Employer Branding in Tourism: How to Recruit, Retain and Motivate Staff

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Abstract
A fierce "war for talent" has emerged, particularly in the tourism industry, with labour shortages and high turnover rates. This situation challenges employers to secure strategic competitive advantage through their most vital asset, people. Simultaneously, firms must invest in their human capital to increase their value, heightening the significance of employer branding. This paper hence investigates employer branding and does so in the unique context of family businesses, the dominant form of tourism firms, where employer branding takes on a distinct dimension as the family's influence fuses corporate and familial identities. Extending prior research findings that indicate that labour issues often stem from leadership inadequacies and human resource management shortcomings, this paper aims to comprehensively examine these multifaceted challenges and their relevance in the tourism industry. This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing 28 semi-structured interviews with managers, successors, and HR managers in Tyrol, an established tourism region in Austria and Europe. The results reveal that the integration of family values and qualities, as well as the identity and value-based self-image and brand strategies of a business, are important factors in recruiting and retaining employees. This study contributes to deeper insight into the importance, opportunities, and challenges of employer branding in family-run tourism businesses.

1. Introduction

Societal and economic developments such as demographic change, changing values, increasing academization, and skills shortages (Immerschitt & Stumpf, 2014) have led to a "war for talent" (Chambers et al., 1998; Rees & Smith, 2017). This battle for the best challenges human resource management (HRM) to achieve strategic competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic business environment (Petkovic, 2007; McGuire, 2014; Michiels et al., 2022). Moreover, firms need to invest in

human capital to increase their value (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Given this fact and the need to be an attractive employer (Immerschitt & Stumpf, 2014), *employer branding* has gained importance in recent years (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2015; Dženopoljac et al., 2023).

Employer branding has already proven useful in many industries (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Ewing et al., 2002). In tourism firms, it was found to be particularly relevant for to respond to an increasing labour shortage, the migration of well-trained workers to other industries and high turnover rates (Dost, 2015; Gehrels & de Looij, 2011; Peters, 2005), especially since the recent pandemic crisis (Breier et al., 2021). The intangible service nature of tourism products (Madera et al., 2017), their small and mostly family-based industry structure (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Middleton, 1998; Okumus et al., 2010; Peters, 2005) and specific structural constraints (e.g., seasonality, acyclic working hours) make it difficult to position oneself as an attractive employer (Gardini, 2014; Gehrels & de Looij, 2011; Peters, 2005).

Family businesses play a crucial role in the economies of many nations around the world (Rovelli et al., 2022), as they have been able to hold their own for decades in the dynamics of economic structural change, especially against the process of concentration and in the globalization process (Bichler et al., 2022b). Employer branding of family businesses is hence a special case, as the family is the dominant group (Chua et al., 1999) exerting influence on the business. Family businesses not only have a corporate identity but also a family identity (Whetten et al., 2014). This interrelationship creates a distinctive organizational identity as a unique resource (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011). Focusing on the organization's family identity can be helpful in developing unique brand strategies (Zellweger et al., 2012). For example, communicating family values and qualities can be a persuasive argument to employees (Zehrer et al., 2017), which is particularly interesting for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Craig et al., 2008).

Vallaster et al. (2016) show that entrepreneurs have a diverse understanding of employer branding and integrate it differently in their firms. Eventually, every firm has an employer brand, because when someone talks, writes, thinks or remembers a firm as a place to work, the employer brand comes to mind (Gehrels & de Looij, 2011). Thus, also every tourism firm has an employer brand, but the question is whether the brand also works in favour of the firm and how (Sartain & Schumann, 2006). Furthermore, research shows that many labour problems are home-made due to inadequate leadership principles (Gardini, 2014) and inadequate HRM, compared to other service industries where a systemic and strategic approach to HRM is already widespread (Kusluvan et al., 2010; Weiermair, 2000). As a consequence, this paper targets to explore these multifaceted challenges by a qualitative study with (owner-)managers, successors and HR managers in the tourism industry setting. Our findings show how employer branding can benefit tourism firms in order to attract and retain managers, but also what expectations professionals have to their employer.

2. Literature review

2.1 Employer branding

Employer branding is defined as a long-term strategy for the perception of already established and potential new employees, as well as other stakeholders who are in contact with a particular firm (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Tanwar and Prasad (2016) also recognize that employer branding is much more than a tool to attract potential employees, it can also be seen as a retention measure for existing employees (Grund & Titz, 2022). Employer branding can create a clear employer brand position vis-à-vis competitors and prospective employees in the workplace (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Thus, through such a package of functional, economic and psychological benefits (Abid, 2022), a workplace considering the firm's philosophy (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) can be provided.

Employer branding is used to define an identifiable and unique employer identity. It also provides an idea of what the employment relationship in the organization will be like (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Bichler et. al (2022a) suggest that companies need to rethink employee retention in terms of meaningfulness not only in the recent times of crisis. According to Moroko and Uncles (2008), the following three characteristics apply to a successful employer brand: (1) be recognizable and noticeable, (2) come across as relevant and resonant, and (3) be different from direct competitors. This means that achieving brand awareness and communicating clear/unambiguous value propositions (Moroko & Uncles, 2008) and differentiation from brands (e.g., employer, consumer brands) (Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 1993) are important for ongoing success.

2.1. Employer branding in tourism

Working in the tourism industry brings positive attributes (e.g., varied and communication-oriented job descriptions, travel, benefits, pursuit of international career prospects) (Gardini, 2014; Peters, 2005). However, people are often confronted with the disadvantages in this line of work, not realizing the fringe benefits offered (Gehrels & de Looij, 2011). Although the tourism industry has experienced positive economic growth in recent years (World Tourism Organization, 2017), stakeholders complain about an increasing lack of qualified and motivated employees, high turnover rates and the migration of well-trained workers to other industries (Dost, 2015; Peters, 2005, Scholl-Grissemann et al. 2021), as well as low barriers to entry for non-tourism trained employees (Peters & Buhalis, 2013). This development is not only due to societal factors (e.g., demographic changes, declining birth rates) (Gardini, 2014), but also to specifics of the industry, which presents itself as an attractive employer (Gardini, 2014; Gehrels & de Looij, 2011; Peters, 2005). This situation is influenced by the seasonal, small and family business structure of the industry (Kallmuenzer & Peters, 2017), the service character of tourism products as well as specific structural framework conditions, which on the one hand increase the personnel intensity and on the other hand lead to a poor employment image of the industry (Gardini, 2014; Mölk et al., 2022). This poor tourism employment image find its base on cross-level dynamics of "radicalization" and "attenuation" that supports such negative image construction, making it drastically more difficult to recruit skilled workers. To improve the industry's image, promoting the labour benefits offered could be a valuable approach that requires the support of the whole organization, in addition to the efforts of the HR department (Gehrels & de Looij, 2011).

In addition, research shows that seasonal and resident workers have different needs and can be motivated by diverse factors, which poses an additional challenge (Lundberg et al., 2009). However, the shortage of skilled workers can be compensated by the deployment of family members, for example by making more flexible working arrangements and adapting their own lifestyle to the firm (Peters & Buhalis, 2013). At this point, the phenomenon of black sheep must also be mentioned. This refers to those tourism firms that do not focus on appreciation towards employees. However, these are precisely the businesses that repeatedly appear in the media through negative reports (e.g., 12-hour gagging contracts, negative word of mouth, patriarchal bosses). Many of these stories are partly cliché, but in fact many of these negative phenomena are based on a misunderstanding and lack of training in personnel management.

2.2. Employer branding in family businesses in tourism

HRM in family businesses in tourism is peculiar (Plaikner, 2018). Attracting and retaining employees with the right skills, knowledge and attitudes is challenging (Becic & Crnjar, 2009; Jones & Haven-Tang, 2005). The overlap between family and business in particular leads to a volatile situation in general human resource strategies (e.g., selection, compensation, evaluation, development) (Astrachan & Kolenko, 1994; Reid & Adams, 2001). The majority of human resource policies are

shaped by family managers. As a result, they are shaped by family internal norms and values (Arregle et al., 2007; Distelberg & Blow, 2010). Thus, the maintenance of family ties plays a central role in determining human resources work in family businesses. Moreover, there is a link between family and business growth (Basco & Pérez Rodríguez, 2009; Barbera & Moores, 2013).

Family businesses can have a more positive work climate, higher levels of involvement, trust and commitment (Märk & Situm, 2018), exposing employees to strong family influence. Kallmuenzer et al. (2019) imply that tourism firms should, among other things, know their business environment well and build on the skills and experience level of employees as key factors for company performance. Hence, the development of family-oriented working relationships (Ward, 1988), characterized by warmth, friendliness and intimacy (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003), as well as a professional approach to strategic HRM, could contribute to the financial performance of these businesses (Carlson et al., 2006).

While other industries systematized their strategic HRM years ago, the tourism industry only recently began to advocate for a more strategic approach (Dost, 2015). Baum (2015) in his overview of the changes in human resources in hospitality and tourism in recent years and the current key issues in the industry, notes that progress towards more mature, fair and respectful strategic human resources management in hospitality and tourism has been slow.

The small and medium-sized structure of family businesses in the tourism industry leads to disadvantages in terms of employer branding. Compared to strong brands, unknown SMEs convey a limited sense of prestige to employees. In addition, these businesses lack training opportunities, as well as aggressive communication regarding their advantageous characteristics and are also hardly flexible in terms of working hours (Immerschitt & Stumpf, 2014). Considering these disadvantages, some tourism businesses use their location to position themselves as attractive employers (Peters & Siller, 2014). The reason for this is that the attractiveness of the firm's location can have an influence on the perception of employees (Baum, 2015; Peters & Siller, 2014; Petkovic, 2007).

These firms are valued for family-like, personal and authentic relationships between employers and employees, low internal power structures and limited corporate politics, but they also have great potential to develop unique employer promises (Plaikner, 2018). These specific characteristics of family businesses offer ideal conditions for combining economic performance with human values (e.g., appreciation).

Family businesses are predominantly able to develop unique brand strategies because they are able to integrate the family identity of the business and its different attributes (Zellweger et al., 2012). Family identities are intangible (Craig et al., 2008), firm-specific, unique, inimitable and identifiable. They also personify firms externally in the marketplace (Zellweger et al., 2012). Through family-based brand identities and associated positive associations (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011), family businesses can gain an advantage over non-family businesses (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011) and, thus, differentiate themselves from a wide range of competitors (Craig et al., 2008; Peters & Buhalis, 2004).

Family businesses enjoy a reputational advantage due to the family being an integral part of the business (Whetten et al., 2014). They project a positive image associated with values such as sustainability, reliability, authenticity (Zanon et al., 2019), credibility, humility and respect (Dörflinger et al., 2013). In contrast to anonymous, impersonal firms, family businesses are authentic personalities and guarantee stability and high quality with their name (Zanon et al., 2019). However, stakeholders may also ascribe negative attributes (e.g., nepotism, lack of professionalism, stagnation, resistance to change) to family businesses. Some family businesses choose to hide their identity as a family business and refrain from presenting themselves as a family business. Thus, the extent to which these businesses express their family ties varies depending on the degree of family business pride, community social ties and long-term orientation (Zellweger et al., 2012).

Family businesses in particular are encouraged to effectively use their family ties to develop family brand equity or reputational capital due to a lack of economies of scale and scope. This allows for improved business performance (Craig et al., 2008), which has already been recognized by some

family hotels in the Alpine region. They use their family names to represent the high service quality of their offers. In this way, they show that family businesses in the tourism industry can also build strong brands with a special emotional added value based on personal relationships between family and staff, or customers (Peters et al., 2007). It is more difficult for smaller family businesses in particular to achieve a certain level of recognition as an employer. Job advertisements in particular offer an important but neglected tool for promoting the employer image. According to Petry at al. (2022), the signalling effect of a job advertisement is strongest when it combines an exciting and challenging description of the tasks with potential career opportunities in addition to information about the company and, of course, the salary. The presentation of the family name, personality and family business history can lead to further competitive advantages (Getz & Carlsen, 2005).

2.3. Enhancing family businesses through employee appreciation

Plaikner (2018) suggests that family businesses' strong sense of regional social responsibility, their long-term and sustainable orientation and the reliability and high regard for employees associated with the entrepreneurial family are decisive factors in creating a strong employer brand. Employee appreciation has the potential to stimulate what these family businesses require (Kallmuenzer & Peters, 2017), committed employees oriented to passion and a drive towards the family values und shared vision.

Although family businesses are valued for their familial, personal and authentic employer-employee relationships, low internal power structures and limited corporate policies, they have great potential to develop a unique employer promise (or employer branding proposition). This strengthens their regional positioning (Dörflinger et al. 2013).

In particular, visual and textual cues (e.g., name or pictures of the owning family) are used to communicate, for example, the values and image of family businesses (Zanon et al., 2019). According to Scholl-Grissemann et al. (2021), tourism destinations in particular should promote their family business composition. This is not only key to positioning family businesses more strongly in the market, but also in the labour market (Bufquin et al., 2021), facing a shortage of skilled workers. According to Breier et al. (2021), digital marketing focused on hospitality and family values creates a feeling of trust and attracts qualified employees through an appreciative attitude, especially in times of crisis. The direct effect of family business image promotion on perceived brand authenticity underpins the notion that family businesses can leverage a strategic competitive advantage by communicating their family nature to the outside world.

2.4. The role of women in employer branding

Another key aspect to consider for the development of family businesses as employer brands is the role of women (Campopiano et al., 2017). In most societies, the status of women in business has greatly improved in the 20th century. Nevertheless, limited access to positions of power, as well as subordination are often still evident, but the number of women in leadership positions is increasing (Coleman, 2003). Carli & Eagly (2001) emphasize that there must be a balance between male and female power. Therefore, women must be represented in large numbers (Carli & Eagly, 2001). This requires role models and mentors for potential female leaders to develop leadership mentalities (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

Women in leadership positions can face numerous obstacles throughout their careers. In particular, reconciling career, personal ambitions and motherhood poses significant challenges for women (Blair-Loy & Dehart, 2003; Folberg et al., 2004; Murray, 2006). This is because career advancement has a negative effect on family, relationships and personal well-being (Staggenborg, 1998). For example, historical examples and role models also lead women to believe that holding leadership

positions creates deficits in other areas of life (Levitt, 2010). In addition, the stress level is further increased by dynamic leadership positions (Blair-Loy & Dehart, 2003).

In order to reconcile career and private life, Chisholm-Bruns et al. (2017) recommend that firms offer more flexible working time models, allowing women to be more involved in leadership positions. Equal pay for equal work also plays a central role, as women are disadvantaged by the difference in pay between men and women. This difference in particular, makes leadership positions less desirable for women. Because of this, even greater deficits in female leadership emerge (Chrisholm-Burns et al., 2017). In the tourism sector in particular, the majority of female employees are overrepresented in low-paid, part-time and casual jobs and underrepresented in management positions (Hutchings et al., 2020).

This study is therefore also particularly interested in exploring the role of women in the development of an employer brand of tourism companies and especially in family businesses, which is still under-researched both in practice and in the literature.

3. Method

A qualitative research design was chosen for this explorative study to develop a better understanding of the factors that lead to the development of a stronger employer brand in the tourism industry. Semi-structured interviews were used as a means of data collection. This type of interview enables insights to be gained into the narratives and direct quotations of the interviewees (Gast et al., 2019), regarding "[...] their attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, intentions, actions and experiences" (Dana & Dana, 2005, p. 82). For the interviews, a guideline was developed in advance based on the previously researched literature (Mayring, 2014).

Table 1. **Overview of the regions and their surveyed employers (AGK) and employees (ANK)**

Region	Number of respondents (anonymization)	
Kitzbühel/Kufstein	1 Manager (AGK A)	4 Owner-Managers (AGK B - AGK E)
Schwaz	1 Manager (AGK AA)	2 Owner-Managers (AGK F, AGK H)
	2 Successors (AGK G, AGK I - 2)	1 Human Resources Manager (AGK I - 1)
Innsbruck-Land	1 Holder (AGK Z)	1 Owner-Manager (AGK J)
Imst/Pitztal	2 Managers (AGK K, AGK L)	
St. Anton/Serfaus	1 Manager (AGK M)	2 Owner-Managers (AGK O, AGK P)
	1 Successor (AGK N)	
East Tyrol	5 Managers (AGK Q, AGK T, AGK V - AGK X)	1 Holder (AGK U)
	3 HR Managers (AGK R, AGK S, AGK Y)	9 Employees (ANK Q - ANK Y)

Source: authors

28 interviews with (owner) managers, successors and HR managers of tourism businesses took place in 2018 in all seasons in firms in various tourism regions of Tyrol, Austria (Table 1). The regions are divided as follows: (1) Kitzbühel/Kufstein, (2) Schwaz, (3) Innsbruck-Land, (4) Imst/Pitztal, (5) St. Anton/Serfaus and (6) Osttirol. The interviews lasted 48 minutes on average. In addition to the employers, employees were also interviewed in order to reveal the perceptions of employers and employees. For this purpose, 9 employees in East Tyrol were interviewed. This region is highly significant precisely because of the different regional development. The sample size for both employers and employees was determined using theoretical saturation. In doing so, interviews are conducted until sufficient usable data is available and no more new insights can be acquired (Guest et al., 2006). Theoretical saturation was reached much earlier for the employees with 9 interviews, whereas this was only achieved for the employers with 28 interviews.

After completion of the interviews , the interviews were transcribed and divided into categories with the help of a coding framework derived from the guideline. The interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis with technical support from MAXQDA (Kuckartz, 2018; Mayring, 2014; Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2019). The formation of the categories is based on Mayring (2014) and the coding on Kuckartz (2018). Figure 1 shows the individual categories into which the respondents' statements were divided and with which the results were derived.

Figure 1. **Hierarchical code subcode model for employer branding (firm focus)**
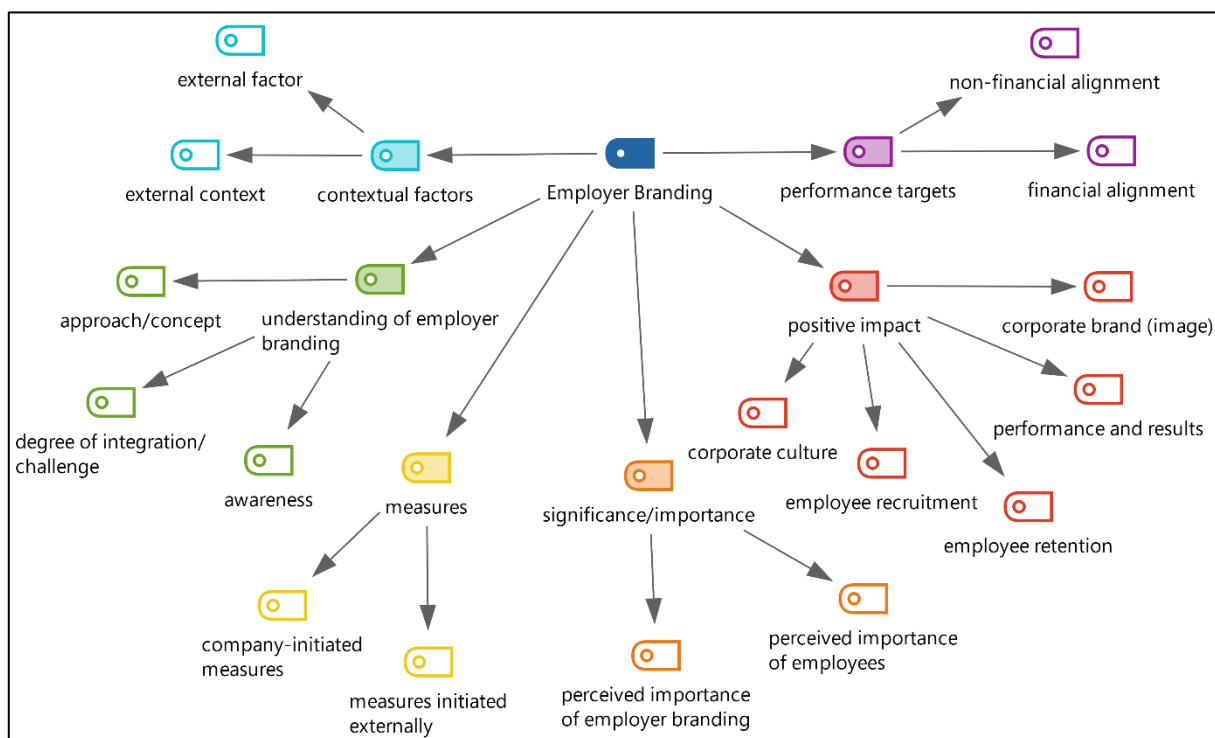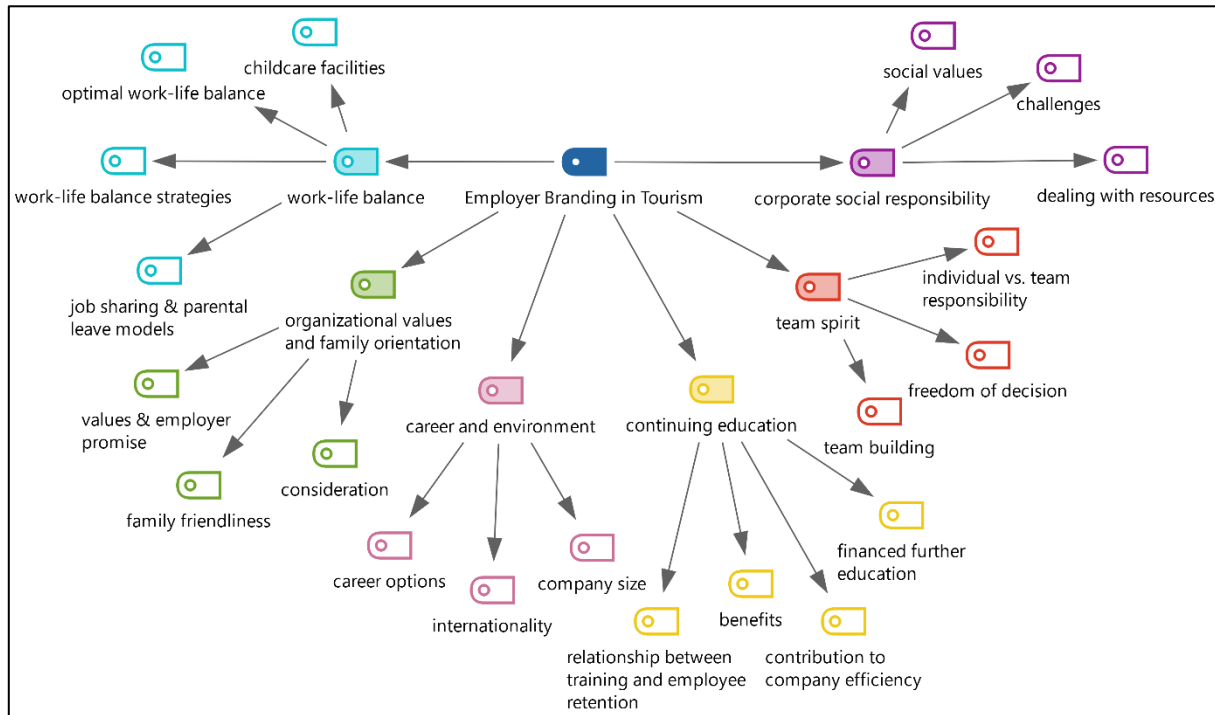

Source: authors (created with MAXQDA, 2022)

In addition, six expert interviews were conducted with female participants (EX1 - EX6) in leading positions in tourism firms (e.g., managing director, marketing manager) in 2021 to explore the specific role of women in employer branding. Employer branding requires role models and mentors for potential female leaders to develop leadership mentalities (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Female experts that have sufficient management responsibility and were characterized by the fact that they are/were all directly confronted with the issue of family-work balance were recruited. The time lag of interviews between 2018 and 2021 had the advantage of also including the coronavirus pandemic, which was

particularly significant for the labour issue in the tourism industry. The time lag allowed to include perspectives before and after the first peak of the corona pandemic, while the specific female view allowed for variance. The average duration of the interviews was 36 minutes. The evaluation of the conducted expert interviews was carried out in the same way as the evaluation of the interviews with employers and employees (see previous paragraph). Figure 2 shows the respective categories from the expert interviews.

Figure 2. **Hierarchical code-subcode model on the topic of employer branding (women focus)**

Source: authors (created with MAXQDA, 2022)

4. Results

4.1. Contextual external factors

The majority of the interviewed entrepreneurs see their current position with regard to employees as positive because of their permanent employees. The same is perceived by the employees. In particular, the relationship with the employer and the working conditions are valued. Nevertheless, entrepreneurs repeatedly encounter negative undertones when looking for new candidates. The results particularly point to a lack of interest on the part of local workers. Therefore, firm are forced to neglect their strategies and further development. According to AGK G, their positioning "[...] is fine for what we offer our guests [...] but to develop further [...] it clearly needs more".

The current situation of a business is also influenced by its size. Not only smaller, but also larger enterprises can have both advantages and disadvantages. For example, the size of the firm can influence the following factors: Closeness of employer-employee relations, family atmosphere of the firm, flexibility of working hours and financial resources. Firm size is crucial for employees' perception of the business, as the type of workplace depends on employees' preferences.

"This is something individual [...]. The bigger [the firm is] [...], the more organization is needed, i.e., working hours, division of labour, it's all organized. Not everyone likes that, they want individuality, small family structures where everything is flexible." (AGK B)

The interviewed entrepreneurs attach particular importance to a positive image as an employer, especially in their own region. A good reputation enables the promotion of positive word of mouth, which potentially attracts new (local) employees. "That is why it is actually important to be positioned externally as a good organization, then you have won half the war. Then people come and ask and organize among themselves [...]" (AGK D). Similarly, most firms see a high level of regional social responsibility. This concerns, for example, the creation of jobs, the decision for village life and the development of infrastructure or the reduction of rural exodus. The large number of tourist job offers and a small number of local workers may also lead to a low level of regional social responsibility on the part of enterprises. Regional cohesion and the integration of all stakeholders is seen by some family businesses as crucial to the success of the whole region.

"I think our region lives from tourism (....) and therefore we certainly have a certain social responsibility, also in terms of making young people feel comfortable in our region so that they can identify with the whole. [...]" (AGK N)

Apart from the shortage of skilled workers, a poor industry image seems to be the most frequently discussed issue in the tourism industry. Seasonal businesses may be more affected than year-round operations. Unhealthy employer-employee relations can also lead employees to take advantage of their position of power. This creates additional pressure through price wars for the best workers. "And I think if I tell a waiter that he is not doing well [...] it doesn't attract him to stay. Because he can easily find a new job, and maybe they pay even more" (AGK C).

4.2. Understanding employer branding

The majority of entrepreneurs have heard of employer branding, but their understanding of the term is fragmented. In contrast, the employees surveyed have never heard of this term. The interviewed firms already implement measures that are to be seen as part of employer branding. This is often not entirely clear to them. On the one hand, there is an identity-oriented understanding of employer branding, starting with the internal quality as an employer, up to aspects such as common organizational culture or deep employee identification. On the other hand, the function of employer branding as an external communication tool to increase awareness and to project a desired external image as an employer is emphasized. In this case, there is an assumption that employer branding is closely related to social media and the internet.

Some of the employers interviewed suggested that employer branding is only feasible for larger firms. Most firms place great emphasis on providing attractive workplaces and actively seek to improve and publicize their high quality as employers. Therefore, the actual implementation rates of employer branding, as defined for this study, seem to be rather low. The reasons seem to be closely linked to their SME structure:

"It's getting really complex. Sure, you can do a lot with your employees (....), but where does it end and where does it start? I think considering how big our firm is, it's enough if we manage [...] [to give our employees] that personal touch [and that] someone is there for them if there is a problem [...]." (AGK P)

4.3. Measures to recruit, retain and motivate staff

Family businesses in the tourism industry are currently taking a wide range of measures to recruit, retain and motivate staff, as well as to implement employer branding effectively. These measures include activities in both performance and communication policies. Employees take notice of these efforts as they are aware that measures are being taken to make the firm more attractive.

Measures include leisure activities such as hiking, skiing, tobogganing and excursions, as well as celebrating or eating together. However, for family businesses general aspects (e.g., employee well-being, ensuring a fair and positive working environment, ensuring reasonable, interactive, equal and individual needs, listening to employees' problems) seem to be essential. In addition, the personal relationships that are shaped by family values represent the greatest potential to be communicated for the employer attractiveness of family businesses. The family working atmosphere and the management of the firm as a large family, are mentioned as important factors for positively influencing the behavior of employees.

"They are actually part of the family for me. Trying to run the house like a big family and dealing with the staff and making sure my staff are doing well is my main job." (AGK F)

While communicating family values and qualities can have a positive impact on employees, not all respondents relate equally to their family ties. Nevertheless, respondents feel it is essential to emphasize values (e.g., praise, recognition, constructive feedback). AGK K states that "everyone's need [is] [...] for someone to say you did a good job today, that was perfect today". This is seen by employers as more motivating than small monetary rewards. Furthermore, strategic HRM measures should focus on many diverse areas. Although fair remuneration, salary and regulated working hours are seen as basic requirements, these are not the most important factors for the well-being of employees. Therefore, "the staff rooms are designed to make you feel right at home" (ANK T).

4.4. Significance of employees

The views of the entrepreneurs interviewed regarding the importance of implementing employer branding or strategic HRM in family businesses in the tourism industry vary widely. Some businesses recognize that a systemic approach to strategic HR management is critical to adequately address the current labour market situation. Other businesses, however, question the need for strategic implementation of employer branding. This is mainly done by small-structured firms that fear an increasing complexity of strategic HR management due to employer branding and prefer to focus on human factors and their gut feeling. Even if the development of a strategic employer branding concept does not seem important to firms, the high importance of employees is generally recognized. Firms see their employees as the most important resource, who are of immeasurable value to their success. According to the entrepreneurs, it is necessary to get along with the staff and work together in order to retain them. In this respect, fair and respectful treatment is important to employees.

"That the staff are treated fairly in any case. That you are competent. That you can talk to the boss, especially if something doesn't fit or something has happened. That you always dare to say anything if something has gone wrong or something like that." (ANK Q)

Furthermore, the implementation of employer branding and strategic HRM is linked to certain financial aspects. Employees are a significant expense item due to the high costs in addition to the normal salary (e.g., housing, catering), the high non-wage labour costs and an increased price war for particularly qualified employees. Nevertheless, the interviewed firms state that employees are not to be seen as a burden but as a source of profit. Thus, investing in them is not to be seen as a waste.

4.5. Positive impact of word-of-mouth advertising

Firms quite frequently mention the positive effects that result from word-of-mouth advertising by internally satisfied employees. For example, AGK N states that "we are known as a good employer. [...] But we have just found out that we have already received some applications for the summer season from employees who work in other hotels here in St. Anton or Lech, [this is] in a way a good feedback [...]". It is also evident from the interviews with the employees that the measures taken by the firms are successful. On the one hand, it is stated that employers make a great effort in the context of an employment relationship and that this ensures satisfaction. On the other hand, it is also perceived that employers make efforts to find new employees via platforms and media. Furthermore, it can be stated that firms are offering more and more additional services (e.g., board, lodging) for employees.

"What an effort, she actually does everything, what wishes, if you have wishes, no matter whether it's workwear or something else, everything is implemented by her and we get everything from her, so it's very atypical for our sector and that's just really great with us, in the business, with the boss, yes". (ANK V)

4.6. The role of employees for reaching performance targets

Family businesses see financial performance as a necessary prerequisite for business continuity, but tend to evaluate their success in terms of stakeholder satisfaction. In this regard, AGK B states that "we [...] don't always [do] things for financial reasons. [...] We do a lot out of conviction [...]". In particular, the satisfaction of the guests leads to a high occupancy rate and thus many overnight stays secure jobs.

"You hear it from the guests themselves that everything is just perfect, that they are super satisfied with us. You also notice that because some of them have been coming here for tens of years. Since the day we opened, they've been coming to us every year, maybe once in summer and once in winter." (ANK Q)

The visible effort on the part of employers to ensure satisfaction is noted positively. In addition, fair and respectful treatment is central for employees. Therefore, all interviewed employees are convinced that increasing the attractiveness of tourism employer brands is of great importance. A credible example on the part of the employer is important.

4.7. Women in tourism management positions

For the specific focus of the role of women in employer branding in tourism (family business), results (Figure 2) extend the general findings.

Spending time with family and friends on weekends shows to be of high priority (EX3). However, this is a challenge for workers in tourism, as days off do not automatically fall on Saturday and Sunday. Some form of separation between work and private life is necessary to create a balance between these two areas of life. In addition, for the majority of the experts (e.g., EX5, EX6), childcare facilities at the workplace are important, but difficult to implement in small-structured businesses. Nevertheless, mothers can be supported by this offer. Another important factor for a long-term successful employment relationship between employer and employee is the agreement on values. The reason for this is that professional activity takes up the majority of one's life (EX4). It is important that the values are communicated and known so that they are appreciated (EX2), as they are described as a key attraction factor. In addition, for three out of six female experts interviewed, the family-friendliness of the firm is relevant when choosing an employer. This is because the willingness to be family-friendly has an influence on one's own image of the employer organization (EX5).

Career options within a business are perceived as important by the respondents (e.g., EX2, EX3), but personal development is in the foreground. Small firms offer opportunities for co-determination, as this can be attributed to the smaller structures. This allows employees to get personally involved. With regard to further training, EX6 would like "financial support [...] if it is professional further training from which the business also benefits". EX2 and EX3 state that further training should be integrated into working time. The interviewees state that employee training has a positive impact on firm efficiency, as the time invested leads to improved work performance. Open-mindedness, cooperation and motivation on the part of employees are also needed. However, the experts (e.g., EX2, EX3) also consider the exchange within the team to be important in order to improve communication and interaction with each other. In addition to the ability to work in a team, social commitment is also important. This commitment increases the attractiveness of a firm. It is important that the business "[...] does not go against social and economic norms" (EX4). Social commitment does not only refer to the firm and its stakeholders and the environment, but also includes moral and ethical obligations in dealing with employees.

5. Discussion

5.1. Employer branding, resources and networks

Interpreting the results from the qualitative study, principles from the Resource-Based View can be seen (Foss et al., 1995; Lenox et al., 2011), the success of a business depends on its capacities and resources; firms that can use these more efficiently can differentiate themselves better and remain in the market in the long term and sustainably As a result, it can be assumed that smaller firms have difficulties in achieving specific goals and implementing growth, as they have less capacity and resources (Lockett & Thompson, 2001; Shields & Shelleman, 2015). Thus, it can be assumed that smaller firms have disadvantages in implementing employer branding compared to larger firms.

This assumption can also been in the study results. Statements from smaller firms clearly indicate that larger firms have an advantage in terms of providing resources for employer branding. Nevertheless, in order to compensate for the aforementioned deficits in capacities and resources, resources of family members working in the business are used.

Results also reflect assumptions from the Network-Based View as a part of the Resource-Based View (Andersson et al., 2002; Gulati et al., 2000). Findings show that almost all firms use their own employees as well as their other networks to recruit new employees for vacancies. Family businesses, in particular, have networks outside the firm that can be used for the firm's purpose. Networks, therefore, play an important role for the sample's firms when it comes to employer branding. The larger the network, the easier it is to find suitable employees for one's own firm and to market it as an attractive employer.

5.2. Employer branding and firm size

When consider the specific role of the often small firm size in tourism, especially in rural areas (Kallmuenzer & Peters, 2018), it cannot be concluded from the data that this is a key factor for the implementation of employer branding. All of the firms surveyed are aware of employer branding and initiate selected measures for this purpose. The smaller the business, the more efforts must be made to position itself as an attractive employer. These firms generally have fewer capacities and resources that they can use for employer branding measures. However, this shortcoming is compensated by the fact that the family uses its own, as well as its employees' networks.

5.3. Employer branding and location

Employer branding efforts also depend on the location of the business. Tourism businesses outside of urban centres and cities are less attractive for potential employees, which makes recruiting new staff more difficult. East Tyrol, in particular, underlines these results in the sense of a model region, as the comparison of urban centres to remote side valleys provides ideal conditions. Firms located in such areas have to take significantly more efforts, or work with other arguments and incentives (e.g., tranquillity, cohesion, strong sense of family, functioning village structures, lower cost of living), in order to be attractive and to attract applicants. For tourism enterprises in rural areas, the implementation of employer branding is much more difficult than for enterprises in urban regions. However, they possibly could offer a more sustainable lifestyle to bring people back to rural areas (Kallmuenzer et al., 2018). This also requires a modern and family-friendly infrastructure (e.g., connectivity, kindergarten and school connection, broadband internet connection).

5.4. Employer branding and corporate values

Both the corporate culture and the corporate values are of essential importance. These are not only essential factors for a successful internal and external transfer of business, but also contribute to the perception of a tourism business as an attractive workplace. Values determine the motives according to which individuals act, and if this action becomes a self-image, then this has a positive influence on the firm's success (Sharma & Nordqvist, 2008). Sustainably oriented entrepreneurs cultivate a fair communication culture and show a willingness to compromise and cooperate. These aspects are perceived as important, especially by employees in family businesses. In this context, family cohesion is also worth mentioning (Zapatero & Jiménez, 2013). This gives employees a sense of a stable internal environment. Furthermore, respect is of great importance for employees. According to Borowski (1998) and Karnes (2009), respect seems to be the most important driver for employees to commit to the business. Accordingly, employees in family businesses are much more exposed to family influence than in non-family businesses (Märk & Situm, 2018). This cohesion leads to increased employee identification with the business, lower absenteeism and voluntary extra work by employees. Thus, increased productivity can be realized (Faleye & Trahan, 2011; Turker, 2009).

5.5. Employer branding and women in senior management positions

In particular, employer branding measures that an increased work-life balance leads to positive results for employees in the view of the interviewed female managers, as they "[...] are much more motivated [to] give top performance [...]". (EX5). In addition, offering family-friendly benefits in their view has a positive impact on employee engagement (Thompson et al., 1999). In addition to this offer, workers seem to also value long-term opportunities for further development and, thus, in-house career options and promotion opportunities, which have a positive impact on organizational attractiveness (Cable & Turban, 2003; Chapman & Webster, 2006; Highhouse et al., 2007) (e.g., EX2, EX3). However, it is difficult for firms to offer continuous training, while still needing to be innovative (EX3).

6. Conclusion

This study contributes a deeper understanding of the important role of employer branding in tourism family businesses to address the challenges from the "war for talent". From this perspective, the identity and value-based self-image of a business forms the basis for building an authentic and meaningful employer brand. Family businesses, particularly present in tourism and faced with the great

challenges of a high turnover rate, seasonality and further issues, form a unique context with the potential to give their employer brands a special meaning. This can be enabled by integrating family values and qualities into business and brand strategies, as the findings of this study show.

The employer brand, or employment offer, builds on both tangible and intangible reward features. Study results show numerous practical measures that could be implemented within the businesses, both in the area of performance policy and in the area of communication policy. However, these measures should be adapted to the individual situation of the firm, as there are significant differences in the possibilities and available resources of organizations of different sizes.

While many firms already invest in tangible benefits for their employees (e.g., housing for employees), intangible aspects (particularly an appreciative attitude towards employees, a good working atmosphere, knowing the needs and dealing with employees), knowledge of modern and participative leadership, as well as professional experience, are essential to counteract the current shortage of skilled workers and the poor employment image of the sector.

To explicitly integrate family elements, family businesses in the tourism sector have the opportunity to emphasize their familiarity and harmonious family working atmosphere, to treat employees like family members and to cultivate amicable relationships and mutual respect. This can also ensure employee satisfaction, which in turn has positive effects. On the one hand, a high level of satisfaction leads to a higher identification with, and attachment to the business, which also results in a higher willingness to perform on the part of the employees. On the other hand, satisfied employees are also perceived as such by the guests. This leads to employees passing on their satisfaction to the guests, which in turn leads to more overnight stays and more turnover and profit.

The results show how important an appreciative attitude and interpersonal trust are for employees, especially when it comes to employer branding in family-run companies. The central meaningful corporate values, the type of cooperation within an organization and the handling of the central corporate resource of employees can play a greater role than monetary incentives and should not be neglected in the weighting of employer branding strategies.

This finding is important, as small businesses, which are strongly represented in the tourism sector, often do not have the capacity for intensive employer marketing. The dimensions of further training, team spirit and part-time careers for managers discussed with the experts should also increasingly address the needs of female managers in employer branding in the tourism sector. In connection with this, a central aspect should also be placed on the compatibility of family and career and transparent communication regarding future options as a mother and father within the company should be encouraged. Social stereotypes also make it difficult for men to reconcile their role as a father with their professional obligations, and this should not be neglected with regard to equality in the professional world.

Regional measures such as improving childcare in tourism destinations or company-financed childcare facilities, as is already practiced in one surveyed destination, can make it easier for employees to return to work and tap into this important potential for the sectoral shortage of skilled workers. In tourism destinations in particular, it is important to support qualified professionals in a long-term and appreciative manner.

Basically all firms apply certain employer branding measures, whereby remote and not so well-known regions have to make greater efforts to be successful. Therefore, there seems to be a relationship between the use of employer branding and the type of region (rural vs. urban). What will also play a role in the future is to what extent tourism associations and regional managers recognize the great potential of building up regional employer branding adapted to their member businesses.

As with every research, also this study is not without limitations. Due to its qualitative nature, the identified factors for employer branding in tourism might be context-specific, and should therefore be explored in other cultural settings. Moreover, the study findings are explorative in nature; the

identified factors could thus be tested on a larger sample in a quantitative study to possibly develop measures for employer branding.

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