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Decoding the Chain of Effects of Family Firm Image on Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract

While there has been plenty of research around family firm governance and management, less is known about the way in which family firm image is perceived by consumers. This research aims at filling the gap by investigating the chained links between family firm status and image, and the key brand elements identified by extant literature. The hypotheses are tested through an application to the wine industry with a sample of over 1,500 wine drinkers residing in Australia, Italy, and the United States. The results reveal several linkages between the distinctive family nature of a business and the loyalty of consumers. All brand knowledge constructs are positively affected by family firm image, and influence brand trust and satisfaction. Individual path coefficients highlight differences between countries. Evidence regarding the cultural interdependencies provides guidance for policy makers. Practitioners can consider this research when defining the relationship with consumers of family firms.

Keywords: family firm image; family business; brand equity; consumer behaviour; structural equation modelling; wine

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1 Introduction

Family firms play a central role in the world economy and are a main driver of job creation, even in highly industrialised nations (Astrachan & Shanker, 2003; Klein, 2000). Moreover, the literature seems to attribute several positive aspects to this type of firm (Arregle, Hitt, Sirmon, & Very, 2007). These favourable aspects are often explained by the strong link between ownership and control in a business, which reduces the presence of agency problems (Aronoff & Ward, 1995). However, like other firms that are embedded in an ever-globalising environment, family firms face increasing competition from various players in the marketplace. For example, given that most family firms are small and medium companies, these businesses may be at a relative disadvantage with respect to their access to capital (Gallucci, Santulli, & Calabrò, 2015) and hence face more severe financial constraints than non-family companies and publicly-traded companies. Family firms not only differ from their non-family competitors (Gedajlovic, Carney, Chrisman, & Kellermanns, 2012) but also are a highly heterogeneous category of businesses themselves (Daspit, Chrisman, Sharma, Pearson, & Mahto, 2018). This heterogeneity is reflected by the fact that some businesses opt to openly communicate their family identity, while other businesses do not communicate such family references publicly.

In the same way that studies have pointed out favourable behavioural traits of family firms towards their stakeholders, consumers may perceive these differences and hold favourable associations regarding this type of firm. This fact raises the question of whether a common image of the family firms exists in consumers' minds. Keller (1993) argues that whenever stakeholders are aware of a brand and hold positive associations regarding this brand, brand equity is created. It is further suggested that brands can be characterised as specific sets of associations that are distinctive from one another and hence serve as a means of differentiation in the marketplace. Blombäck (2011) provides the theoretic foundation for how such distinctive characteristics may derive from the family nature of a business. Indeed, according to Binz, Hair, Pieper and Baldauf (2013), consumers attribute some relational and business qualities to family firms that set them apart from their non-family counterparts. Therefore, family firm image may be linked to meaningful associations that influence consumer behaviour, and a family firm's status and its active communication can be a strategic resource in the marketplace for this type of businesses (Blombäck, 2009; Esch, Langner, Schmitt, & Geus, 2006).

While the internal characteristics of family firms, such as the governance of the business and further organisational features, are well known, particular research gaps exist in relation to family firm image. Beck (2016) has shown in a recent structured review concerning brand management of family firms that much past research has focused on conceptual papers and business-related studies. However, consumer studies have been scarce in the past. Despite pioneering theoretical contributions (i.e. Blombäck, 2009, 2010, 2011), much evidence in the past has been anecdotal (Blombäck & Botero, 2013; Orth & Green, 2009). Scholars have only recently begun to focus more attention on investigating consumer perceptions of family firms and the related issues of branding (Astrachan Binz, Botero, Astrachan, & Prügl, 2018). To date, only a few applied studies exist in the field. Most recently, Lude and Prügl (2018) have highlighted the preference of consumers for family firm brands in experimental consumer studies. However, little knowledge of the factors that constitute this consumer preference for family firms exists (Sageder, Mitter, & Feldbauer-Durstmüller, 2018). More importantly, no validated framework that provides a single structural approach to modelling the effect of family firm status on behavioural outcomes has been developed by scholarly research (Felden, Fischer, Graffius, & Marwede, 2016). In addition, it is also unknown how influencing factors may exhibit heterogeneity with respect to the cultural background of different countries. Babin et al. (2017) state that furthering the knowledge related to the identity and the branding of family firms and its related communication to stakeholders is highly relevant for future research.

In light of the points presented above, this research investigated the chained links between the informational cue ‘family firm status’ and brand associations, which have been identified as relevant drivers of consumer behaviour. Although some of these links have already been established by prior studies, a comprehensive theory-grounded model is proposed and validated for the first time in this paper.

A structural framework of how family firm identity affects behavioural outcomes was applied to consumers, since they represent a key stakeholder group for many small and medium companies. The structural framework of this study was derived from previously validated frameworks in the fields of marketing (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), brand (Esch et al., 2006) and family firm research (Sageder et al., 2018). The application of this framework was performed on the wine category since it represents a highly branded product category with considerable presence of both family and corporate wineries. The sample included consumers residing in three different countries, Australia, Italy and the United States (US), to extend the generalisability of the findings.

This research addresses significant knowledge gaps since, to date, little consumer-focused research exists in the field of family business research. The findings will not only fill academic gaps but also address recent requests for brand management research by practitioners in the family business context, such as family business consultants and managers (Beck, 2016). Finally, the results will also help businesses understand the behavioural effects that key brand elements evoke in consumers and generate an understanding of the chain of effects on how family firms develop customer-based brand equity.

2 Literature Review

This study provides insight into the question of how customer-based brand equity occurs in family firms. It synthesises previously validated frameworks by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Esch et al. (2006), who established the effect of brand image and brand knowledge on behavioural outcomes in consumers. A meta-analysis of Sageder et al. (2018) further identifies relevant constructs of consumer-based brand image in family firms. Many of these constructs overlap with notable characteristics of price premia in the premium food sector (Anselmsson, Bondesson, & Johansson, 2014). The aforementioned contributions serve as the foundation of the present study.

This study's framework is founded on the concepts of value and branding. Particular emphasis is placed on specific links to hedonic products. Premium wine is the chosen product category of application because it is associated with hedonic characteristics.

2.1 Value of Products

Theory about the value of products is linked to literature on branding. Keller (1993) points out the three benefits from which brands and products derive their value: functional, experiential and symbolic benefits. For hedonic products, such as wine, experiential and symbolic benefits are of particular value (Charters & Pettigrew, 2005). The underlying process of product valuation is characterised by high complexity and also needs to be considered from a sociological angle. Another phenomenon linked to the valuation of products is asymmetric information. In many situations, agents are not able to assess the intrinsic quality of a product at the time of purchase. Hence, brands play a specific signalling role for intrinsic product characteristics. In situations of high uncertainty, brands can reduce the cost of information through their signalling function and generate additional value for agents (Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela, 2006). While this aspect relates mainly to functional and experiential benefits, Beckert, Rössel and Schenk (2017) argue that the economic valuation of products is based not only on the aforementioned objectively measurable intrinsic qualities, but also on symbolic benefits. Symbolic characteristics stem from a complex sociological process that takes place in the field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1996). It is argued that particular symbolic criteria, such as artisanship, tradition and individualism, have been gaining more importance for consumers (Maguire, 2018). In particular, products that emanate from a production process that can hardly be standardised require an understanding of these factors, as in the case of luxury wines (Beverland, 2005).

2.2 The Family Nature of Firms and Brands

Many definitions of the family firm exist in the literature. When synthesising the consensus of this existing body of literature, the following definition is formed: A family firm is a business that is owned and operated by members of a family (related by blood or marriage) and in which decision-making is influenced by one or more family generations (Westhead & Cowling, 1998). This definition underscores the unique pooling of ownership and control, which is the central revolving motive in these firms and a major source of their distinctive organisational identity (Sharma, 2008). It can further be constituted that this hybrid identity of family firms results in a higher concern about their reputation in the public compared with their non-family counterparts (Dyer & Whetten, 2006). This is also owed to family firms' focus on normative values (Bingham, Dyer, Smith, & Adams, 2011). One example is the fiduciary responsibility towards long-lived assets, which originates in the trans-generational vision of these companies. This ability to plan across long periods of time ahead is often an element in non-family businesses, where leaders must carefully consider their performance in the short term. The above sentences exemplify that family firms exhibit a differential behaviour in the marketplace through idiosyncratic interaction of family and business subsystems. This can be perceived by consumers and ultimately influences their behavioural outcomes through different relationships with these companies. Nonetheless, heterogeneity may not only exist between family and corporate firms but also within the group of family firms. For this reason, Beck and Kenning (2015) highlight the importance of considering the degree to which a business is perceived to be a family firm from a consumer perspective (family firm status). The above-mentioned points lead to the fundamental first hypothesis of this study, which tests whether consumers distinctively perceive actual family firms as such:

- Family firm status positively affects family firm image (Hypothesis 1).

Differences exist between family and non-family firms from a business point of view. However, also from a consumer point of view perceptual differences are associated between these groups. The characteristic of family firms is drawn from human associative memory theory: The word family is linked to a multitude of meaningful experiences throughout human life and represents a concept of high relevance for humans (Beck & Kenning, 2015). In the human mind, many and meaningful associations are triggered when external stimuli of the family concept are present. This is an important aspect since not all associations with brands are of equal importance for humans (French & Smith, 2013). The powerful advantage of the family attribute resides in the fact that associated elements are a mix of everyday experiences, which at the same time reflect meanings central to an individual's life. Fournier (1998) argues that such 'lived experiences' enable brand attributes (in the context of this paper, the family attribute) to transcendent category-specific themes and generate a strong consumer-relevant purpose of a brand that parallels a person's individual life (p. 367). This is in line with Esch (2008), who makes the point that strong brands evoke associations that are linked to intense emotions and images. The following section explains relevant elements of customer-based brand equity in family firms.

2.3 Customer-based Brand Equity

Customer-based brand equity is defined as the ‘differential effect of brand knowledge on customer response to the marketing of the brand’ (Keller, 1993, p. 2). According to the model proposed by Esch et al. (2006), the customer response originates in brand knowledge and is mediated by brand relationship. While the relationship between brand relationship and behavioural outcomes is well developed in the literature (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), less knowledge exists on its antecedents. The conceptual work of Esch et al. (2006) provided the foundation to investigate further how customer-based brand equity is derived from brand knowledge.

Brand knowledge is constituted from brand awareness and brand image (Esch et al., 2006; Keller, 1993), with brand awareness being a necessary precondition to brand image. Brand image is defined as the ‘perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory’ (Keller, 1993, p. 13) and hence is a multifaceted construct that represents the actual influencing element of brand relationship. In the literature it is assumed that family firms are ‘a special type of company with typical associations’ (Sageder et al., 2018, p. 348). Since this study investigated wine, specific consideration was given to prior research in the food and drink category (Anselmsson et al., 2014). The following seven key attributes that influence brand relationship have been identified as core distinctive elements in family firms (Sageder et al., 2018): uniqueness, social image, perceived quality, localness, corporate social responsibility, long-term orientation and customer orientation.

Perceived customer orientation is an important element of a firm’s perceived image (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). The beneficial effects of customer orientation on trust and satisfaction is well outlined in a body of literature (Swanson, Kelley, & Dorsch, 1998; Walsh & Beatty, 2007). Family firms are considered to show strong relational qualities, such as customer orientation (Craig, Dibrell, & Davis, 2008; Tokarczyk, Hansen, Green, & Down, 2007), which creates a competitive advantage for these firms in the marketplace. Finally, the study tested the following hypotheses:

- Family firm image positively affects customer orientation (Hypothesis 2).
- Customer orientation positively affects brand trust (Hypothesis 3) and brand satisfaction (Hypothesis 4).

The willingness of a brand to prioritise decisions, even if returns only come into effect after an extended period (long-term orientation), creates trust (Lohtia, Bello, & Porter, 2009) and satisfaction (Griffith, Harvey, & Lusch, 2006). Owing to the particular unity of ownership and control, family businesses are more likely to implement long-term strategies compared with their non-family counterparts (Heine, Phan, & Atwal, 2016; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2015). This study assumed that:

- Family firm image positively affects consumers' perceptions of businesses long-term orientation (Hypothesis 5).
- Long-term orientation positively affects brand trust (Hypothesis 6) and brand satisfaction (Hypothesis 7).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is defined as a set of policies and actions considering an equilibrium of economic, social and environmental goals, has the propensity to influence the relationship between a brand and its consumers (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Prior studies have found significant links between CSR and consumer trust (Vlachos, Tsamakos, Vrechopoulos, & Avramidis, 2009) and satisfaction (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). CSR is a central attribute that is strongly linked to family firms (Blodgett, Dumas, & Zanzi, 2011). The study tested the following hypotheses:

- Family firm image positively affects CSR perceptions (Hypothesis 8).

– CSR positively affects brand trust (Hypothesis 9) and brand satisfaction (Hypothesis 10).

Localness is defined as the degree to which a brand symbolises local values and needs. Brands can differentiate themselves through their localness and build a loyal customer base (M. Beverland & Luxton, 2005). In the case of food and wine, local provenance and association with the territory are a point of particular importance (M. Beverland, 2006; Özsomer, 2012). Such local origin of food is thought to increase consumer trust (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004) and satisfaction (Bratanova et al., 2015). Family firms are believed to take a leading role in the preservation of local traditions and products (Fonte, 2008). Hence, this study hypothesised that:

– Family firms exhibit localness to a higher degree than do their non-family counterparts (Hypothesis 11).
– Localness can be seen as a positively linked antecedent of brand trust (Hypothesis 12) and brand satisfaction (Hypothesis 13).

Perceived quality is a central element of customer-based brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993) because it creates a fundamental functional benefit of the brand. Thus, perceived quality is strongly linked with brand satisfaction (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996) and brand trust (Aydin & Özer, 2005). The link between the family nature of a firm and product quality has been pointed out by Blodgett et al. (2011). This link is particularly the case in situations of uncertainty about the intrinsic quality of products (Beck & Kenning, 2015). Hence, the structural model assumes that:

– A positive relationship exists between family firm image and perceived quality (Hypothesis 14).
– A positive relationship exists between perceived quality and brand trust (Hypothesis 15) as well as brand satisfaction (Hypothesis 16).

The role of brands and their signalling effect of social status is implied in earlier studies and explicitly described as an essential part of symbolic brand benefits (Keller, 1993). The concept of social status has been shown to be linked to trust and satisfaction in a consumer context (Jin, Line, & Merkebu, 2016; Walsh, Shiu, & Hassan, 2014). It is commonly argued that products of family firms, particularly in the luxury goods sector, are often linked to high social prestige (Bresciani, Bertoldi, Giachino, & Ferraris, 2015). The above-referenced literature leads to a further assumption that:

- Family firm image positively affects the social image of a brand (Hypothesis 17).
- Social image is positively linked to brand trust (Hypothesis 18) and brand satisfaction (Hypothesis 19).

Uniqueness describes the degree to which a brand is perceived to be different from its competitors, and it is an intrinsic element in Keller’s (1993) definition of customer-based brand equity. Uniqueness has been found to be a relevant antecedent of brand trust and satisfaction (He, Li, & Harris, 2012; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Sageder, Mitter and Feldbauer-Durstmüller (2018) advocate that through their close ties with stakeholders, family firms develop a unique firm image, which implies a positive correlation between the family attribute and uniqueness. The above discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

- Family firm image positively affects uniqueness (Hypothesis 20).
- Uniqueness positively affects brand trust (Hypothesis 21) and brand satisfaction (Hypothesis 22).

The links between behavioural outcomes and brand relationship are well understood. Behavioural outcomes are the phenomenological expression of customer-based equity. Following earlier studies, such as Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), behavioural outcomes are conceptualised as loyalty. Further differentiation is made between attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Such a dual perspective of loyalty has been widely adopted in research (DeWitt, Nguyen, & Marshall, 2008; Ganesh, Arnold, & Reynolds, 2000; Jones & Taylor, 2007; Kamran-Disfani, Mantrala, Izquierdo-Yusta, & Martinez-Ruiz, 2017; Taylor, Celuch, & Goodwin, 2004). Two key components of brand relationship have emerged in the literature and have been validated earlier (Esch et al., 2006): brand trust and brand satisfaction. Interdependencies between behavioural outcomes and brand relationship exist. Brand relationship can be seen as the bonding element between brand knowledge and behavioural outcomes. Therefore, based on the above-mentioned earlier research findings, the present study assumed the following hypotheses:

- Brand trust positively affects attitudinal loyalty (Hypothesis 23) as well as behavioural loyalty (Hypothesis 24).
- Positive links exist between brand satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty (Hypothesis 25) as well as behavioural loyalty (Hypothesis 26).

Figure 1 shows the hypothesised structural model, which is based on the individual relationships between the variables identified by prior research.

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3 Method

3.1 Data Collection

To test the research hypotheses, a survey was carried out in Australia, Italy and the US in October 2017. Two key wine producing countries in the New (Australia) and the Old (Italy) World of wine were selected, as well as their most important intersecting import country (the US). To qualify for participation in the survey, respondents were selected on the basis that they drank wine at least once a month (regular wine drinker). In addition, respondents had to have bought wine from family and non-family wineries within the past year, since participants were asked to provide their perceptions and experiences of both firm types. Representativeness of a panel of respondents, provided by a leading global panel provider, was ensured through quota sampling. The sample was representative of regular wine drinkers in terms of gender, age and geographic regions for each country. The survey questions were developed in English and then translated to the local language, if necessary. Translation bias was addressed through back translation to English (Craig & Douglas, 2005). Logic control questions were implemented in the survey to ensure data validity. Structural response bias of the survey was addressed through randomisation of the response items for each question, randomisation of questions at the block level of the survey and randomisation of blocks within the logic requirements of the survey. After screening for incomplete or invalid responses, 513 Australian, 518 Italian and 510 US respondents remained in the sample. The characteristics of the sample with respect to demographic variables can be found in Table 1.

--- Table 1 here ---

3.2 Measures

The survey instrument was developed based on previously validated scales from earlier research, and items were presented on 7-point Likert scales. Attitudinal and behavioural loyalty were measured through the scales proposed by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). Trust was measured on a scale presented by the same authors. Fornell et al. (1996) developed the scale of satisfaction used in this study. Uniqueness and perceived quality were measured on a scale developed by Netemeyer et al. (2004), social image on a scale by Sweeney and Soutar (2001), localness on a scale by Steenkamp, Batra and Alden (2003), CSR on a scale by Wagner, Lutz and Weitz (2009), long-term orientation on a scale of Lohtia et al. (2009) and customer orientation on a scale of Bartikowski, Walsh and Beatty (2011). The measurement of family firm image developed by Beck and Kenning (2015) was implemented in this study. Respondents were asked to use these scales to evaluate their perceptions about wine produced by family and non-family wineries that they had purchased in the past year.

3.3 Analysis

Relationships among variables were implemented in lavaan version 0.5-23 to derive a covariance-based structural equation model. Before implementing the structural model, scale validity was ensured through computation of Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951), composite reliability (CR; Raykov, 2001) and average variance extracted (AVE; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 provides a summary of the three indicators for the latent variables of the study.

--- Table 2 here ---

One of the observed variables of the localness scale showed a strong negative effect on scale reliability. Although the scale had been validated previously, exclusion of this item led to improvement of scale reliability of the localness scale across all countries. The lowest α-value was observed for the variable of behavioural loyalty in the Australian sample (α = .73). Moreover, CR (CR = .73) and AVE (AVE = .57) showed their lowest values in the Australian sample for the given variable. This pattern held in the US sample (α = .79, CR = .79, AVE = .65). In the Italian sample, attitudinal loyalty exhibited the lowest values with α = .80, CR = .80 and AVE = .67. All given values were well above critical thresholds, which are frequently defined as $\alpha > .70$ (Kline, 2015), CR > .70 and AVE > .50 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Multinormality of the data was assessed through the test statistics of skew and kurtosis proposed by Mardia (1974) and Mardia (1970). Tests for skewness and kurtosis were significant ($b_{1,36}$ = 78.35, $z_{1,36}$ = 40,244.95; $b_{2,36}$ = 1,974.34, $z_{2,36}$ = 321.77; and $p < .001$, respectively), which led to a rejection of the assumption of multinormality. When considering the distributional characteristics, despite the significance of both tests, modest skew and kurtosis existed for the individual manifest variables. The prevalence of a significant but modest non-normality was addressed through the computation of robust standard errors, scaled test statistics and fit indices according to Satorra and Bentler (1994) and Li and Bentler

(2006). Through the adoption of these measures, maximum likelihood estimation remained the preferred estimation method.

Scale invariance was assessed to be able to perform a singular estimation of the structural model using the same measurement model. Table 3 shows the invariance tests for the country group variable. A pooled model without the distinction of any groups exhibits a favourable fit (comparative fit index (CFI) = .944, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .059). When using the same structural model to estimate three individual models at a country level, model fit was still well above the critical cut-off of CFI > .90 and RMSEA < .08 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2013). To assess whether invariance held, ΔCFI < .01 was used as a selection criterion because of the sensitivity of the χ^2-statistic to sample size (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). The baseline scenario was represented by configural invariance, which was represented by a joint estimation of the three models without parameter constraints. When imposing the constraint of equal loadings between groups (ΔCFI = 0.002, weak invariance), the model fit did not violate the invariance condition. Further, equality of intercepts was added as a further constraint (ΔCFI = 0.006, strong invariance). Invariance still held when using the ΔCFI-criterion. Finally, in addition, error variances were constrained to equality to obtain strict invariance of the measurement models. Again, the invariance condition was maintained after adding this further constraint (ΔCFI = 0.005). Strict invariance of the model implied that the indicator variables measured the same latent variables. This was important to be able to perform a joint model estimation across the three countries (Davidov, Meuleman, Cieciuch, Schmidt, & Billiet, 2014).

--- Table 3 here ---

4 Results

The first stage was to test how brand image elements are influenced by family firm image and how they relate to brand trust and brand satisfaction. The results of the structural model are shown by country in Table 4.

--- Table 4 here ---

First, it could be shown that not only family firm image—a measure of subjectively perceived family firm status by respondents—positively affected any of the given brand image element constructs, but also family firm status of a business was positively linked to family firm image, leading to an acceptance of Hypothesis 1 regarding any of the three countries under observation. Further, family firm image exercised a positive effect on customer orientation, leading to validation of Hypothesis 2 in all three countries. The hypothesised directional downstream relationship between customer orientation and brand trust was consistently confirmed as well (Hypothesis 3). However, a positive effect of customer orientation on brand satisfaction was only found in two countries (Australia and Italy); hence, the results provided only partial support for Hypothesis 4.

Long-term orientation was a further variable positively influenced by family firm identity in all three countries (Hypothesis 5); however, differences in the magnitude of this effect were detected at $p = .06$. The positive effect of long-term orientation on brand trust (Hypothesis 6), could only be partially confirmed in the three countries, and between-country differences were observed ($p = .04$). The findings for the Italian sample were in line with the hypothesis; however, no relationship could be established in the other two countries. The relationship between long-term orientation and brand satisfaction was significant in all three countries. Nevertheless, Hypothesis 7 is only partially supported, since this relationship showed the expected positive sign only among the Italian sample, while in Australia and the US samples the relationship was negative. Differences between the countries were significant at $p = .00$.

Results from all three countries provided evidence that family firm image positively influenced CSR. These findings support Hypothesis 8. CSR itself exercised a positive effect on brand trust, hence supporting Hypothesis 9 regarding all three countries. Hypothesis 10, which assumes a positive effect of CSR on brand satisfaction, is partially supported since a significant positive relation could only be detected among the US sample.

In line with Hypothesis 11, a positive effect of family firm image on localness was found, and differences with respect to the magnitude of this effect existed between countries ($p = .06$). Further, localness was found to influence brand trust positively in the Australian and Italian samples, while no effect could be found among US consumers, leading to a partial confirmation of Hypothesis 12. The effect of localness on brand satisfaction was confirmed across all three countries, as predicted in Hypothesis 13, while marginal evidence for differences between the countries existed ($p = .10$).

The expected relationship between family firm image and perceived quality was confirmed in all countries under consideration (Hypothesis 14); however, differences in the magnitude of the hypothesised effect were detected at $p = .08$. The hypothesised positive effect of perceived quality on brand trust was confirmed (Hypothesis 15), while between-country differences were detected at $p = .08$. Similarly, perceived quality positively influenced brand satisfaction in all three countries (Hypothesis 16), while showing significant between-country differences ($p = .00$).

Social image was positively influenced by family firm image, which confirms Hypothesis 17. Further, a significant positive effect of social image on brand trust was found in the Italian sample. However, a negative effect of social image on brand trust was found in the US sample, and no effect was detected in the Australian sample. These between-country differences were significant at $p = .00$. Hence, Hypothesis 18 is only partially supported. An inverted effect compared with evidence derived from literature was observed in all countries regarding the relationship between social image and brand satisfaction, leading to a rejection of Hypothesis 19.

Family firm image exercised a significant influence on uniqueness, validating Hypothesis 20 equally regarding all three countries. However, no evidence in any country could be found that supports the directional relationship between uniqueness and brand trust, leading to a rejection of Hypothesis 21. Nevertheless, partial support was found for the hypothesised relationship between uniqueness and brand satisfaction among the Italian and US samples (Hypothesis 22), and differences between the countries were detected at $p = .09$.

With respect to behavioural outcomes, brand trust positively affected attitudinal loyalty, which confirms Hypothesis 23 for all countries; however, significant differences between countries were detected at $p = .02$. Further, Hypothesis 24 is supported through the confirmation of a positive relationship between trust and behavioural loyalty. In all three countries, brand satisfaction exercised a significant influence on attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, thus confirming Hypotheses 25 and 26. Significant differences in the magnitude of path coefficients were detected at $p = .00$ for the relationship of brand satisfaction with attitudinal loyalty as well as for the relationship with behavioural loyalty ($p = .10$).

An analysis of latent means was conducted for the previously investigated constructs at the country level to determine differences between family and corporate wineries for the given constructs. As a first step, measurement invariance was established for the firm type group variable for each of the three countries. The results show that strict invariance held for all three countries. Table 5 illustrates the differences in latent means between both levels of the firm type grouping variables for each country for the constructs of this study. Family firms demonstrated consistently higher means of the latent variables than did corporate firms. Effect sizes ranged from small ($d < .2$) to large ($d > .8$) effects for the individual constructs.

--- Table 5 here ---

5 Discussion

The results confirm earlier research in the field of marketing, such as brand relationship and loyalty, and reveal new linkages regarding how the distinctive family nature of a business is constituted (brand knowledge) and how this family nature links to the loyalty of consumers. This result is achieved through a newly proposed consumer-based brand equity framework that is specific to the nature of family firms. Thus, it contributes to a decoding of the multiple layers of this chain of effects. The individual aspects are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The path coefficients that are linked to the constructs of brand knowledge reveal several particularities that are important to discuss. First, and most importantly, all variables of brand knowledge were positively related to the construct of family firm image. However, the magnitude of individual path coefficients reveals differences between the countries. Since measurement invariance held, it can be constituted that the distinctive perception of family businesses shows idiosyncrasies between the individual countries. Consumer perceptions of family firms appear to have differed slightly with respect to constructs, such as the long-term orientation, localness, perceived quality and social image of these businesses. However, for any of the given constructs, the paths demonstrate a highly significant positive relationship leading to confirmation of any of the related hypotheses. More marked between-country differences with respect to the confirmation of the individual hypotheses emerged for the linkage between the individual brand image elements and how they affect behavioural outcomes.

The missing significance of an association between uniqueness and brand satisfaction among the Australian sample was unexpected, particularly since in Western cultures uniqueness conceptually is considered a desirable attribute that is linked to freedom and self-expression (Ruvio, 2008). A strong cultural grounding can be seen in the latent construct of social image and its link to brand trust, which shows the expected positive link only in the Italian sample. The magnitude and significance of the link can be considered to originate in cultural dimensions. Particularly, individualism in a society may play a role. Following Shukla (2010), the brands with high public status cultures may act as institutions with lower degrees of individualism, such as in Italy in the given study. The link of social image to brand satisfaction has shown an inverted effect to the one hypothesised. Higher social desirability of a family brand appears to have a negative effect on satisfaction with the same. It is unclear whether this negative effect derives from peer pressure–related strain; hence, further investigation is necessary.

Perceived quality revealed different effects between the countries on brand relationship constructs. Italy demonstrated the weakest linkage among the three countries for both brand satisfaction and brand trust. This relative weakness may relate to the fact that sophisticated consumer societies infer trust and satisfaction through a wider range of variables than just plain product characteristics (Beckert et al., 2017). The relative weakness of this variable in influencing both brand relationship constructs has to be understood in the context of the two other variables of brand knowledge, namely localness and long-term orientation. The Italian sample exhibited the strongest association of any of the countries between these two variables and both constructs of brand relationship. The strong link to localness is conceptually rooted in the 'deep cultural value of Italian gastronomy and peasant traditions' (Sassatelli & Scott, 2001, p. 224). Local production is also linked to traceability of food origin and is the cornerstone of the European system of 'protected designations of origin'. Similarly, long-term orientation as a further construct showed differential effects between Old World (Italy) and New World (Australia and US) countries in the sample. In Italy, long-term orientation was a further relevant antecedent of brand trust and brand satisfaction (cf. Kehagia, Chrysochou, Chryssochoidis, Krystallis, & Linardakis, 2007).

Path coefficients with both brand relationship variables showed a significant positive association. However, in Australia and the US, long-term orientation did not influence brand trust, and even negatively influenced brand satisfaction. Hence, in these countries long-term orientation is overly linked to negative connotations, which may evolve from an association with stasis and old-fashioned practices that fail to address consumer needs. Further, this finding can be directly linked to the corresponding dimension of the culture score scale developed by Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010), which supports the observed pattern in the three countries. While no differences existed for the relationship between CSR and brand trust among the tested countries, the relationship with brand satisfaction was mixed. Only among the US sample was a significant positive relationship between the given variables found. This finding provides insight into the mechanistic relationship regarding how CSR affects consumer behaviour, which appears to show some dependence on cultural factors that leads to differential behaviour of consumers in any of the three countries.

Finally, customer orientation has unambiguously been identified as a central antecedent that influences brand trust in all three countries under investigation. One exception existed in the relationship of this variable with brand satisfaction in the US sample, which showed no significant positive effect, unlike the in two other countries. This fact may originate in the lower prevalence of direct-to-consumer sales in the US (investigated but not discussed in this manuscript). Nonetheless, an effect of customer orientation on behavioural outcomes through an intermediate mediation via brand relation exists, and this underlines the relevance of this latent construct for family businesses, which can generate additional value through their unique relational qualities (Binz et al., 2013).

Similar to previous research in the field of marketing, this study has identified brand relationship variables, such as brand trust and brand satisfaction, to show a significant association with consumer loyalty. However, between-country differences indicate that brand trust was a stronger driver of attitudinal loyalty in the Italian sample than in the other two countries, while the link of brand satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty was stronger in the Australian and US samples. These differences confirm an earlier study in the field of tourism research by Forgas-Coll, Palau-Saumell, Sánchez-Garcia and Callarisa-Fiol (2012). The observed differences between countries are not spurious but originate from the distinct cultural characteristics of each country. Forgas-Coll et al. (2012) argue that high degrees of culturally rooted individualism result in a strong pursuit of self-satisfaction and experience of pleasure; hence, a stronger link between brand satisfaction and behavioural outcomes might be expected. In fact, in this study, a stronger association of brand satisfaction and loyalty can be observed in the Australian and US samples compared with the Italian sample. Referring to Hofstede's (1980, 2001) scale, Wallenburg, Cahill, Michael Knemeyer and Goldsby (2011) draw parallels between the magnitude of the trust–loyalty relationship with the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance. This pattern was confirmed within the three countries under investigation in this study. As expected, Italy, being the country with the highest score for the dimension of uncertainty avoidance, exhibited the most marked path coefficient. It can be constituted that consumers in cultures with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance feel especially vulnerable in unstructured situations (Hofstede, 2011). Trust is known to be an important element for reducing uncertainty that causes vulnerability (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82).

Further, the analysis of latent means revealed that family firms ranked higher for any of the latent variables compared with their corporate counterparts. Customer orientation, localness and CSR were shown to be the most distinctive variables overall, apart from the family firm image variable, which was the most distinctive. However, it should be noted that other variables, such as perceived quality, while they may have taken a lower rank, exhibited a strong link with brand relationship variables. Hence, these variables represent a significant antecedent in influencing consumer behaviour. More generally, it must be understood that not all elements that have been found to differentiate family businesses from corporate ones show any of the expected effects on consumer behaviour. This point is a critical one to understand for practitioners because it clearly demonstrates that differentiation as an end in itself does not necessarily lead to a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Nonetheless, this research generates evidence that the vast majority of hypothesised elements that are found to differentiate family firms lead to the goodwill of consumers in the marketplace. However, the behavioural consequences that some brand image elements exercise depend on the cultural context.

Important implications for the food and wine sector can be derived. Results of this study show that the value of wine derives from a complex social process that adds further value to the material act of production. Under the assumption of full information, actors in the marketplace can fully assess the information cues related to the field of cultural production. However, if information cost is assumed, market players may experience difficulties in obtaining such information. In contrast, other market players possess a self-interest to use the presence of such asymmetric information to obtain an advantage, which ultimately results in market failure and adverse selection of product quality (Akerlof, 1970). In such situations, principals' uncertainty about the intrinsic characteristics of agents can be reduced by reducing information costs through certifications by trusted third parties. Further, principals can screen agents through exogenous cost signals. Family firms can generate such signals in the marketplace and reduce principals' uncertainty about the intrinsic characteristics of agents through customer interaction with family members. These considerations have direct implications for dedicated business models attached to such signalling that distinguish family firms from their non-family counterparts.

6 Conclusion

This research provides important insights into the question of whether family firms are perceived differently from their non-family counterparts and how such a perception differential evolves from a customer perspective. A theory-driven framework has been derived from past studies in the fields of marketing and family business research. The framework introduces several advances in the field: For the first time, a comprehensive set of brand image elements specific to family firms is modelled in an integrated customer-based brand equity framework. In addition, this study adopts a dual perspective of consumer loyalty, which related work in the field lacks. Third, results are validated across three countries for increased robustness of findings.

Direct implications for different stakeholder groups can be derived based on the research findings. First, the model validates and extends existing scientific marketing models to the context of family firm research. Second, the first evidence regarding the cultural interdependencies of detected relationships has been presented together with a proposed theoretical explanation. Third, customer attitudes towards family firms provide further guidance for policy makers, particularly when considering the social role of these firms and the ways in which these firms create value. Similarly, practitioners, such as owners, managers and consultants to family firms, can consider the findings of this research when defining the strategic orientation of firms and their relationship towards consumers, who constitute one key stakeholder group in many business contexts. The favourable perception of family firms opens many avenues for market strategies, especially in an age of greatly decreasing information costs. These developments equally constitute opportunities for family businesses to reach out to new and existing customers. However, innovation and alignment of communication strategies are required in this transforming market environment to prevent family businesses becoming passive victims in this ongoing transformation process (Chrisman, Chua, De Massis, Frattini, & Wright, 2015).

Although appropriate attention has been paid to the conduct of this study, limitations apply. While consistent cultural patterns have been observed between the three countries, no multivariate statistical analysis of cultural effects could be applied because of the limited sample of only three countries. In addition, this research has only considered developed countries, which constrains the applicability of implications to Western countries in particular. It is therefore recommended that future research extends the results of the current research by replicating this study for other countries and product categories, especially categories that differ with respect to their hedonic or utilitarian qualities.

Table 1

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Surveyed Samples

		Australia (n = 513)		Italy (n = 518)		United States (n = 510)
Gender	Female	53		51		55
	Male	47		49		45
Age	Less than LDA	0		0		0
	LDA–24	8		8		7
	25–34	20		14		22
	35–44	20		19		15
	34–54	17		20		17
	55–64	17		16		19
	65 and older	19		24		22
Region	Australian Capital Territory	3	North	49	New England	5
	New South Wales	31	Centre	18	Mid-Atlantic	17
	Northern Territory	0	South	22	East North Central	15
	South Australia	11	Islands	12	West North Central	6
	Queensland	19			South Atlantic	20
	Tasmania	2			South Central	12
	Victoria	26			Mountain	8
	Western Australia	8			Pacific	17

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding; LDA = legal drinking age.

Table 2

Scale Validity Assessment Using Cronbach's Alpha (α), Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Indicators

	Australia			Italy			United States			Pooled		
	α	CR	AVE	α	CR	AVE	α	CR	AVE	α	CR	AVE
Behavioural loyalty	0.73	0.73	0.57	0.80	0.80	0.67	0.78	0.79	0.65	0.78	0.78	0.64
Attitudinal loyalty	0.77	0.77	0.63	0.80	0.80	0.66	0.84	0.84	0.73	0.81	0.81	0.68
Satisfaction	0.87	0.87	0.70	0.90	0.90	0.76	0.87	0.87	0.69	0.88	0.89	0.72
Trust	0.89	0.89	0.73	0.89	0.89	0.73	0.89	0.89	0.73	0.89	0.89	0.73
Uniqueness	0.93	0.94	0.78	0.94	0.94	0.78	0.94	0.94	0.81	0.94	0.94	0.80
Social image	0.93	0.93	0.77	0.92	0.93	0.77	0.93	0.94	0.79	0.93	0.93	0.77
Perceived quality	0.89	0.89	0.67	0.91	0.91	0.72	0.91	0.91	0.72	0.90	0.91	0.71
Localness	0.89	0.89	0.79	0.83	0.83	0.71	0.85	0.85	0.75	0.86	0.86	0.75
Corporate social responsibility	0.85	0.85	0.65	0.91	0.91	0.77	0.87	0.87	0.69	0.88	0.88	0.71
Long-term orientation	0.80	0.81	0.59	0.81	0.81	0.60	0.86	0.86	0.67	0.83	0.83	0.62
Customer orientation	0.90	0.90	0.75	0.90	0.91	0.77	0.91	0.91	0.76	0.91	0.91	0.77
Family firm identity	0.94	0.94	0.85	0.95	0.95	0.86	0.95	0.95	0.86	0.95	0.95	0.86

Table 3

Measurement Invariance Assessment

Model		LR (df)	p	RMSEA	CFI	Δ
Group	Pooled	7,241 (599)		0.059	0.944	
	Australia	3,121 (599)		0.061	0.927	
	Italy	3,247 (599)		0.062	0.931	
	United States	2,893 (599)		0.058	0.941	
Invariance	Configural	9,262 (1,797)		0.061	0.933	
	Weak	9,474 (1,845)	0.000	0.060	0.932	0.002
	Strong	10,084 (1,893)	0.000	0.062	0.926	0.006
	Strict	10,733 (1965)	0.000	0.063	0.921	0.005

Note: Robust adjustment of RMSEA and CFI for non-normality; LR is the non-scaled test statistic; p is computed according to Satorra and Bentler (2001)

Table 4

Structural Model Estimation Results

Path			Hypothesis	Australia			Italy			United States			
				Est	Se	p	Est	Se	p	Est	Se	p	$p_{chi^2\_diff}$
Family firm status	→	Family firm image	1	0.50	0.07	0.00	0.48	0.07	0.00	0.44	0.07	0.00	0.82
Family firm image	→	Customer orientation	2	0.79	0.04	0.00	0.82	0.04	0.00	0.85	0.03	0.00	0.47
Customer orientation	→	Brand trust	3	0.24	0.04	0.00	0.22	0.04	0.00	0.25	0.05	0.00	0.93
Customer orientation	→	Brand satisfaction	4	0.09	0.04	0.01	0.10	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.28	0.53
Family firm image	→	Long-term orientation	5	0.69	0.03	0.00	0.70	0.04	0.00	0.78	0.03	0.00	0.06
Long-term orientation	→	Brand trust	6	−0.11	0.09	0.19	0.12	0.06	0.04	−0.04	0.07	0.51	0.04
Long-term orientation	→	Brand satisfaction	7	−0.19	0.07	0.00	0.10	0.04	0.02	−0.20	0.06	0.00	0.00
Family firm image	→	CSR	8	0.80	0.04	0.00	0.89	0.04	0.00	0.86	0.03	0.00	0.25
CSR	→	Brand trust	9	0.29	0.06	0.00	0.13	0.05	0.01	0.21	0.07	0.00	0.12
CSR	→	Brand satisfaction	10	0.05	0.05	0.39	0.01	0.04	0.83	0.15	0.06	0.01	0.15
Family firm image	→	Localness	11	0.81	0.04	0.00	0.74	0.04	0.00	0.83	0.03	0.00	0.06
Localness	→	Brand trust	12	0.16	0.05	0.00	0.18	0.04	0.00	0.05	0.06	0.38	0.13
Localness	→	Brand satisfaction	13	0.22	0.04	0.00	0.27	0.03	0.00	0.15	0.05	0.00	0.10
Family firm image	→	Perceived quality	14	0.85	0.04	0.00	0.98	0.04	0.00	0.93	0.03	0.00	0.08
Perceived quality	→	Brand trust	15	0.38	0.05	0.00	0.23	0.05	0.00	0.39	0.07	0.00	0.08
Perceived quality	→	Brand satisfaction	16	0.62	0.05	0.00	0.33	0.04	0.00	0.50	0.06	0.00	0.00
Family firm image	→	Social image	17	0.86	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.05	0.00	1.03	0.04	0.00	0.02

Social image	→	Brand trust	18	−0.03	0.02	0.14	0.04	0.02	0.04	−0.05	0.02	0.04	0.00
Social image	→	Brand satisfaction	19	−0.04	0.02	0.01	-0.05	0.02	0.00	−0.06	0.02	0.01	0.90
Family firm image	→	Uniqueness	20	0.93	0.04	0.00	0.96	0.05	0.00	0.94	0.03	0.00	0.83
Uniqueness	→	Brand trust	21	−0.03	0.04	0.43	0.05	0.04	0.16	−0.02	0.05	0.74	0.38
Uniqueness	→	Brand satisfaction	22	-0.01	0.04	0.78	0.08	0.03	0.01	0.11	0.04	0.01	0.09
Brand trust	→	Attitudinal loyalty	23	0.38	0.09	0.00	0.74	0.08	0.00	0.44	0.09	0.00	0.02
Brand trust	→	Behavioural loyalty	24	0.19	0.08	0.02	0.33	0.07	0.00	0.20	0.06	0.00	0.31
Brand satisfaction	→	Attitudinal loyalty	25	0.74	0.11	0.00	0.51	0.09	0.00	0.94	0.11	0.00	0.00
Brand satisfaction	→	Behavioural loyalty	26	0.75	0.10	0.00	0.71	0.09	0.00	0.92	0.07	0.00	0.10
Brand trust	↔	Brand satisfaction		0.09	0.01	0.00	0.06	0.01	0.00	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.02
Attitudinal loyalty	↔	Behavioural loyalty		0.27	0.03	0.00	0.11	0.02	0.00	0.19	0.03	0.00	0.00

Note: Unstandardised parameter estimates (Est), robust standard errors (Se) and Satorra and Bentler (2001) test for group parameter differences $p_{chi^2\_diff}$ reported

Table 5

Latent Means

	Australia	Italy	United States	Pooled
Behavioural loyalty	0.22	0.28	0.19	0.23
Attitudinal loyalty	0.36	0.32	0.32	0.32
Brand satisfaction	0.36	0.37	0.33	0.34
Brand trust	0.35	0.43	0.27	0.35
Uniqueness	0.37	0.22	0.34	0.30
Social image	0.09	0.11	0.13	0.11
Perceived quality	0.28	0.38	0.28	0.31
Localness	0.52	0.43	0.41	0.44
Corporate social responsibility	0.47	0.37	0.39	0.40
Long-term orientation	0.34	0.29	0.30	0.31
Customer orientation	0.52	0.43	0.46	0.45
Family firm identity	2.02	2.21	1.22	1.71

Australia: n = 1,026; Italy: n = 1,036; United States: n = 1,020

Note: Values expressed as Cohen's d.

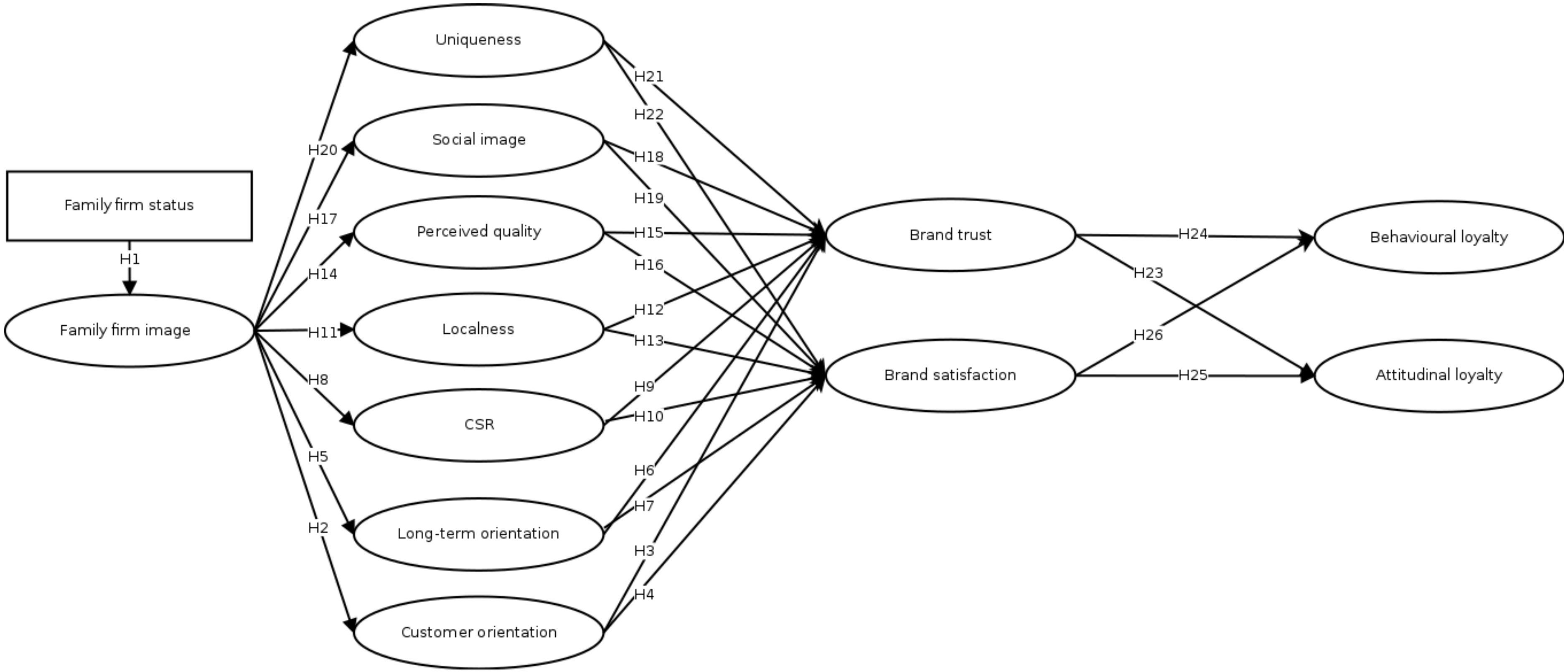

Figure 1 Structural model.

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