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Identity of the Family Business Company. How Do the Most Valuable Polish Family-Owned Companies Use Family Identity in Building the Image of a Family-Owned Company?

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Abstract

Theoretical background: In Poland, family-owned companies have been actively developing since the democratic transformation. Some of them have used market conditions, being mature and large entities, consciously building their corporate brand identities, and communicating their messages on their websites. A lot of them are faced with a strategic decision whether to build a brand based on the family-owned type

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of brand, as encouraged by associations, foundations as well, and the media, whose goal is to support and integrate family-owned companies.
Purpose of the article: This article aims to explore the way in which the most valuable Polish family-owned companies that decided to be presented in the *Forbes* ranking in September 2023 communicate the identity of the family firm on their website and to find out if there is any pattern or model of communication.
Research methods: Fifty websites from 100 family businesses classified in the *Forbes* magazine ranking of the most valuable Polish family-owned companies with revenues exceeding PLN 100 million, published in September 2023, were examined, diagnosing elements indicating the adoption of the brand identity of a family business. The criteria for building the family business brand for Polish companies were developed with the participation of 12 experts in the field of family business.
Main findings: A model was constructed to identify the family identity of the brand of the family-owned company using family-owned websites. The results of the research indicate that the percentage of family owned companies among the most precious family owned companies which are defined as family owned companies is higher than that indicated in the reports as of 2009 and 2017 for small and medium companies in Poland.

Introduction

"We are the largest family-owned company within our industry", "despite constant development, we are still a family-owned company, in which experience, knowledge… and goodwill pass on from one generation to the next", "We are a pharmaceutical company no. 1 in Poland on the market of over-the-counter products" – these are examples of different messages to be found on the websites of the largest Polish family-owned companies. They answer the user's question about the identity of the organisation, the company whose services or products they are interested in, as they browse their website. Family-owned companies appeared in Poland alongside the system transformation and economic change that followed, part of them developed dynamically, using market chances and effectively competing in European markets (Jeżak, 2014). The staples are customer-centredness, responsibility, credibility, and greater trust received from stakeholders and customers in particular than might be the case within the group of nonfamily-owned companies (Binz Astrachan & Botero, 2018; Andreini et al., 2020). A question arises whether the stakeholders (customers, business partners, employees) give more trust to family-owned companies and, therefore, whether Polish family-owned companies build their brand identity based on being family-owned and business family identity.

Literature review

Organisational identity is not an easy notion, nor an unambiguous one. It has been analysed by researchers of many disciplines for years (marketing, management, sociology, or psychology), which renders it even more difficult to directly define it (Kowalska-Jarnot, 2019). The point of departure of considerations concerning organisational identity is the definition of a person's identity, i.e. a group of self-de-

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scriptions (features and classifications) through which a person describes their person (Zarębska, 2009). The identity of an organisation is defined as the response of its members to the question of who we are as an organisation and who we would like to be. According to Sułkowski (2005), the identity of the organisation must meet four key criteria: the defining of the key traits of the organisation, i.e. its essence, the difference between it and other entities, i.e. building the sense of separateness of its members, time continuity, i.e. continuing of the organisation's operations despite the elapse of time, as well as its subindividual and subsocial character manifesting itself in the building of a group. As Gioia et al. (2000) indicate, organisational identity is highly correlated with its image and the main role of management is the ability to manage the identity and adjust it to external challenges.

The organisational identity is a two-dimensional system: an internal one (related to the organisational culture and the people the company is composed of) and an external one (related to the company impacting different stakeholder groups). The system is characterised by a unified character and time continuity, symbolic representation manifesting itself in visual, verbal, and behavioural communication, separateness contributing to specifying the boundaries about other entities, as well as placement, i.e. taking a particular position within the minds of customers (Kowalska-Jarnot, 2019).

In marketing, brand identity is subcategorised as a notion narrower than that of organisational identity. Brand identity is constructed by its owner or the brand strategist and is a unique compilation of associations with the brand based on its features, benefits for the customers, beliefs and values. Building brand identity is not limited to specifying the name, logo, colours, slogans, or symbols, but, above all, it consists of making a promise of permanently providing the customer with a set of specific features of the product, benefits as well as services (Kotler, 2005, pp. 422–423). Brand management is a planned process that includes, above all, the points of contact with external and internal customers.

The concept of brand identity in the case of a family-owned company has a wider scope than in the case of a nonfamily-owned company. It stems from the specificity of family-owned companies in which two separate systems in terms of social categories, i.e. a family and a business system, different in terms of goals, expectations, and values, function parallelly (Leszczewska, 2016, pp. 39–41). Looking from the standpoint of management and ownership, subsystems function within family-owned companies: companies, owned entities, and families, and the model of three circles suggested by Tagiuri and Davis (1996), allows us to understand a lot of areas generating conflict or areas requiring discussion within a family (Lewandowska & Lipiec, 2015; Leszczewska, 2016). Additionally, family-owned companies are different from nonfamily-owned companies in terms of a long-term outlook on their activity and the idea of succession. Moreover, family-owned companies are different from non family-owned companies taking into account the idea of succession, which is typical for family-owned companies, family-owned companies may be defined through the

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prism of a reference to three dimensions: ownership, the Board as well and continuity, in which family and company values are significant and overlapping between one another and between a generation of doyens and successors (Trembaczowski, 2020). The adoption of a family-owned-company identity concerns different systems, and the presence of a lot of identity units (for example, family owner, family employee, family member) may lead to important identity conflicts (Bettinelli et al., 2022). The decision concerning company identity is thus a strategic decision, causes the combination of an overlapping of an organisational identity and a family identity, the tightening of the impact of a family on the company, the reinforcement of a belief that a family shall take care of the company and shall apply its knowledge and experience in business management, as well as shall use their knowledge and experience to move the company ahead (Mahto et al., 2019). In such a situation, the company brand becomes a corporate brand. For a corporate brand, the major areas are values; the statement of a clear mission and vision, which may reinforce the image of particular products (which is transposed onto better placement, and better communication coherence) as well as in difficult times may help protect the goodwill of the company (Greyser & Urde, 2019). A family-owned company identity means focussing on company branding as a whole, beginning with the social aspect and responsibility for the environment, a focus on branding, building trust, and differentiating it from the competitors, including corporate communication also (Blombäck, 2011). Therefore, the family-owned company owners are faced with a decision whether being the owner of an enterprise and the wealth in the hands of a family, adopt a family-owned company identity and communicate it openly both to internal and external stakeholders. In practice, they give answers to a question thus stated: on whose behalf our company will give promises to customers – whether only on behalf of the company which is the owner of the enterprise. It is an important decision, as the brand identity and what it stands for are some of the greatest assets of a family-owned company and form the basis for building a competitive advantage and increasing efficiency, particularly when it is connected to a customer-focused strategy (Craig et al., 2008).

This article aims to find an answer to a question of how many of the 50 most precious family-owned companies included in the September *Forbes* report titled "The most valuable Polish family-owned companies with revenues exceeding PLN 100 million" (2023) adopt a brand identity, communicating a family-owned identity to external stakeholders. A hypothesis was stated according to which due to the active promotion activity concerning family entrepreneurship realised in Poland by associations and institutions created in the years 2008–2011: Foundation of family-owned companies (www2), the Institute of Family Business (www6), Family Business Network Poland (www4), the Association of a Family-owned Company Initiative (www3) as well as the *Forbes* magazine which has been publishing the ranking of the most precious family-owned companies (www5), as well as the scale of the functioning of the analysed companies, the percentage of business entities adopting

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the family-owned company among the most precious family-owned companies, is higher than in the research conducted brand in 2009 and 2016. 27% of micro-, small, and middle-size companies in the communication identified as family-owned companies (PARP, 2009), and 36% of companies self-identified as a family-owned company (Więcek-Janka & Lewandowska, 2017) and, based on that differentiating factor, built the identity of a family-owned company.

Fifty out of 100 companies within "The most valuable Polish family-owned companies with revenues exceeding PLN 100 million" ranking were analysed. The ranking was compiled by Dun & Bradstreet in cooperation with *Forbes*. In the compilation companies, in which at least two shareholders were related and a minimum of 50% + 1 share belonged to them, and on top of that, they existed uninterrupted for 8 years. Additionally, the companies had to: in 2021, demonstrate revenue not lower than PLN 10 million net, regularly in recent years, demonstrate a positive balance, not be subject to insolvency and liquidation proceedings, be financially healthy, enjoy a good reputation (*Najcenniejsze*…, 2023, pp. 144–147).

It has been assumed that the activity taken up by the associations, business institutions and the media transposes onto the creation of pride based on the family-owned company identity. The activities realised by those entities are geared towards professionalising, integrating and educating family entrepreneurs through organising meetings, congresses or reunions (the Institute of Family Business, Family Business Network Poland, the Association of Family-owned Companies, *Forbes*), the presence of the family-owned company subject in the media (*Forbes*), the issuing of a newspaper directed at family-owned companies (the Association of Family Owned Companies), rewarding outstanding family-owned companies (the Institute of Family Business of the *Forbes* magazine), publishing rankings and organising activities dedicated to successors – development programmers and building their support networks (the Institute of Family Business), or the building of the sense of pride as a family-owned company through promoting the Family Company trademark (the Association of Family-owned companies – currently over 1,100 companies in Poland use this trademark – www1).

Concerning the above-mentioned grounds, the following research questions have been posed:

1. How do the wealthiest Polish family companies communicate the family identity on their website and is there a pattern or model of their communication?

2. Whether among the companies included in the *Forbes* magazine ranking more companies adopt the identity of family businesses than in previous studies and, if so, how many such companies there are.

3. How many of the richest family-owned companies adopt the family-owned brand identity?

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Research methods

The research was carried out using a quantitative research technique consisting of analysing the content of the websites of the first 50 family-owned companies within *Forbes*' Ranking (2023). The research was conducted in October 2023. An assumption was made that irrespective of the type of client at whom the company offer is directed (the B2B or B2C market), every entity has an active website. Google Chrome was used to look for company websites, by entering the name of the company to be found in the 09/2023 *Forbes*' Ranking (2023).

Table 1. A list of 50 family-owned companies from "The most valuable Polish family-owned companies with revenues exceeding PLN 100 million" ranking together with the addresses of their websites

Company	The name of the company	Company website
1	Euro NET sp. z o.o.	https://www.euro.com.pl/cms/o-firmie.bhtml
2	Agata S.A.	https://www.agatameble.pl/
3	Aflofarm Farmacja Polska sp. zo.o.	https://www.aflofarm.com.pl/pl/
4	CORRECT K. BŁASZCZYK i WSPÓLNICY SPÓŁKA KOMANDYTOWA	http://www.vcorrect.eu/
5	WIĘCEK BOGDAN BUDMAT	https://www.budmat.com/pl
6	PRUSZYŃSKI SP. Z O.O.	https://pruszynski.com.pl/
7	SERWISTAL sp. z o.o.	https://serwistal.pl/
8	BIURO TECHNICZNO-HANDLOWE BTH IMPORT STAL sp. z o.o.	https://bth.pl/
9	KACZMAREK MALEWO Spółka komandytowa	https://www.kaczmarek2.pl/
10	MOKATE sp. z o.o.	https://mokate.com/
11	BIOAGRA S.A.	https://bioagra.pl/
12	PTAK S.A.	https://ptak.com.pl/
13	WERNER – KENKEL sp. z o.o.	https://wernerkenkel.com.pl/
14	TRANSFER MULTISORT ELEKTRONIK sp. z o.o.	https://www.tme.eu/pl/
15	MOTOROL AUTOMOTIVE sp. z o.o.	https://www.motorol.pl/
16	Zakład Przetwórstwa Mięsnego JBB Import Export Józef Bałdyga	https://jbb.pl/
17	ARCHE S.A.	https://arche.pl/
18	COM40 sp.z o.o. spółka komandytowa	https://com40.pl/kontakt
19	AGROLOK sp. z o.o.	https://www.agrolok.pl/
20	FABRYKA MEBLI BODZIO BOGDAN SZEWCZYK Spółka jawna	https://www.bodzio.pl/pl/
21	SOLBET sp. z o.o.	https://www.solbet.pl/
22	PORTOS TR7 sp. z o.o. spółka komandytowa	https://www.portosrolety.pl/
23	FERMY DROBIU WOŹNIAK sp. z o.o.	https://fdw.pl/
24	WIŚNIOWSKI sp. z o.o. komandytowo-akcyjna	https://www.wisniowski.pl/
25	BALEX METAL sp. z o.o.	https://balex.eu/
26	OPOLTRANS sp. z o.o.	https://www.opoltrans.com.pl/
27	FIDELTRONIK POLAND sp. z o.o.	https://fideltronik.com/
28	ZAKŁADY PRODUKCJI KRUSZYW RUPIŃSCY SPÓŁKA JAWNA	https://zpkszumowo.pl/
29	PIEKARNIA OSKROBA S.A.	https://www.oskroba.pl/

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Company	The name of the company	Company website
30	GRUPA G3 Spółka jawna Grzegorz, Piotr Radosław GUGAŁA	strona w przebudowie http://www.grupag3.com/
31	Blachotrapez sp. z o.o.	https://www.blachotrapez.eu/
32	Witoplast.Kiesielńscy.spółka.jawna	https://witoplast.com.pl/
33	DFM sp. z o.o	https://www.dfm.pl/
34	Polbildingsp.zo.o. spółka komandytowa	http://polbilding.pl/
35	Model opakowania sp. z o.o.	https://www.modelgroup.com/pl/
36	Wener Kenkel Bochnia sp. z o.o.	https://wernerkenkel.com.pl/
37	Ziaja LTD Zakład Produkcji Leków sp.z o.o.	https://pl.ziaja.com/
38	Drukarnia Dako Kozioł i wspólnicy s.j.	https://drukarnia-dako.pl/
39	JBG 2 sp.z o.o.	https://pl.jbg2.com/
40	Plichta sp. z o.o. spółka komandytowa	https://www.plichta.com.pl/
41	Olimp Laboratories sp. z o.o.	https://olimp-labs.pl/
42	Oknoplast sp. z o.o.	https://oknoplast.com.pl/
43	Zakłady mięsne Skiba S.A.	https://zmskiba.pl/
44	Budnex Deweloper sp. z o.o	https://www.budnex.pl/
45	RBB stal sp. z o.o.	https://rbb-stal.com.pl/
46	CITRONEX sp. z o.o.	https://citronex.pl/pl
47	Paula Fish Sławomir Gojdź spółka komandytowa	https://paulafish.pl/
48	XL TAPE International sp. z o.o.	https://bluedolphin.pl/
49	Eurometal S.A.	https://eko-swiat.pl/
50	TFP sp. z o.o.	https://tfp.com.pl/

Source: (Ranking…, 2023).

It has also been assumed that the most precious companies with a revenue counted in millions consciously make decisions concerning the strategy of communicating the brand to the business surroundings and that the former three-level stage of building the brand – from the intuitive stage, in which the company brand develops based on intuition and self-perception, through the stage of the emerging process in which an active role is played by the managers, up to the strategic stage in which brand identity is a result of a specified and defined brand strategy focussing on corporate communication (Blombäck & Ramírez Pasillas, 2012). As a result, communication and presenting the family-owned company brand about different stakeholders (starting from business partners, the media, and potential customers) on the family-owned company from within the *Forbes* ranking websites is a consciously planned process and corresponds with the adopted brand strategy. It has thus been assumed that a website, as a tool of marketing, as managed by the company, fully represents the company identity and is the best source of information constituting an answer to the question of what organisational identity is created by the owners and whether they adopt a family identity. It has been acknowledged that a family-owned company is such a family-owned business entity which communicates to the external surroundings on its website that they are a family-owned company, using verbal communication, speaking about themselves, we are a family company, we are a company in the second or third generation as an owner. Additionally, it was checked whether companies build a family identity by placing on their websites graphics or verbal

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symbols of the associations or foundations integrating the surroundings as well as the results of a family-owned company's *Forbes* Ranking (2023). The name of the company itself was analysed as well, checking whether it contains the surname pointing towards the family character of the business entity.

In parallel, a qualitative research with the participation of 12 experts dealing with the subject of family-owned companies, asking them about the "family company" topic. To obtain a high level of objectivity, experts from family-owned companies had to meet the requirement of at least 3 years of experience working for family-owned companies. Additionally, they represented different service and competence areas: starting with the law, through management, finance, psychology, HR, designing innovation, up to scientific research in the area of family companies.

Table 2. Characteristics of experts who participate in the research of the brand attributes of a family-owned company brand

Code	Gender	Experience in working with family-owned companies	Since
y1	M	Lawyer, supports family-owned companies within the area of ownership and succession, a financial advisor	2004
y2	F	Researcher, a business advisor, deals with family entrepreneurship	2007
y3	M	The legal advisor supports family-owned companies within the area of ownership	2017
y4	F	An owner of a family-owned company for 15 years, a business advisor, who specialises in HR processes and HR strategies for family-owned companies	2019
y5	M	A business advisor, an experienced manager, advises family companies	2019
y6	F	A family-owned company researcher, a family entrepreneurship researcher, and a family business advisor	2002
y7	M	A financial specialist, an experienced manager, supports family-owned companies	2020
y8	F	A family company successor, a founder of an association, advises family-owned companies within the area of ESG	2004
y9	F	A psychologist, a family business advisor, a business trainer	2005
y10	F	A service design specialist supports family-owned companies within the area of innovation design.	2015
y11	M	A manager, a succession advisor	1994
y12	F	A specialist in a business institution associating family entrepreneurial	2018

Source: Authors' own study.

The research process comprised the following stages:

1) a verification of the hypothesis that all the most precious Polish family-owned companies with revenues exceeding PLN 100 million have an active and accessible website,

2) an analysis of verbal content on the website in accordance with the selected verbal phrases. A qualitative analysis comprised content and messages connected with a family identity on the following websites: the main company website, About us, History, websites with updates on the logo main website. The following verbal phrases were searched: "a family company", "family orientation", "family values", "succession", "successor", "the second or subsequent generation of founders"; the phrases "surname" and "those are the owners or founders of the company" were verified,

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3) an analysis of a website in terms of posting on it graphics related to a family identity – a family-owned symbol of a tree – as well as references to external initiatives analysis directed at family entrepreneurs, for example, a *Forbes* ranking, the Family Award of the Year, participation in the activities of the Family Business Institute, for example, participating in a U-Family family reunion,

4) an analysis of the name of the company regarding using the name of the owner. It has been verified whether within the brand there is a surname subconsciously pointing towards a family identity. It has also been verified whether there is a correlation between the name of the company and the communication of the family identity on the company website,

5) research with the participation of experts related to the family-owned company subject area concerning the assets of a family-owned company brand consisting of a spontaneous indication of the family-owned company features by the experts,

6) analysing and segregating the indicated features, to conduct research with the participation of experts concerning the significance of the indicated features in building a family-owned company brand,

7) preparing an analysis model of the websites in terms of building a family-owned brand identity.

The results of the websites of the most precious Polish family-owned companies have been written in the form of an Excel file in the form of charts. Expert research has traditionally been carried out in paper form, and the results have been sent to an Excel file and analysed in SPSS Statistics.

Results

Analysis of active websites has shown that in October not all the richest companies in the *Forbes* ranking had active and accessible websites. Of 50 family-owned companies, 49 had active websites and 1 had an unavailable website marked as a website in construction. Additionally, an analysis indicated that within the ranking two companies have been categorised within the ranking from within one capital group, the companies stated the same website as their own. As in the previous, further company identity analysis was limited to 48 family-owned companies. The value of the companies analysed valued by the Swiss method of 2001 was between PLN 185,212,629 and 1,078,540,617.

It has been verified which markets the researched family-owned companies function within – in line with the information obtained from websites – 88% of them focus their activity on the B2B market (41 companies or company groups), 6%, i.e. 3 companies offer their products directly to individual customers, and 4 companies (8%) offer their products both to business and individual customers, i.e. they function on B2B and B2C markets. Within the analysed family company group, there were most companies whose main operations consisted of manufacturing, i.e. 37 entities,

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including 1 manufacturing-commercial and 4 manufacturing-services, which constitutes almost 78% of the companies. The rest of the companies focused their activity on other areas. Eight out of them may be defined as commercial companies (16% of the group), and 3 entities (6%) work within the area of services. In summary, the richest companies within the *Forbes* ranking operate mainly in the B2B market and are manufacturing companies.

An important element of the research was an answer to a question of how many of the analysed richest family-owned companies included a reference to a family identity, in the form of verbal or graphical communication. The analysis comprised the following elements on the website: verbal phrases related to direct communication of the family identity, references to associations and institutions supporting family entrepreneurship, the surname of the founder or the owner of the company within the name of the company, as well as the extent of information about the owner or the owners of the company.

The results of the analysis demonstrate that family-owned companies communicate a family-owned company identity using different assets, often separately. Out of 48 analysed companies, 32 have assets pointing towards a family-owned company identity, i.e. 67% of the companies; however, it is not equivalent to the adoption of a family-owned company brand. Most, i.e. 20 of 48, companies analysed use the phrase "a family-owned company", "a family-owned enterprise", "father", "son", "grandson", "generation", "successor", "multigenerational tradition"; in the names of the 18 companies analysed, there is a name of the owner, on the websites of 7 family-owned companies, there has been a reference to the family-owned company ranking, for different 5 years. Five companies placed a graphical sign of the family-owned company tree in the lower menu at the bottom of the website, 2 companies registered the fact of entering a cooperation or obtaining an award from the Institute of Family Business, a reference to the participation in the meetings of the Association of a Family Company Initiative or the activity within the Family Business Network Poland was found on the website of none of the analysed family-owned companies.

The analysis indicated that the most frequently used messages answered an identity-related question of who we are as "a family-owned company". Out of 20 economic identities analysed, 13 thus self-identified. Two companies self-identified as "family company" and in 3 companies, the message was about a managing company "a family tradition continuator", "the fourth generation" or "a wife with children", in 1 company, "family traditions" were used, and in 1 company, it was indicated "we were awarded in a family-owned company ranking". Companies use phrases that combine a family and a company system, but also words and meanings related to a family (wife, son). Detailed data concerning the analysed companies are compiled in a graph form in the Appendix.

Comparing the references to associations and organisations promoting and supporting family entrepreneurship in Poland (using the Family tree logo, information referring to the activity of the Institute of Family Business) with information about

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the award received from the *Forbes* ranking concerning family-owned companies (information in the news feed, often together with the picture from a gala connected with distributing awards from the previous years) it is observable that only some of the companies use those brand identity assets combined on their websites, and only some of them use them separately. The question of what motivates the owners in terms of exhibiting only one asset related to the building of the family brand identity arises.

In parallel to the analysis of websites, research was run with the participation of experts, who for at least 3 years dealt with the subject of family-owned companies from different viewpoints (research, practical, supportive). Experts aimed to spontaneously point towards the assets, the brand identity features applied by family-owned companies in the process of building a family-owned brand identity. The features identified by the experts concerned both communication and assets related to the organisational culture of the family-owned companies; however, for the research herein, only features pointing towards a family identity of the family-owned company brand were selected, identifiable with the use websites, without the necessity to conduct deep interviews with the owners and employees of the analysed companies.

Table 3. A list of features/assets spontaneously chosen by the experts related to the family-owned company brand

No.	Feature/Asset
1	A family-owned company tree (the logo that is promoted by the Foundation of family-owned companies)
2	Communication: we are family-orientated, we are a family company, e.g. by "About us" on the website
3	The National Court Register – Surnames
4	The surname in the name of the company, brand
5	A comment in the name, i.e. Mokate, we are a Family Business
6	The company has specified values on their website and within the communication
7	The history of success
8	Owners appear and endorse the brand with their faces
9	Are to be found within the Forbes rankings, the FRR competition.
10	Emphasising durability
11	A reference to a multi-generational character
12	We show the generation DNA (nesters, successors)
13	The history of the founder is told, and there are references to the history of the founder.
14	Are in the IBR, FBN networks?
15	Participate in conferences concerning family business
16	Communicate that the family works in the company, the company is managed by the family, and each family member speaks about the company with pride
17	There is XXX and sons in the name
18	The 90s graphics, and unfashionable design (it means the company was established in the 1990s)
19	PPHU xxx
20	The year of founding within the logo
21	A logo with surnames

Source: Authors' own study.

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Depending on the expert knowledge at their disposal, respondents more strongly emphasised the assets related to the brand or the organisational culture of the company.

Table 4. A list of features/assets related to the family-owned identity brand of the expert spontaneously indicated by the experts

	Features/assets in line with the numbers from Table 3																				
Expert	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
y1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
y2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
y3	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
y4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
y5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
y6	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
y7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
y8	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
y9	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
y10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
y11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
y12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5	5	2	5	1	3	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	4	1	1	2	1	1

Source: Authors' own study.

A spontaneously indicated list of assets was subject to analysis. Twenty-one of the features were aggregated into six key brand assets of the family-owned company brand.

Table 5. A chart of aggregated family-owned company brand features

Feature	Aggregated characteristic	Remarks
A family tree logo (the logo that is promoted by Foundation of family-owned companies)	Using the Family Tree logo (a website / product packaging / advertising material) or another logo pointing towards the adoption of the family-owned company identity	A feature considered in further research with no changes
Communication: we are family-orientated, we are a family company, e.g. by "About us" on the website	Using the phrase "We are a family-owned company" in communication on websites / social networks	A feature considered within further research
A reference to a multigenerational character		
Communicate that the family works in the company, the company is managed by the family, and each family member speaks about the company with pride		
An inscription within the name, e.g. Mokate we are a family business		
Surname in the name of the company, brand	The name of the founder within the name of the company	A feature considered within further research
The National Court Register – Surnames		
XXX is amending the name		
Logo with the names		

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Feature	Aggregated characteristic	Remarks
The year of founding within the logo	Exposing the owner (founder) by his name and surname, his values, and the challenges he has faced (storytelling)	A feature considered within further research
The story of the founder is told, they refer to the history of the founder		
Emphasising the continuity		
A story of success		
We demonstrate generational DNA (nesters, successors)	Communicating about the successor or a business family (photos, name and surname) within the context of, for example, a website, social media, advertisements, edited material	A feature considered within further research
Owners appear and endorse the brand using their face		
Are in the IBR, FBN networks?	Referring in their communication to rankings, compilations, and awards granted by the company surroundings (for example, *Forbes*, IBR, IFR, FFR)	A feature considered within further research
Are in the Forbes rankings, the FRR competition		
Participating in conferences related to the subject matter of subject matter of family business		
The 90s graphics, unfashionable		A feature not taken into account
PPHU xxx		A feature not taken into account
has their values stated on their website and in their communication		A feature not taken into account

Source: Authors' own study.

Combining the features indicated by the experts, three of them have purposefully been omitted from the combining process. It has been acknowledged that communicating values is not a differentiating feature between family-owned and non-family-owned companies; the significance and understanding of this feature within the context of the family company specificity requires a more accurate definition together with the experts in the IDI research. A feature of "unfashionable graphics from the nineties" has also not been considered based on the extent of the research: the analysis did not take into account an analysis of logos in terms of the design, nor did it take into account the "PPHU xxx" that refers to the most commonly adopted names of companies founded in the nineties – manufacturing and trade, as well as service companies, adopting that the richest family-owned companies, based on the scale of their operations, transformed existing entities legally. Based on the compilation, six criteria were consulted with experts in terms of their significance in building the family-owned company brand, through the assessment of each feature's significance from 1 – *the most significant feature* to 6 – *the least significant feature* receiving a significance of particular features according to each expert.

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Table 6. A feature ranking according to the features of experts where feature 1 is the most significant, feature 6 is the least significant in building the brand of the family-owned company

Expert	Using the phrase "we are a family-owned company" in their website communication	Using the family-owned company tree logo; adopting the family-owned company identity	The surname of the founder in the name of the company	Referring in communication to rankings, compilations, and awards granted by the surroundings of family-owned companies (e.g. *Forbes*, IBR, IFR	Demonstrating the owner by his name and surname in the company history, his values, and the challenges he faced (storytelling)	Communicating about the successor or a business family (pictures, name and surname) within the context of the economy, e.g. in the context of a company, e.g. on the website, social media, advertisements, edited material
y1	4	5	1	6	3	2
y2	3	2	4	1	5	6
y3	2	1	6	5	3	4
y4	3	6	1	5	2	4
y5	3	2	1	5	4	6
y6	1	5	2	6	3	4
y7	1	6	3	5	2	4
y8	2	4	1	5	3	6
y9	1	6	3	5	2	4
y10	5	4	6	2	3	1
y11	1	4	2	6	3	5
y12	5	6	1	2	4	3

Source: Authors' own study.

To assess the compliance of expert rankings, answers involving the compliance factor were subject to analysis by Kendall and Smith (Kendall & Babington-Smith, 1939; Wallis, 1939). The Kendal compliance factor for the row scale and the minimum graduation and its value are counted based on the following pattern (1):

$$W = \frac{12S}{n^2(k^3-k)} = 0.373 \quad (1)$$

where:
n – the number of different grade compilations (the assessor number)
k – the number of classified objects

$R_{i,j}$ grades ascribed to the subsequent objects ($j = 1, 2\ldots k$), separately for each assessor ($i = 1, 2\ldots n$)
C – a correction of even rank counted from the pattern (2)

$$C = \sum_{j=1}^{n} xij\,(t^3 - t) \quad (2)$$

t – the number of cases comprised within the even rank
W signifies Kendall's compliance coefficient in the population and the sample $\underline{W}$

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In each of the scopes, to assess the compliance of expert responses, we have counted the Kendall and Smith compliance coefficient stated at the level of 0.374, which indicates that the expert compliance is 37%.

Table 7. The value of Kendall and Smith's compliance coefficient for research scopes, the characteristics of the family-owned company brand

1	Task_1	Using the phrase "we are a family-owned company" in your website communication/social networks
2	Task_5	Showing the name and surname of the owner, their values, and the challenges they have faced in the company's history (storytelling)
3	Task_6	Communicating about the successor or the business family (pictures, name, and surname) in the context of the company, e.g. on their website, social media, advertisements, edited material
4	Task_3	The surname of the founder in the name of the company
5	Task_2	Using the family-owned company tree logo (a website/product packaging/ advertising material) or another logo indicating the adoption of the family-owned company brand
6	Task_4	Referring in the communication to the rankings, compilations, and awards granted by the family-owned company surroundings (e.g. the *Forbes* magazine, IBR, IFR, FFR)

Source: Authors' own study.

Based on the significance ranking of the characteristics in expert research, a model to identify the family identity model was developed using the websites of family-owned companies. The model includes 6 factors (categories), by expert indications. Each of them was given a point value.

1) Verbal communication of the awareness of being a family-owned company on the company website – 5 points, when there is a message that shows the identification of being a family-owned company and is communicated as a feature of the family-owned company identity, 4 points when the message is on the main website, but it does not have an identity character for the brand company, it is the only out of many messages, 3 points when the message appears on the subsidies of the main site devoted to the description or the company history,

2) Demonstrate on the website the history of the owner's company by their name and surname, based on the fact that the information appears on the About us websites / company history and requires searching on a website – 3 points,

3) Communicating about the successor or the business family (photos, the name and the surname, the description) – 2 points,

4) The surname of the founder of the company in the name of the company – 2 points,

5) Placing the family-owned company tree logo by the company logo – 1 point,

6) Referring or cooperating with the associations integrating family-owned companies, e.g. IBR or the family-owned company initiative or FBN – 1 point.

The maximum number of points to be obtained is 14. The model assumes that family-owned companies are divided into three categories: family-owned companies with a family-owned company brand, family-owned companies with a high potential of building a family-owned company identity, which communicates simultaneously

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on their websites other distinctive characteristics of the brand than the related ones of the related ones of the family-owned company. Table 8 exhibits the results of applying a model for those from the 50s in the case of the most precious family-owned companies in Poland according to the ranking, for which on the websites at least one indicated feature of the family-owned company was identified (a detailed analysis of the features is included in Table 3).

Table 8. A description of the family-owned identity model for company websites, together with classifying them to the model of the analysed companies

An identity of a family-owned company according to the model	The number of points	Family businesses qualified for a given category (alphabetical order within the category)
A family-owned company with a family-owned company identity	12–14 points – above 80% of the points	1. MOKATE SP. Z O.O. 2. WERNER – KENKEL SP. Z O.O.
A family-owned company with a high potential to build the family-owned company brand, communicating other distinguishing features of the brand	9–11 points – above 60% of the points	1. BUDNEX DEWELOPER SP. Z O.O. 2. DRUKARNIA DAKOKOZIO I WSPÓLNICY S.J. 3. FABRYKA MEBLI BODZIO BOGDAN SZEWCZYK SPÓŁKA JAWNA 4. ZAKŁADY MIĘSNE SKIBA S.A. 5. ZAKŁAD PRZETWÓRSTWA MIĘSNEGO JBB IMPORT EXPORT JÓZEF BAŁDYGA 6. WITOPLAST KIESIELŃSCY SPÓŁKA JAWNA
A family-owned company building its advantage on other distinguishing features and elements of the identity than the family-owned identity brand in the communication on their website	1–8 points – below 60% of the points	1. ARCHE S.A. 2. BLACHOTRAPEZ SP. Z O.O. 3. CITRONEX SP. Z O.O. 4. CORRECT K. BŁASZCZYK I WSPÓLNICY SPÓŁKA KOMANDYTOWA 5. DFM SP. Z O.O. 6. FERMY DROBIU WOŹNIAK SP. Z O.O. 7. KACZMAREK MALEWO SPÓŁKA KOMANDYTOWA 8. MODEL OPAKOWANIA SP. Z O.O. 9. OKNOPLAST SP. Z O.O. 10. OLIMP LABORATORIES SP. Z O.O. 11. PAULA FISH SŁAWOMIR GOJDŹ SPÓŁKA KOMANDYTOWA 12. PIEKARNIA OSKROBA S.A. 13. PLICHTA SP. Z O.O. SPÓŁKA KOMANDYTOWA 14. PORTOS TR7 SP. Z O.O. SPÓŁKA KOMANDYTOWA 15. PRUSZYŃSKI SP Z O.O. 16. PTAK SA 17. RBB STAL SP. Z O.O. 18. SERWISTAL SP. Z O.O. 19. TFP SP. Z O.O. 20. TRANSFER MULTISORT ELEKTRONIK SP. Z O.O. 21. WIĘCEK BOGDAN BUDMAT 22. WIŚNIOWSKI SP. Z O.O. KOMANDYTOWO AKCYJNA 23. ZAKŁADY PRODUKCJI KRUSZYW RUPIŃSCY SPÓŁKA JAWNA 24. ZIAJA LTD ZAKŁAD PRODUKCJI LEKÓW SP. Z O.O.

Source: Authors' own study.

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Within the analysis group of the most precious family-owned companies in Poland with revenue above PLN 100 million, the family-owned company brand in line with the composed model is adopted by two companies: Mokate, a shared company and WERNER – KENKEL, a limited liability company. On their websites both companies communicate the fact of being family-owned companies, both publicise the image of the company owners, describe the history of the founding of the company, emphasise the role of the family and the founder, as well as publicise the cooperation with the companies and associations integrating the environment of family-owned companies. It means that they have adopted a family business identity for the firms. Thanks to applying the family-owned brand identity model to websites, it has been established that out of all the companies analysed, there are six entities which have a high potential to specify their family-owned brand identity. They communicate on their website the fact of being family-owned companies using different forms of communication, although it does not identify itself as a family firm brand, thus, indicating a lot of features differentiating it from other entities, and one of them is a family-owned company. And there is also a third group of the richest family-owned companies that marginally communicate the fact that they are family-owned companies directly or using the vocabulary connected with the family system, concentrating on building company brands on other factors.

Discussions

The purpose of this study was to study the wealthiest Polish family-owned companies, which are ranked by *Forbes*, in case of family firm identity by analysing the communication on their websites. Suppose that by placing on the website the phrase "we are a family company" or related phrases, 42% of the richest family companies communicate that they are family companies, but by adding more sophisticated ways of communicating connections with the family, 32 companies can be identified (66% of the analyzed groups) as family firms only by browsing their websites. It is a significantly higher percentage than in the research to date conducted in Poland, in 2009, 27% of micro, small and medium-size companies identified themselves as family-owned companies (PARP, 2009) and in 2016, 36% of the companies self-identified as a family-owned company (Więcek-Janka et al., 2017).

Like any research, some limitations must be considered in interpreting the results. Firstly, both studies from 2009 and 2016 were conducted on a representative sample of companies, unlike this analysis, which was realised on a narrowed, unrepresentative group of 48 wealthiest Polish companies. Secondly, the analysis was carried out only among companies that reported themselves to the *Forbes* ranking, which should be kept in mind when analysing the results.

According to the proposed model based on company websites, only 2 companies adopt a family brand identity. It is important to ask why family-owned companies that decided to participate in the family-owned company ranking that they registered for

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themselves do not build the family-owned company identity. Introductory conclusions concerning the specificity of the Polish enterprises were defined by Lewandowska et al. (2017) exhibiting a few elements. One of them is a myth functioning in Poland concerning a private operator, existing despite the over thirty-year-long transformation, and resulting from the historical background of Poland and an image of a family-owned company as unprofessional (as compared with a multinational). Another feature, that Lewandowska et al. (2017) underline, is the lack of awareness among owners concerning the differences between family-owned companies and non-family-owned companies, which is transposed onto a lack of perceiving the family-orienteers as an asset within the context of building identity. Another element might be conscious hiding of the company identity, based on the adopted business strategy, e.g. introducing the company to the stock exchange which is associated with the dynamic character of functioning, and fast decisions, as opposed to family characteristics which according to the researchers are characterised by a long- term perspective of their operations, protection of the capital, and a direction towards the continuing of the enterprise. The practical experiences of the author indicate that companies operating within the sector of technological advancement (ITC) think that a family brand identity communicated outside can negatively impact the perception of the company as not innovative. Other threads related to the decision not to communicate the family-owned identity brand to a wider external audience were defined by Binz Astrachan and Botero (2017), which pointed to the fact that, based on qualitative research, for part of the companies in the opinion of their owners, communicating the family-owned brand identity has no influence over the business, and as a result, owners communicate the family-oriented character marginally. Important worries have been identified for the owners of family-owned companies. Some of the owners feel fear of publishing the data concerning the business family, as they are worried about increased public activity related to this, particularly if family members are associated with the business. In such a situation, death, difficult stories, or scandals could impact the business. The linking of the company brand with the activity of the family members might be important and influence not only the situation of the company but also the situation within the family. In Poland, such an example of the impact of the activity of distant family members on the company brand is a story of the activity of the daughter-in-law and the granddaughters of the founder of Lody Grycan. Because their public activity had hurt the businesses run by the family and had started the conflict instigated within the family, Zbigniew Grycan asked family members to stop their activity (Beszczyńska, 2022).

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to explore in what way the wealthiest Polish family-owned companies that decided to be presented in the Forbes ranking in September 2023 communicate the identity of the family firm on their website and to

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find out if there is any pattern or model of their communication. The decision to adopt the family brand identity is a strategic choice for both systems: company and family. Among the 48 most precious family-owned business entities analysed with revenues exceeding PLN 100 million included in the ranking, for 32 business enterprises (66%), identification with a family-owned company brand is observable to a different extent on their websites identified in expert research: direct messages "we are family-owned company", introducing in the company history the name of the owner, their values, the challenges they faced, communicating the successor or the business family, using the name of the founder in the name of the company, emphasising the family-centredness through the use of the family-owned company logo or another logo indicating the adoption of a family-owned company logo, posting messages about rankings, compilations, awards granted by the surrounding family companies (e.g. *Forbes*, IBR, IFR, FFR). 20 of business entities (42%) have directly verbally identified as a family-owned company, and in the case of two companies, it has been specified that the companies build their corporate identity as a family-owned company and communicate it on their websites. A website analysis model was presented, which allowed identification of the degree of the adopted brand identity of the family business.

The proposed model may also have practical value. Thanks to it, consultants or owners of family businesses can verify whether a company declaring a family brand identity presents itself in the same way to external stakeholders through communication on its website. The model can be used to diagnose elements that should be emphasised in communication with external entities and stakeholders if the company makes a strategic decision to adopt the brand identity of a family company.

An interesting topic is checking to what extent the identity of companies presented on the analysed websites of family businesses is consistent with the strategic decisions of owners and their families. Such a study would require in-depth qualitative research with business families. Another research thread would also be to check how companies are perceived in terms of identity by internal stakeholders (employees) and external stakeholders (business partners, offices, suppliers), which would allow for a holistic view of the analysed topic.

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www1: https://ffr.pl/pl/drzewko/
www2: https://ffr.pl/pl/
www3: https://firmyrodzinne.pl/
www4: https://www.fbnpoland.org/
www5: https://www.forbes.pl/forum-firm-rodzinnych/2018
www6: https://www.ibrpolska.pl/

Appendix

An analysis of the messages used related to the family identity and the references to family-owned companies from the list of 50 family-owned companies from "The Most Valuable Polish Family Businesses with Revenues over PLN 100 Million" related to the building of the family-owned company

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	The company name	Company website	Specifying a family identity phrase connected with the website	A place within the ranking with revenue over PLN 100 million (2023)	Communicating a family identity on a website	References of institutions and companies working to the benefit of promoting family-owned business			The surname in the full name of the company	Information about the successor or a business family (a picture, the name and the surname)	Information about the owners on their website
						A family-owned company tree logo	Referring to the family-owned business ranking	Referring to the Family Business of the Year / or the Institute of Family Business			
1	CORRECT K. BŁASZCZYK i WSPÓLNICY SPÓŁKA KOMANDYTOWA	http://www.vcorrect.eu/	Not found	4	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
2	WIĘCEK BOGDAN BUDMAT	https://www.budmat.com/pl	Not found	5	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
3	PRUSZYŃSKI SP. Z O.O.	https://pruszynski.com.pl/	Not found	6	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
4	SERWISTAL Sp. z o.o.	https://serwistal.pl/	Ninth second edition of the ranking of the Forum of Family-owned Companies of the *Forbes*, SERWISTAL became a leader in the Warmian-Masurian province. We are pleased to say we have been counted as one of the biggest and most credible family-owned companies	7	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
5	KACZMAREK MALEWO Spółka komandytowa	https://www.kaczmarek2.pl/	Kaczmarek Malewo is the biggest family-owned company in its branch.	9	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No

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						A family-owned company tree logo	Referring to the family-owned business ranking	Referring to the Family Business of the Year / or the Institute of Family Business			
6	MOKATE sp. z o.o.	https://mokate.com/	Mokate is one of the biggest family-owned companies in Europe functioning within the segment of groceries	10	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
7	PTAK S.A.	https://ptak.com.pl/	Not found	12	No	No	No	no	Yes	No	No
8	WERNER – KENKEL sp. z o.o.	https://wernerkenkel.com.pl/	The name and surname of the founder of the company is a recognizable brand today	13	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Transfer Multisort Elektronik Sp. z o.o.	https://www.tme.eu/pl/	TME to is a family-owned company	14	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
10	Zakład Przetwórstwa Mięsnego JBB Import Export Józef Bałdyga	https://jbb.pl/	We are a family-oriented, Polish company, functioning on the market since 1992.	16	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
11	ARCHE S.A.	https://arche.pl/	Not found	17	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
12	Fabryka Mebli BODZIO Bogdan Szewczyk Spółka jawna	https://www.bodzio.pl/pl/	It is a typical family-owned company based in Polish capital.	20	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
13	PORTOS TR7 sp. z o.o. spółka komandytowa	https://www.portosrolety.pl/	Presenting the new CEO of the company: PIOTR SZUKALSKI **Family tradition continuator**	22	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

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14	FERMY DROBIU WOŹNIAK sp. z o.o.	https://fdw.pl/	Not found	23	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
15	WISNIOWSKI sp. z o.o.komadytowo akcyjna	https://www.wisniowski.pl/	Not found	24	No	No	Nie	No	Yes	No	No
16	ZAKŁADY PRODUKCJI KRUSZYW RUPIŃSCY SPÓŁKA JAWNA	https://zpkszumowo.pl/	Not found	28	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
17	PIEKARNIA OSKROBA S.A.	https://www.oskroba.pl/	Despite continuous growth, we are still a family-owned company in which experience, knowledge and expertise go from one generation to the next and which uninterruptedly draws from the Polish baking traditions.	29	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
18	Blachotrapez sp. z o.o.	https://www.blachotrapez.eu/	Blachotrapez is a company with a long family-owned activity tradition, whose roots back to 1969	31	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
19	Witoplast Kiesielińscy spółka jawna	https://witoplast.com.pl/	Founded in 1989, Witoplast is a family-owner company	32	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No

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20	DFM sp. z o.o	https://www.dfm.pl/	As a family-owned company, we obtained an award within the Family-owned business of 2022	33	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
21	Model opakowania sp. z o.o.	https://www.modelgroup.com/pl/	Our company is run in the fourth generation by Daniel and Elisabeth Model.	35	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
22	Ziaja LTD Zakład Produkcji Leków sp. z o.o.	https://pl.ziaja.com/	Not found	37	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
23	Drukarnia Dako Kozioł i wspólnicy s.j.	https://drukarnia-dako.pl/	Ryszard Kozioł suddenly dies. The company is run by his wife Danuta, and in the subsequent years, growing sons come with aid, who run the Dako printing company together	38	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
24	Plichta sp. z o.o. spółka komandytowa	https://www.plichta.com.pl/	Not found	40	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
25	Olimp Laboratories sp. z o.o.	https://olimp-labs.pl/	A family-owned company with global range and corporate standards	41	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
26	Oknoplast sp. z o.o.	https://oknoplast.com.pl/	Not found	42	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
27	Zakłady Mięsne Skiba S.A.	https://zmskiba.pl/	Although we are part of the biggest and most modern meat manufacturers, we are still a family-owned company	43	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No

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28	Budnex Deweloper sp. z o.o	https://www.budnex.pl/	We run our activities within construction as a family-owned company	44	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
29	RBB stal sp. z o.o.	https://rbb-stal.com.pl/	The RBB- STAL group was created on the grounds of a craft family-owned company founded in 1957	45	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
30	CITRONEX sp. Z o.o.	https://citronex.pl/pl	Citronex has been active on the market since 1988, we are a family-owned company	46	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
31	Paula Fish Sławomir Gojdź spółka komandytowa	https://paulafish.pl/	Not found	47	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
32	TFP sp. z o.o.	https://tfp.com.pl/	A manufacturer of corrugated cardboard and packaging is an independent family-owned company founded in 1992	50	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
	Total				20 companies	5 companies	7 references	2 references	18 companies	5 companies	13 companies
	%				42%	10%	15%	4%	38%	15%	27%

Source: Authors' own study.