culture were inclined to facilitate the welfare of others and recognize the wide-ranging benefits of a corporate citizenship orientation. They continue that such prioritizing of non-financial goals reflects family culture generally introduced by the founder (Binz *et al.*, 2017, see also Cabeza-García *et al.*, 2017).

Secondly, the tendency to uphold legacy and ensure continuation drives family firms towards long-term orientation. This long-term orientation connects the reputation and reputational advantage, that are recognized as a key "resources" for family firms (e.g. Habbershon and Williams, 1999; Zellweger and Nason, 2008; Le-Breton Miller *et al.*, 2015). This is important since an important outcome of positive reputation through corporate citizenship is socioemotional wealth. Socioemotional wealth includes having the family name associated with the emotional attachment to the firm, and the pride and satisfaction of family members working for the organisation (Gómez-Mejía *et al.*, 2011). It is primarily a non-financial benefit that satisfies a family's need associated with the influence and affinity in the local context resulting from corporate citizenship initiatives (Berrone *et al.*, 2012). Hence, socioemotional wealth resulting from corporate citizenship supports intergenerational aspirations and offers intangible long-term benefits to family firms.

However, as also indicated above to some extent, the findings of individual studies are still somewhat inconclusive, specifically regarding the financial outcomes of reputation advantages. Prior research has offered varying results in this area due to variance in context and circumstances of family firms in which the research has been conducted (Gomez-Mejía *et al.*, 2011). Likewise, the role of the

founders also seems to be relevant, but still somewhat limitedly understood (e.g., Block and Wagner, 2014; Cabeza-García *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, we believe that there is value in examining these issues further in empirical settings. We also believe that qualitative case studies can provide much needed insight that complements the general patterns found in more quantitatively oriented studies in the specific context of family firms (e.g., Fletcher *et al.*, 2016).

In the following case study, we analyse interplay between all these factors in case of a family firm which operates in medical supplies service sector.

3. INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE FIRM: MEDKIT

The primary data from our case firm was collected using open ended detailed interviews with the firm's founder and strategic manager. The interview followed all the themes covered in the theoretical overview and was transcribed in verbatim and analysed. Moreover, supplementary material from the case firm's website was used as receive additional information for the analysis and discussion. The founder and CEO, Ms. Minna Åman-Toivio, established MedKit in 2008. Her husband, a cofounder, MD Tuukka Toivio, has been working in many countries, in various circumstances, helping the victims in war and disaster areas, such as the Afghanistan war and Thailand tsunami. While operating abroad, they realized that some of the first aid products were either not available in Finland or were more expensive compared to prices in other countries. Following from this observation, the firm started to import suitable, high quality products from manufacturers, and had some of the products tailor-made under the MedKit label. MedKit orders the products from abroad and imports them to its warehouse located in Oulu, Finland, and then collects, packages, and ships the items to its customers. Effortless ordering, investments in customer experience, and fast deliveries have brought MedKit notable growth potential. The steady growth, both in terms of number of customers and sales per customer, in turn, has permitted the firm to shift from relatively small deliveries to more extensive supply contracts. In 2019, the firm's turnover is approximately EUR 4 million and MedKit employed 15 staff, all of them working in Oulu, Finland (MedKit, 2019). At present, MedKit supplies over 6000 first aid, first care, and medical safety product items. MedKit has over 3800 healthcare, industrial, and private customers, mainly in Finland, although the firm delivers products also internationally to countries including civil war-ravaged countries, like Somalia.

4. CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP IN MEDKIT

Corporate citizenship initiatives in the case firm are mostly self-initiated, as the founder strongly believes in paying back to the society to which she feels closely associated with. The founder revealed that even though medical supplies sector is highly competitive, corporate citizenship initiatives are helpful to gain prominence in the eyes of stakeholders. In case of MedKit, corporate citizenship initiatives primarily revolve around offering students work practice positions and theses writing opportunities (e.g. bachelor's and master's theses at the end of undergraduate university studies), as well as offering work placements to long term unemployed people (including both senior and younger citizens). They train these unemployed individuals, upskilling them in areas such as digital marketing, data analytics, and Microsoft power BI (business intelligence) visualisations among others, thereby increasing their job prospects in other companies after going through training and work experience with MedKit.

The owner is very passionate about work experience opportunities and the relative lack of opportunities for young people, as most firms tend to look for experienced professionals. In many other western developed economies, including Finland, job opportunities and work placements for young people – particularly millennials – confront globalisation, outsourcing, and technological advancements (Brynnner *et al.*, 2018). The founder of the case firm feels rather personal and passionate about this topic as her own children are in this age cohort, and she feels that her generation should be willing to support the workforce of the future. This is a very important aspect as it touches upon the issue of the generational rift that has been focus of recent discussions by many social researchers. Young people in developed western economies feel squeezed out of opportunities including jobs and housing by baby boomer generation (Weil *et al.*, 2017; Pickard, 2019). Hence, it was very clear that in case firm, the founder's vision and family values played a significant role in developing corporate citizenship initiatives surrounding skills development and job market opportunities for young people, as well as other unemployed individuals and groups. Millennials are visible in top management team of MedKit as well, thereby offering them leadership traits development opportunities. In case of MedKit, corporate citizenship is part of corporate philosophy and organisational routine.

As a result, MedKit has received significant applause from relevant stakeholders including the President of Finland, the city of Oulu, and Business Oulu. These kinds of corporate strategies also strengthen the argument presented recently by researchers on the future of the welfare state and the voluntary involvement of the private sector. This kind of activity is relevant in making it easier for Nordic countries to preserve their current standards of living (Larsson *et al.*, 2012). In particular, while socioemotional wealth has been linked with family firm's need for affinity in the local context

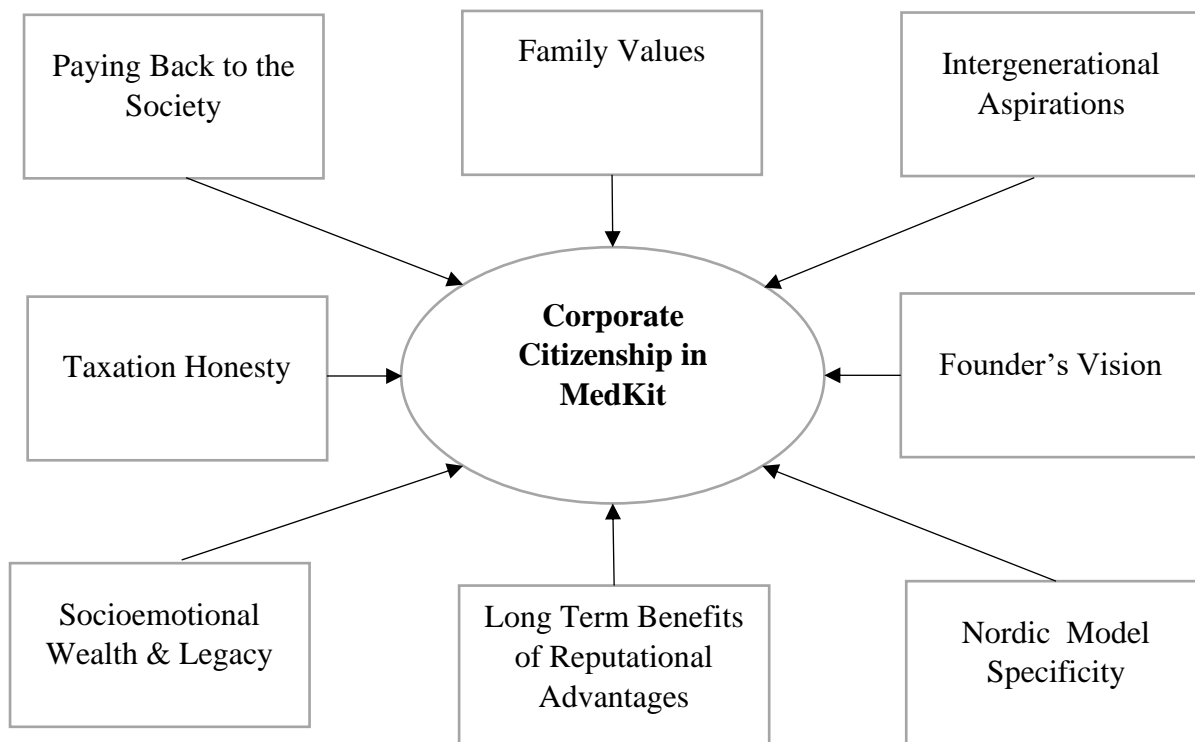
(e.g. Berrone *et al.*, 2012), linking socioemotional wealth to larger picture of socio-political context of a country (Nordic welfare state in the current case) is an important finding. In fact, the MedKit founder specifically highlighted this aspect and said that she has lived in USA and Middle East, and based on her experiences, she strongly supports and values of the Nordic welfare state model. She also referred to the long-term benefits for firms once they get involved in such ingenuities. For example, MedKit's educational program for the long-term unemployed people offers them work placements and job market skills that have benefited other stakeholders by sharing best practices, which further enhances the positive reputation of MedKit. The benefits may not always accrue directly but may realize through more indirect paths.

The case analysis also supported the argument presented in prior studies that family firms are more embedded in local society, and view betterment of local society as a cornerstone for their own long-term success (e.g. Berrone *et al.*, 2012; Crane and Matten, 2016). The MedKit founder agreed with this concern. She highlighted that businesses need to take into account of the social context where they operate. Along with corporate citizenship initiatives discussed so far, the founder referred to taxation honesty as very important. She referred to cases of large multinational firms, who have been highlighted in this context both globally and more locally in Finland. Taxation brings welfare, which is an important point and can be linked to some prior research done on taxation dynamics and differences between family and non-family firms (e.g., Mares, 2006; Flora, 2017). This finding can also be linked with earlier discussion on socioemotional wealth, as honesty in taxation can also potentially add to it; as aspect, not addressed specifically in most prior studies on this topic.

The discussion also highlighted that although direct financial benefits of corporate citizenship are rather negligible, the founder is very happy and satisfied with reputational advantages and the socioemotional wealth that they generate. In her view, and in line with other above observations, these reputational advantages indirectly influence future business opportunities while dealing with both public sector hospitals, as well as private sector hospitals. It was revealed that due to reputational advantages, MedKit has received additional consulting projects outside the main areas of business from private sector healthcare organisations, as they viewed it as a trustworthy partner. Moreover, intergenerational aspirations were also visible in case of MedKit, as the owner would like her children to continue to run the business. She feels that reputational advantages and socioemotional wealth, will help them in carrying on this useful legacy. Hence, our case offered support to prior studies, which also highlighted long term benefits of reputational advantages.

As final point, like mentioned also earlier, specificities of the Nordic or Scandinavian context was visible in our case study. However, also another interesting aspect related to it emerged regarding role of family firms in the discussion. The founder was proud of welfare state of Finland and stressed the need to keep it going and highlighted the role that businesses (particularly family firms) need to play for this purpose. This finding is in line with some prior studies that have emphasized the importance of social responsibility and corporate citizenship for Nordic family owned firms and done this with specific reference to the sociocultural and historical factors associated with the development of the relevant market economy and governance model (e.g. Iversen and Thue, 2008). We believe that this is an important finding that should be further analysed in limitedly explored contexts of emerging economies to see if similar trends and associations can be observed or not. Based on the discussion associated with our case firm, following figure 1 presents key characteristics of corporate citizenship in this specific context.

Figure 1: Overview of Corporate Citizenship Drivers in MedKit



5. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this study was to address and analyse corporate citizenship, and especially observe this phenomenon in a specific context of a Finnish family owned firm operating in the medical supplies sector. We linked the findings to the wider debate on corporate citizenship by (family) firms and its role in specific socio-political context. Based on our single case study, we can identify several useful implications for theory and for managerial audience.

A key theoretical implication relates to incorporating the model of governance and socio-political context into the debate on corporate citizenship in family, as well as potentially non-family owned, firms. A significant share of prior research on family firms and corporate citizenship has been conducted in the American context, with unique institutional and cultural characteristics (e.g., Block and Wagner, 2014). Our study findings are in line with prior studies done in the Nordic context, where the specificities of the Nordic (Scandinavian) model emerge in the discussion about corporate citizenship – especially the continuation of the welfare state model. Incorporation of socio-political context and governance model is expected to strengthen theoretical bases of extant corporate citizenship literature. Another theoretical implication relates to increased emphasis on the role of firms in skill development and employment dynamics in an economy. This is in line with larger debate on increased role of private sector in areas like these which were earlier viewed solely from public sector lens.

We also incorporate some current societal trends in our discussion on corporate citizenship. For example, in the case firm, the issue of generational rift in developed western economies (specifically less employment opportunities for young people), was one of the factors behind specific corporate citizenship initiatives. This calls for scholars to look beyond traditional issues like donations, charity, etc. (see, e.g., Block and Wagner, 2014) and expand to other issues, that may be more “mundane”, everyday-issues that are hiding in plain sight. Examining the founder’s vision, family values, and intergenerational aspirations is needed, especially when addressing corporate citizenship dynamics in family firms. Moreover, these aspects are influenced specifically by the founder’s experiences, as exposure to societies with different levels of economic development, equality, and welfare regimes can influence perceptions towards corporate citizenship. This was also visible in our case firm.

Finally, reputational advantages emanating from corporate citizenship should be seen in overall perspective of business growth and new opportunities rather than merely focusing on short term

monetary gains. We found that a firm that gains positive reputation may also indirectly benefit by receiving business opportunities in business areas beyond their core interests. For example, while public and private actors may have initially different expectations for family firms, they may become tightly intertwined when a long-term approach is adopted.

Our study also offers some practical insights. In particular, family firms do not need to take an extravagant approach to corporate citizenship in order to gain benefits. As in the case of MedKit, merely living up to the established rules (e.g., paying taxes as is expected) and taking a strategic view on issues that companies need to do anyway (e.g., offering training and development opportunities, but paying attention to the immediate needs of the firm) can offer a family firm competitive advantage. It is up to the founders and family members in the organisation to make their values visible in their statements, and in their actions. Another point is, that by embracing the broad variety in their customer base, this may provide family firms with opportunities to promote their business. Public and private sector customers (organisations) may have very different views on the family firm and may require it to take upon quite different actions; however, in the end, the reputational advantages and socioemotional wealth result in useful outcomes in both customer segments for family firms. The study also revealed that embeddedness in society may not bring short-term benefits, yet, the increased competitiveness emerges in the long run. Employment of young people, students, and long-term unemployed people require continuous commitment, but also builds reputational advantage as well as pool of skilled workforce. Furthermore, long term profitable growth of any firm can be easily ruined by breaking the laws, for example by avoiding taxes. This aspect needs specific attention of managers as increasingly external stakeholders including governments and media are becoming strict on this issue.

Finally, we need to acknowledge that like other academic endeavours, our study has limitations as well. Firstly, it is a single case study on a family firm operating in a specific industrial sector, which makes generalisation of the findings problematic. However, we chose this firm due to it being engaged in best practices associated with corporate citizenship and receiving recognition and applause for it. We believe that future studies can build upon our work by specifically focusing on socio-political external factors like the governance model of countries and role of corporate sector in this context as highlighted in our findings. These future studies can analyse these in context of family firms operating in other industries and countries. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies can be used in this work. Moreover, analysis of interrelationship between the type of governance model in a country and corporate citizenship requires further investigation by scholars, as it would help to

categorize macro level antecedents and influences properly for different types of economies. As, corporate citizenship in family firms is an emerging concept, we have developing a table which highlights further areas of research and questions, which future studies can address specifically, along with above mentioned topics. Table 1 below provides some suggestions on how to advance knowledge on these issues.

Table 1: Possible Topics for Future Studies

Research Question/Topic	Context	Methodology
How corporate citizenship dynamics vary in firms located in economic hubs (main cities) compared to firms located in peripheral regions?	Developed economies of western Europe and North America	Qualitative research methods
Analysis of the link between corporate citizenship and cultural dimensions of the society (country). It would be especially interesting to focus on the cultural dimensions from GLOBE cultural project like performance orientation, humane orientation and future orientation.	Both developed and emerging economies.	Both quantitative and qualitative research methods
The role of corporate citizenship in family firms to achieve the United Nations' (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs) as most firms in the world are family owned.	Both developed and emerging economies.	Both quantitative and qualitative methods. Multilevel analysis
Reputational benefits and their influence on business performance in the long run vs. short run: Comparison of corporate citizenship in family firms in different industries and service sectors.	Both developed and emerging economies	Both quantitative and qualitative methods.
Analysis of policy perspectives the corporate citizenship in family firms. Is this specific topic being recognised as important due to its usefulness in addressing certain pertaining social issues or is it still marginal issue in that specific context?	Developed economies	Exploratory qualitative studies.

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