**Philanthropy in Family Business:**

**A Multiple Case Study**

**Keywords**

Family Business, Philanthropy, Family Philanthropy, Corporate Philanthropy, Family, Family Business Philanthropy (FBP), Phenomenon, Crisis Leadership

**Introduction**

Family businesses represent 80% of global business structures (Gangé, Marwick et al., 2019); which means that such firms are a major player in shaping world economies and contributing to the societies in which they operate. According to Howorth et al. (2010), a family business is “the most fundamental and universal form of a business organization around the world”, coming in diverse structures, spreading across various industries and continuing among generations. On the one hand, family businesses are described by Kassar et al. (2018) as those firms who are known to be philanthropic in nature and their philanthropic activities are on the rise (Ge & Micelotta, 2019). This is best exhibited when families leverage their human, social, and financial capital to ensure that their non-monetary goals are reached (Breeze, 2009). In other words, the way the “enactment of the family logic interacts with the market and ecological logics not only in conflicting but also in synergetic” manners (Drencheva and Au, 2021). On the other hand, there is an ample body of knowledge on philanthropy in the social sciences field (Wiepking and Bekkers, 2011) but this phenomenon still faces construct clarity and standardized definitional issues.

This paper aims at boosting the understanding of the rising phenomenon of family business philanthropy (FBP) which cross-fertilizes the family business logic with philanthropy logic; highlighting the heterogeneity of this construct (Drencheva and Au, 2021). We try to answer our first research question related to the way family businesses describe themselves as philanthropic in a specific empirical context. We would be investigating the way family businesses perceive their charitable giving beyond their business operation and how they usually structure their philanthropic activities. Such activities include “voluntary donations of resources [money, time or goods] to support the betterment of society” (Bhatnagar et al., 2020: 715) by addressing problems such as poverty, food security, and health etc. In this aspect, we narrow the focus on this study by selecting our empirical setting to be the country Lebanon; whereby philanthropic activities are usually associated to the crisis context that the country suffers from for a long period of time. Our main contribution is twofold. First, we are observing the phenomenon from a specific empirical context. Second, we attempt at constructing a standardized definition for philanthropy in family firms i.e. Family Business Philanthropy (FBP).

**Literature Review**

What is known today about family business philanthropy is only some descriptions about its motivations and drivers, as well as, few definitions of its core components such as family business, corporate philanthropy, and family philanthropy.

Family philanthropy is considered as just **a classic dream** for many, whereby, relatives bring the best version of themselves into the work room and “express their opinions, make reasoned arguments and find compromises, honor their parents and provide extraordinary models for their children...” Moreover, cousins would be closer to each other, even grandchildren and the successive generations would look highly up to their ancestors’ achievements and “learn what their family stands for” (Gersick and Breeze, 2009). When these family ties strengthen, thanks to philanthropy, the community would perceive such family as one of high quality, not just well-off but also generous, and unified in accountabilities (Gersick and Breeze, 2009). This notion is becoming more evident in literature and many scholars have highlighted philanthropy as a “glue” by playing a major role in bringing family members together especially the younger generation closer to the family business and to their family legacy (Oglesby, 2005). Vogel and Kurak (2018) stated that “family philanthropy is a vehicle for the incumbent generation to secure an enduring legacy for a more sustainable world.” In other words, philanthropy is often considered in literature as a binding tool to keep families united across generations.

#### Socio-Emotional Wealth goals

According to Neihm et al (2008), among the features describing FBP is the passion of its family owners, the firm’s localized nature, and the stewardship model adopted, in addition to the pursuit of non-monetary goals i.e. socio-emotional wealth. Interestingly, present literature also tackles the meaning of socio-emotional wealth goals of a family business as it provides a comprehensive insight to clearly define or describe family business philanthropy. Socio-emotional wealth “refers to the affective endowments that the family receives from the business and that makes the family firm pursue family centered non-economic goals, labeled as socio-emotional goals” (Berrone et al., 2012; Gomez, Meja et al., 2007; Samara et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018). This feature is further dissected into five scopes which are 1) safeguarding the family’s control and influence, 2) family members’ identification with the family business, 3) binding social relations, 4) the emotional attachment to the firm and finally 5) the desire to refurbish family bonds via a dynastic succession plan. In order to achieve socio-emotional wealth, a strategy that engages in social outreach activities, namely corporate philanthropy, nurtures the profile of the firm. It also helps the newly appointed CEO preserve the values of the firm’s specialized assets, and supports the successor in improving its visibility (Pan and Weng et al., 2018). In this fashion, it is worth studying the structure that family businesses adopt as regards to the locus and strategy of their philanthropic activities. Philanthropic activities could be driven by either having a sound marketing strategy to enhance market share and improve customer experience or by *Peer pressure* through maintaining a competitive edge. These drivers along with the “family values”, in fact, create a range of potential mediations for those who wish to promote “greater philanthropy and social responsibility in the family business sector” (Breeze, 2009). In short, it is inferred that “firms that are values-driven may respond to connecting this agenda to the salience of their family name and the opportunity to create a lasting impact; those that are marketing-driven may respond to learning about reputational benefits and competitive advantages in terms of recruiting and retaining talent; and those that are peer-driven may respond to case studies and networking events that disseminate information about what contemporaries are doing” (Breeze, 2009).

* *Philanthropy Within The Family Business*

Some family enterprises consider philanthropy as part of the corporate culture itself between and across generations. That’s why they believe that philanthropy should always be embedded in the corporate culture between and across generations of the family firm. In other words, philanthropic activities are to be performed by the family firm itself i.e. without the need of any foundation structure on the side. For instance, some family firms would organize round-table meetings where philanthropists meet amongst each other (Vogel and Kurak, 2018) to discuss strategies for practicing philanthropy within the family enterprise. Such firms obviously prefer to channel their philanthropic activities within the business lines. In fact, the expression of philanthropy through a foundation-style system has always been subject to critique especially in its broad socio-political aspect. For example, Harrow (2010) mentioned in her paper on philanthropy that philanthropic foundations serve as "prime constructors of hegemony" by endorsing consent while discouraging dissent against capitalist democracy. Supporters of this notion believe that enterprising families often do this in an aim to sustain their family as well as organization’s reputation, showing commitment to the long term and the prominence of non-financial goals which further reflect the long term goals of the society.

* *Philanthropy via a Separate Family Foundation*

In an aim for achieving practical efficacies, some family firms express a need to establish a family foundation which is solely responsible for family or corporate philanthropy. This is perceived in literature such as family firms are usually assumed to be representing one family and one business. This is the simple form of family business. In this aspect, separate foundations are known to be the preferred vehicles of philanthropic practices (Campopiano et al., 2014). Furthermore, foundations (whether based on controlling or non-controlling model) are very important vehicles used for practicing philanthropy as they might act as a platform for smooth succession within a family firm (Feliu and Botero, 2016). Nonetheless, family firms are widely viewed as complex systems having multiple constituencies and subcomponents. That’s why they tend to adopt a separate vehicle to practice their philanthropic activities vis-a-vis their society (Feliu and Botero, 2016). Such firms consider that having family foundations apart from the core business activities plays a prominent role in leading the efforts of the sector to stimulate its legal and regulatory environment, and in leading the creation and operations of civil society infrastructures both nationally and internationally. The two scholars settle on the notion that foundations, established with the purpose of making grants to unrelated organizations, institutions, or individuals for scientific, educational, cultural, religious, or other charitable purposes, are very important vehicles for practicing philanthropy.

**Problem Identification**

In traditional management theories, philanthropy has been labeled as a positive means to “explore, identify, and rally around the core family values while making a positive impact on the broader community. More importantly, practicing philanthropy enables an inclusive environment to family members who are not employed in the family firm. For instance, in the UK, 55% of family businesses cite their primary motivation as the ability to support other members of the society (Breeze, 2009). Previous literature has focused mostly on corporate firms, leaving family businesses aside (Feliu & Botero, 2016). In this regard, Breeze (2009), adds that research generally focusing on corporate philanthropy alone or on family philanthropy alone is of limited use (Breeze, 2009). Despite their importance, there are only a few studies focusing on “Family Business Philanthropy” (De Massis & Rondi, 2020). This is a surprising gap given the strategic and societal value of family business philanthropy, which lies in the promotion of socio-economic development, indirect positive effects on business performance, redistribution of resources as well as improved family reputation (Ge & Micelotta, 2019; Leat, 2016). Due to this lack of academic engagement, family business philanthropy faces definitional and construct clarity issues (Steiger et al., 2015). Although remarkable research was conducted on a broad array of aspects, it only tackled the big picture of what is known about family business philanthropy “and what we do not know is still missing” (Gauthier and Pache, 2015). Digging further into the scarce literature, it is observed that the paucity of research in relation to family business philanthropy is problematic by itself. Why? It is because in family businesses, there is a complex relationship between the family values, the private wealth of individual family members, the profitability of their businesses and the reputational success of both the business and the family name (Breeze, 2009). Moreover, what literature presents about the component “philanthropy” is still mere descriptions and observations with a lack of standardized definition that is accepted among scholars in the field.

In fact, the identification, definition, and analyses of the two main logics of which family business philanthropy is comprised of, being “family business” and “philanthropy”, is still lacking. Historically, Lansberg et al. (1988), Wortman (1994), and Upton and Heck (1997), advocated that “people seem to understand the concept of family business, yet when they try to articulate a precise definition they quickly discover that it is a very complicated phenomenon.” Litz (1995) also agrees that for most family business researchers, the one very basic and foundational problem is coming up with an exact definition to the term family business (FB).” A firm would be categorized as family business “on the basis of the perception of its owners and/or managers” i.e. considering variables such as “ownership, management, involvement of the family in the business, continuity and combinations thereof” (Breeze, 2009). One example on defining a family business is Newski and Romano’s (1998) delineation in which they stated that it is a business in which “50% or more of the ownership is held by a single family; 50% or more of the ownership is held by multiple members of a number of families; a single family group is effectively controlling the business; and a significant proportion of the senior management is drawn from the same family”. Conversely, some definitions abide by other criteria such as “how the CEO, its managers, or its owners view the business” (Kontinene and Ojala, 2012). Such definitions are criticized by being constructed based on inaccurate criteria and by not considering the behavioral aspects of family business at the core of their definition (Chua, Sharma et al. 1999). Philanthropy, in turn, is best described as “love of humanity” - an act of generosity that entails the donation of time, money or expertise (Vogel and Kurak, 2018). It is also described as a “clustered concept capable of being multiply defined by multiple stakeholders, so that parallel understandings of its nature and purpose coexist in research” (Harrow, 2010). Again, descriptions instead of clear definition.

**Theoretical Framework**

Previous literature on family philanthropy have been built on several theoretical frameworks such as the stewardship theory, agency theory, and neo-institutional theory, incentive systems theory (Weipking and Bekkers, 2011) among others. Principally, a significant group of prominent scholars among which are Feliu, Botero, Breeze, Neihm, and Campopiano adopted the stewardship theory in their studies in order to clearly explain the strategic, political, and reputation motives of philanthropy in a family firm. For instance, Feliu and Botero (2016) stressed that “practicing philanthropy helps the family firm act as good steward in the community” in which it operates. This is elaborated on by articulating that stewardship predictions mostly depend on the degree of the family's involvement in the firm’s ownership and management, as well as, on social and reputational capital as accessible resources (Campopiano et al., 2014). Breeze (2009) explored further this notion and noted that “the presence of family values in a business setting, the commitment to stewardship through the generations and the balancing of long-term objectives against the requirement to generate short-term profit, are features that appear to predispose family businesses towards being philanthropic and socially responsible.” Moreover, family owners invest capital and efforts in their firms, seeking to build a good reputation and using philanthropy as a means to appear as better stewards or mediators in their community (Neihm et al., 2008)In specific, the family business owners’ attitudes towards their business, as well as, their perception of the role of their business in the community drives its “family business philanthropy” strategies and decisions. According to Neihm et al (2008), among the features describing FBP is the passion of its family owners, the firm’s localized nature, and the stewardship model adopted, in addition to the pursuit of non-monetary goals i.e. socio-emotional wealth.

*Variables of Family Business Philanthropy*

In order to better understand and visualize the different variables related to family business philanthropy which are highlighted in existing literature, the below framework is constructed to illustrate the interrelation of the important dimensions and drivers of philanthropy in family business.

**Figure 1:** Interconnection of Family Business Philanthropy with the possible variables, as well as, the cross-fertilization of some notions with each other.

From the above general scheme, more narrowed down models could be extracted to show the nature of the interconnection and cross-fertilization between the two main constituents of family business philanthropy i.e. “family philanthropy” and “family business”. This paper, particularly, tackles the following dimensions revolving around practicing philanthropy in family business:

* The under-researched motives (Gallo, 2004) behind practicing philanthropy in a family firm (values, culture, etc...) The values, in this regard represent the internal family values while the culture could be presented as the external values and the adherence of the family firm to the cultural and institutional norms in which it operates.
* The structuring of family business philanthropy (whether through the business or a separate vehicle)

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**Figure 2:** Interconnection of Family Business Philanthropy with its main motives and structuring strategy.

***Potential Contributions: Definitions***

Definition of a family business

From the ample literature on family business, we can formulate the following definition, such as family business is an enterprise whereby a certain number of family members are directly involved in the business operations and decision-making process leading the business across generations.

The alignment of ownership and management is most of the times looked at as a main requirement for a business to be defined as a family firm (Chua et al., 1999; Litz, 1995).

Definition of Family Philanthropy

Similarly, from what we can take from the literature on family philanthropy is that it can be defined as the act of giving by certain family members and that extends beyond the family members to the outer societal actors.

Definition of Family Business Philanthropy

We attempt at creating a standard definition of this construct and thus contribute to the scientific knowledge of Philanthropy. In this aspect, we tend to define Family Business Philanthropy as an act of giving, in cash or in kind benefits to target beneficiaries, by family members who are either directly or indirectly involved in the respective family business; through leveraging on the business resources.

**Methods**

Empirical Context

In order to study this topic and answer the above research question, I have selected a specific context entailing a highly volatile environment with history of exogenous shocks spread across almost 50 years, as my empirical setting - represented by the country “Lebanon” in the Middle East. “This is an attractive” context “for several reasons” (Martin & Eisenhardt, 2010). First, the geographical and cultural location of Lebanon being at the center of the Middle East where the notion of charity is considered a religious imperative and a moral obligation across the prevailing religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism (Feliu & Botero, 2016). Charity or Philanthropy is deeply rooted in the cultural and religious teachings prevailing in this country whereby it is the responsibility of those who are more fortunate to support those who are less fortunate or are going through a hard time (Garcia & Raposo, 2013). Initially, the motives were focused on basic physical and material needs (food, clothing, and shelter) which later evolved to a wider spectrum of grounds such as health care, environment, education, and arts. Later, philanthropic efforts in Lebanon were no longer focused exclusively on reducing the consequences of social problems such as hunger, unemployment, or disease; instead they started considering ways to alleviate the symptoms of these problems including the lack of education or of skills or a culture of poverty. Today, with the recurring crises situations and exogenous shocks that are shaping the present history of the country, philanthropists are more concerned with the immediate response to the basic needs of people rather than spending time and money on their traditional activities towards their communities. Second, Lebanon incorporates a rich and interesting medium to explore as regards to the family logic. “The family logic that embraces goals, norms, values, and practices related to family cohesion, continuity, and support, common in family-owned firms, so far has not been – widely- empirically explored” (Drencheva and Au, 2021). Also, the meaning of “community” somehow changed with respect to philanthropists in Lebanon in terms of geographical and cultural scope.

Thirds, Lebanon currently struggles with severe socio-economic problems, an explosion of public debt, decreasing GDP and high exchange rate volatility. These problems are compounded by an influx of Palestinian and Syrian refugees fleeing from their war-torn countries (Beaujouan & Rasheed, 2020). In the midst of this turbulent environment, Lebanon was recently hit by a series of exogenous shocks in less than a year (starting by a severe financial/banks crisis in October 2019, the pandemic Covid19 in March 2020, and on the 4th of August 2020, a massive explosion at Beirut port which tore through the capital killing 200 people, injuring 5,000 and devastating the city’s infrastructure). The latter ignited protests across Lebanon as people took to the streets to call for change and the whole episode turned into a serious societal crisis. Amid this exogenous situation, the “Lebanese family enterprise” played a surprising role in amplifying the charitable giving in vital areas such as providing shelters and alternative housing, debris removal, cash assistance, nutrition & food security, emergency healthcare etc. amid the complete absence of the state. These stylized facts inform us that the Beirut port disaster (the most influential exogenous shock ) has created a societal crisis in a country already ravaged by economic loss and entrenched failure of the public sector and political leadership (Fakhoury, 2019). Yet, it acted as a trigger for the philanthropy in the Lebanese family businesses to be put in action – a phenomenon worth documenting and understanding. Below table represents excerpts from participants as regards to the way they describe the empirical setting:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Empirical Context | Crisis Context, Lebanon is a Pain Point, Difficult to plan in such environment, hard and challenging, country problems hinder establishing a foundation, daily challenges, Difficult to implement philanthropy in crises, multiple-crisis context, People in Lebanon are living in Hell, No confidence in the banking sector, no trust in the government, absence of the state, when the whole environment is not safe individuals or businesses would not be able to preserve their ethics. Last couple of years external circumstances were negatively unique, structure of philanthropy changed (affected by the crisis context) |

**Table 1: The empirical context in the eyes of the participants**

Data Collection

Given limited theory about (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2010) the role and structure of family business philanthropy, this study assumes a qualitative research approach based on “a multiple case design that allows a replication logic” (Eisenhardt, 1989) or “embedded multiple cases” (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2010). According to Eisenhardt, “sometimes the goal is to create a fundamentally new theory, while at other times the goal is to elaborate an existing theory.

*An Exploratory Abductive Approach*

In order to explain the rising role of family business philanthropy, a new theory would be developed. Hence, an inductive perspective. Yet, there is a surprising element associated with the “entry point” of this research, which is manifested in the emergence of a new actor to the field. While some expected traditional players were almost entirely absent the moment the blast occurred, the proactivity and solidarity of Lebanese family firms in amplifying their philanthropic giving was phenomenal. Hence, an exploratory abductive approach.

*Selection of Instances*

The object of the study acting as the focal point of the theory is a family firm. The theoretical domain would be all family firms in the world. The study domain would be all the family firms in Lebanon while the population is restricted to the family firms in Lebanon who have a common characteristic being a family firm with philanthropic nature. From this population, the selected sample of firms represents ten family businesses, carefully selected among the diverse social tissues in order to build a meaningful multiple-case study. These family firms were selected based on the following criteria:

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| --- | --- |
| **Criterion** | **Description of Criterion** |
| *Their size* | Medium to large local family business with their geographical or business operational reach |
| *Their reputation* | Known to be ethical in the market especially in the mid of crises situation |
| *Their Family Name* | Deeply rooted in their local society (village, region) or across Lebanon |
| *Number of Family Members* | Involved in the ownership or the leadership/management of the business |
| *Number of Employees\** | More than 20 employees per business case |
| *Religion*  | Stereotype (given that the Lebanese social fabric is known to be sectarian) |

Table 2: Criteria based on which the sample of ten cases was selected \* One case laid off several employees due to the crisis now they are only 5.

*Longitudinal Research Strategy*

The adopted strategy is to collect data on the philanthropic practices of family firms, on site and at multiple occasions being spread over two years-time span enabling a longitudinal perspective. According to Hak (2013), “a longitudinal study is a research strategy in which a change in the value of the independent variable and a later change in the value of the dependent variable are observed in a population.” In this manner, my data is collected initially during the first week after the blast – on August 5 2020- (preliminary online survey and participant observation) in order to document the immediate reactions, then after six months of the blast – in January/February 2021 (first round of interviews) and after one year from the blast - from July 14 until October 2021 (second round of interviews) which set path to observing the evolution of events as compared to our initial observation. Semi-structured interviews are the main instrument used to illustrate the inductive side of the method. In addition, field notes were collected one year after the blast from by spontaneously chatting with twenty businesses in Gymmayze street and port area which resembles the main damaged area. The last phase of data collection would be towards August 2022, marking two years of data collection.

The analysis of these interviews follows the principles of grounded theory in order to ensure rigor in the qualitative analysis (Gioia et al., 2013). This methodology actually enables describing changes in the philanthropic practices of family business at certain incidents in time (longitudinal strategy). All data is transcribed via Transcribe.Wreally.com and coded via Nvivo software to better classify and analyze the collected data which will help detecting meaningful patterns that can enhance our theoretical understanding of the FBP phenomenon. Further, the analysis will be built on interpretive thematic analysis (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016) in order to identify patterns and commonalities.

The research method also takes into consideration the risks that I may encounter specifically with respect to field accessibility. As for the country risk, this is mitigated by the fact that Lebanon has a resilient social structure, which has survived many crises and instabilities; despite its different ethnicities, religions, and political attachments. Due to Covid19, I did not have the chance to have a sufficient field study; however, I conducted detailed interviews at distance through video conferencing platforms (Archibald, et al., 2019), as well as, phone conversations. The average time per interview is one hour. The second round of interviews was conducted partly on site and partly at a distance (online). It entails conducting interviews with several family members inter and across generations, as well as, other stakeholders (mostly employees). I aimed for interviewing some recipients of the family businesses’ philanthropy (beneficiaries), yet due to limited time that I had on site and the overall drastic social situation in Lebanon, I could not do that thus keeping it as a limitation to this research.

**Data Sources**

Data was collected from three sources in Lebanon summarized in the table below. First, I leveraged my portfolio of corporate clients which I established a long term relationship with as part of my previous professional career in corporate banking. I sent emails to all business owners who could be interested to participate in my research to explain my project and invite them to join this study. Then, I used the “LinkedIn” professional network - online platform – in order to reach out for the wealthy Lebanese family business owners who are well known in practicing philanthropy for many years. This comes along with surfing the internet to check family businesses operating in Switzerland and Africa as those businesses also have a reputation in giving back to their community in their home country Lebanon. Unfortunately I could not get any concrete response in that direction. Second, I used my own family connections for referrals to some family business owners who are part of the IRADA businessmen network in Beirut and who could be interested to participate in the study. This can be considered from the Muslim side of the population. From the Christian side, I managed to contact one family business owner who is also a founder of FBN Levant (part of the FBN International network). After conducting the interview, he referred me to another family business owner who might be interested to participate. Finally, I came up with a sample of ten Lebanese Family Businesses who were interested in the study and whom I interviewed in January 2021, i.e. after almost six months from the Beirut Port Blast Incident. All interviewees were the owners of the family businesses except for one company in which the owner did change the firm from a family owned one to an institution (solely owned by himself) with a proper CSR vision and CSR strategy. Lastly, secondary sources and other sources of data included information on the selected sample of family firms (collected through their websites, social media publications, and informal observations during the interviews). For instance, since I was actually present in Beirut at the moment of the Port blast, on August 4 2020, I was able to observe and carefully note various dynamics of philanthropy practiced by the diverse actors in the field, the moment the crisis happened and during its aftermath (i.e. one week later, one month after, etc.) i.e. participant observation. Moreover, I have collected photos of the damaged site in Beirut, before restoration and after restoration (specifically after six months from the Blast) were documented. The same will be done on August 2021, to measure the changes in before and after the philanthropic activities that were exerted by family businesses (and some related NGOs).

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| --- | --- |
| Data Source Name | Data Source Type |
| Previous Corporate Portfolio at Bankmed sal | Primary Data |
| LinkedIn Professional Network Online Platform | Primary Data |
| Personal Family Connections  | Primary Data |
| Family Business Owners Referrals | Primary Data |
| Participant Observation (Field Notes) | Primary Data |
| Websites of Family Businesses (Participants) | Secondary Data |
| Social Media Publications | Secondary Data |

Table 3: Data Sources

Data Analyses

*First Round of Interviews*

The qualitative data gathered comprises of responses to semi-structured interviews (the verbatim) conducted on a sample of ten family owned businesses who have a known track record in philanthropy or charity in Lebanon. The sectors selected are quite diverse ranging from automobile, shipment and logistics, home appliances, glass, paint, and technology among others. “This combination of multiple industry segments” (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2010) is anticipated to enhance the “robustness and generalizability of the results” (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2010). The ten interviewees (mainly business owners) accepted to participate willingly in this study. Below table represents a cross-case comparison among the initial ten focal firms (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2010) based on the following criteria; selected in line with the research question subject of this paper:

* Scope/Focus of Philanthropy (Local Community vs Social cohesion)
* Type of Philanthropists (Operators or Donators)
* Long Term vs Short Term Philanthropic Activity
* Structuring of Philanthropy (Vehicle)
* *Description of the Ten Focal Firms*



\*Table 4: Cross Case Comparison Table of ten cases of Lebanese Family Businesses practicing philanthropy

*Second Round of Interviews – Preliminary Assessment (first level coding)*



**Table 5: Description of the extended sample of 24 participants across the ten cases – Round Two Interviewees**

*Second Round of Interviews (Second Level Coding)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Second Order Codes** | **First Order Codes/Clusters** |
| **Direction of Giving** | Growing Circles Concept (Prioritizing target beneficiaries) | Charity at Home (Focusing on Employees) | Serving the under-privileged (children, women, families, employees…) | Consistency in giving,Opportunities |
| **Meaning of Community** | Sense of belonging to our country/our identity, family territory rather than territory of opportunity, families rooted in the society | FBs part of the society ,Future generations, collective work | Preserving the connection, paying back to us from the community, whoever has trust in our family name | Wherever we have geographical reach (could be limited in areas inside Lebanon or to external locations) |
| **Family Values** | Professionalism, Empathy, Positivity, Trust, Education, Hard Work, Meritocracy, Courage, Involvement, Moral Obligation, Fairness, Transparency, Loyalty, Communication, Family Harmony, Family Coherence, Generosity |
| **Reasons for Giving** | Community need for Philanthropy, family thing, obliged to do so (social impact), sympathy with elderly, bringing joy, promoting a hopeful environment, promoting family values through philanthropy for future generations (continuing the family legacy), better quality of life, Solidarity to save the private sector, A role to play in sustainable economy, sense of accomplishment, Good Networking, helping, need to do good, tradition,  |
| **Social Fabric** | No discrimination between geographies & Religions | There is Discrimination (Beirut only) | Diversification within the family | Put all people on same level |
| **Philanthropic Activities** |  Fundraising | Creation of new jobs,Trainings | Women Empowerment, Education, Health | Day Care, Vocational Center, |
| **Perceptions** | Story telling (family legacy, philanthropic activities, historical philanthropic achievements of owner mainly the founder, philanthropic activities in response to the Beirut Port Blast), low profile giving, paying back to diverse sectors, the blast was a completely different dynamic entailing different activities, no significant influence of blast on the existing philanthropic practice, Family tree/history, Coat of Arms, Crisis Leadership, Need to fetch for NGOs, Survival mode after the blast, Focus on our business operations and growth at the moment, stressing on the values of the founder, value of helping, family members are very humanitarian, philanthropy as business strength (marketing tool) |
| **Family Firms vs Other Organizations** | *FBs:* Easier to give a green light for philanthropy, emotional attachment, involvement, passion & dedication more than expertise, ability to plan for longer terms, involving the next gen (leading by example), Family funding, the unique family values, No support from NGOs, More Trustworthy, Not the job of FBs to replace the state, perhaps more solid, more attached to their values, not necessarily trustworthy (case by case), FB more ethical (not a general rule), more competent*Non-FBs:* philanthropy will stay as “corporate”, no family involvement, using external consultants, more disagreements among partners/top management regarding the values/ philanthropic practice (what type, to what extent, to what depth) |
| **Involvement in Business** | Very involved, Part timer, Reasonably involved, not anymore,  |
| **Involvement in Giving** | Ongoing process, we don’t label our giving, business affluence, priority for the basic needs, Charity Association, joint forces with local NGOs, any help is good help, Spontaneous Initiative, Ongoing Process, everything is limited, fuzzy lines set by the founder, amplified after the blast, not very much involved as it is centralized with top management (family members) |
| **Separate Vehicle or Within Business line** | *In favor*: yes but difficult to establish in such empirical conditions, definitely agree, yes but not very clear differentiation between NGOs and Foundation*Not in favor*: No time to handle or govern a foundation, employee involvement so it’s difficult to separate philanthropy from business functions, through NGO that I am part of, sometimes becomes destructive to the business operations (wasting time) |

**Limitations to the Sample**

* Sample Composition

As mentioned in the previous section, the ten cases originally were selected based on their size, reputation, and family name. During the second round of interviews one family business was no longer interested to participate and thus the cases dropped from ten to nine.

These family firms were selected in particular through opportunities and referrals. For instance, part of the companies were referred to me by business owners whom I first conducted my interviews with. The other part were selected based on my knowledge of the market, given my previous career in corporate banking and thus my extensive knowledge and relation with the portfolio of corporates which I was managing. Third, the relatively small geography of the country which renders family firms or families who practice philanthropy well-known in their local community as well as across the country. Of course, there are other companies and individuals which practice philanthropy yet the selected cases are pioneers in philanthropy and they were rapid in supporting people’s needs especially during the current crisis in the country which started two years ago. In addition, most of these companies are members of three main business conglomerates in Lebanon (FBN Levant, RDCL, IRADA Network). Thus, it opens doors to interviewing more cases in future research. For the sake of this study, given a multiple case study, it will be sufficient to have a feel of what these cases tell us about the philanthropic practice of family firms in the never changing crisis context of Lebanon especially that there is no other study tackling this subject with this specific empirical setting yet. I chose to look at Lebanon yet the philanthropic works of family businesses in Lebanon can always be compared to other family businesses operating in other countries.

* Variance between the number of participants interviewed per case:

Among the 9 cases, the number of interviewed participants varies between one business and the other whereby one case was limited only to the owner (similar to the first interview) while in another case the number of participants increased to five participants. This is justified by the fact that in some cases family members (whether involved or not involved in the business) were not interested to participate in the interview (as mentioned by the owner of the business who was interviewed during the first interview and who acts as the referral or the liaison between the interviewer and the other interviewees. On the other hand, one business owner referred me to two of his sisters out of which one expressed her interest to participate in the interview (mainly because she is a philanthropist and dedicated to charitable giving). Interestingly, another business owner, and as a motivation for his employees (especially in the tough situation that the country is passing through), he invited not only family members (who are involved in the business) but also some of his employees as an act of motivation and sign of trust. In this case, I interviewed two employees who are directly engaged in the philanthropic activities that are practiced by the family firms.

**Findings**

Integration of Findings

In this section, we present partial results of field research; 1) the analysis of the trends behind the first round of Interviews and 2) a first level and second level order analyses of the second round of interviews (pending the abstract dimensions).

From the first round of interviews, we note the following primary results/findings:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scope/Focus of Philanthropy | *When asked about the general scope of their giving, most of the interviewees attributed their giving to the social cohesion while only a few mentioned that they would give only their local community. Others mentioned that they start with their local community first then they spread their giving to the diverse social structure.* |
| Type of Philanthropists | *On average, interviewees considered themselves pure operators of philanthropy. If combined with those preferring both methods (operator and donator), we will end with the majority being involved in philanthropic activities (whether through monetary donations or tangible activities).* |
| Long Term vs Short Term Philanthropic Activity | *Most businesses preferred a long term program like initiative or at least both long term and short term initiatives.* |
| Structuring of Philanthropy | *Most interviewees mentioned that they conduct their philanthropic activities through their family business channels and prefer to continue doing so in the future. Further, a third of the cases are currently practicing philanthropy through the family business, yet, they are thinking of establishing a separate family foundation for this reason. Only a few cases have already established a family foundation to govern their philanthropic activities. Hence, this phenomenon of having more and more family business owners shifting their awareness or mindset towards creating stand-alone family foundations to better structure or govern their family philanthropy activities.* |
| Understanding the demarcation between family philanthropy and CSR | *On average, the interviewees did not see a demarcation between family philanthropy and corporate social responsibility (partly because they mix their business with the family contributions when paying back to the community). Their business is used as the main channel to practice their giving and partly because they don’t really understand the meaning of each of CSR and family philanthropy in order to differentiate between them. The other half already separated their family philanthropic activities from corporate social responsibility. Even, it is worth to mention that 10% of the interviewees did not actually know what corporate social responsibility means. Most of the interviewees prefer to keep their philanthropic activities within the business and will continue to do so while only a third currently have their philanthropic activities within the business but are thinking to establish a separate foundation or philanthropy vehicle. Only one case mentioned that they already have a separate family foundation.* |

In addition, we present the below two tables summarizing some of the verbatim that is directly related to the question about how the Lebanese family firms perceived their philanthropic giving in response to the rapid deterioration of the societal conditions starting with their immediate response to the Beirut Port Blast (August 4, 2020) – the entry point of this research – and one year later (knowing that the empirical crisis context still prevails).



 **Table 6 – Partial Verbatim – Round One Interviews**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Case No.** | **Owner** | **Family Member** | **Employee** |
| Case 3 | “The Situation is getting worse, it’s really getting worse and more and more people are in need of basic food in order to survive” | “Now it is different because we no longer need to be on the ground to help, now we need to dig to find out what still needs to be done” | “It surely forced top management to focus on the outer environment because it is an exogenous crisis, but this does not mean they forgot about their employees.. but the external society became more important” |
| Case 5 | “Same activities (education and health) as a family but now planning for the future (creating endowment funds for any Lebanese student who wants to study abroad)” | “What’s happening at the moment is mainly our engagement into positioning the private sector into the core of nation building” |  |
| Case 8 | “I increased my donations but with a shift in purpose whereby I am only funding basic needs and not luxury items” “Also focusing the giving on my family first the inner circle” | “We were not directly engaged with the victims but what we did is that we provided promotions for people whose situation was not a front line but were also affected, now it is more structured and not on case by case basis” | “Now we are giving to more individuals than before and employees are more involved in this giving whereby we prepare a list of individuals in need and we refer it to the owners as a weekly and monthly budget for philanthropy” |

**Table 7 – Partial Verbatim – Round Two Interviews**

**Discussion**

*Family Values*

Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) articulate that endorsing “pro-social values generally has a positive association with charitable giving”. Based on our findings, we argue that indeed the most common values mentioned by the business owners across then ten initial cases are in fact pro-social. Such values that refer to the social circles of the family firm are “sense of belonging”, “empathy with the society”, “moral obligation”, “Education &Leveraging on the youth”, and “patriotism” which the majority of the owners find as significant drivers of their family philanthropy. Below table summarizes the different values that were presented initially by the Lebanese family owners:



**Table 8 - Main Values of Lebanese Family Owners**

For instance, philanthropy raises the morale of the younger generation who wish to work in a corporate culture promoting broader goals than simply the pursuit of profit. This is in line with our findings that present “Youth Empowerment” as one of the most important values as per the interviewed family business owners. Therefore, while efficiency and short-term profits matter, enterprising families do care about generational continuity, trans-generational entrepreneurship, family socio-emotional wealth preservation and the family’s social capital (Kassar et al., 2018). We emphasize that one of the core motives of family business philanthropy (FBP) phenomenon which was widely evident in round two of the interviews is family values and how these values impact the way the Lebanese families and their respective family businesses are deeply rooted in the society. Literature in this regard, underlines specifically family tradition. Family tradition is commonly understood as “transmitted beliefs and practices expressing identification with a shared past” (Dacin et al., 2019), which is handed down from generation to generation. It has been argued that the invariant core of this tradition shapes not only family firm’s identity but also its strategy and ownership structure (Erdogan et al., 2020). Family tradition and its underlying values such as family reputation and altruism (Ge & Micelotta, 2019) might also determine the level, type, and timespan of FBP (Feliu & Botero, 2016) but this remains to be empirically established. Niehm et al. (2008) highlighted that family firms with higher family involvement will be more likely to have a stronger commitment to their community, greater community support, and a deeper sense of community within the community where their business was located. This is explained by the fact that usually family members are altruistically dedicated to the business and tend to put the business objectives and the surrounding community ahead of their own goals. This is also in line with our outcomes regarding the five main values identified by our interviewees (ex. Sense of belonging to their community, moral obligation (altruism), and social responsibility/awareness).What is not in line, though, is the value of *“Family Reputation”* which was widely stated in previous literature on family values, yet, was not very highlighted by the majority of the interviewees although they raised the term “family name” and dwelled on the achievements of their parents in philanthropy.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning that the influence of “family reputation” as one important family value driving family business philanthropy, according to historical theories, was later widely debated among scholars. Adams et al. (1996) advocated that family businesses, initially, did not often have a formal code of ethics; instead, they were more likely to model the personal ethical behaviors of their owners through the firm’s actions. Recent literature, on the other hand, shows that family owners invest capital and efforts in their firms, seeking to build a good reputation and using philanthropy as a means to appear as better stewards in their community. Tigiuri and Davis (1996) added that “family business decisions in relation to philanthropic activities tend to be motivated by the family’s degree of interest in the business reputation” as well. Out of 34 papers -systematically reviewed- revolving around the studied construct, one paperstates that a family business tends to practice social responsibility and engage in philanthropic efforts because doing so is consistent with the reputation value of the family. Conversely, thirteen publications highlighted thatfamily enterprises desire to practice philanthropy because by doing so, families can accumulate wealth (Garcia & Raposo, 2013). The diversity and different viewpoints of family owners contribute to the related beneficial reputation for the family and the business. As the number of family owners involved in the business increases, their social network is also likely to expand while creating more incentives to improve their business reputation in the community through philanthropic activities. One study postulated that family firms are more likely to engage in these activities, as these firms are more concerned “about image and reputation and a desire to protect family assets” (Garcia & Raposo, 2013). It is worth shedding the light, in this case, on the dilemma of whether family firm ownership is only associated with such activities related to reputational benefits (i.e. philanthropy or community involvement) or serves other motives as well.

The family business owners’ attitudes towards their business, as well as, their perception of the role of their business in the community actually drives its strategies and decisions (Neihm et al, 2008). Values, on the other hand, are known to be a defining feature of family firms by acting as a key motivation of robust philanthropic and socially responsible behavior. In fact, the distinctive values of family firms are the core purpose of why they genuinely care about the recipients of their philanthropic contributions. Philanthropy, as a set of values, “is considered a desirable quality for a family business and an indicator of its success” (Breeze, 2009). Particularly, previous literature touch on family values as a notion of “giving something back” and constitute a key driver of far-reaching philanthropic and socially responsible behavior in family businesses. This in turn has positive impact on the non-family forces within the business reconciling both forces under the philanthropy pillar. In other words, philanthropic activities are used by family businesses to educate both family members and non-family members about the ultimate family legacy and to embed the family values in the next generation. According to our findings, “Family Legacy &/or Founder’s legacy”, as a value, comes as third to most of the interviewees. In the same manner, Hammond et al. (2016) conveyed that family legacy is a major driver of key decision–making processes within a family business.

* *The Social Family Legacy*

We find in literature that the concept of “social family legacy”, which is similar to the “family reputation” value, is also a key motivation of decisions within a family business especially those related to contribution to the society. The social family legacy, as defined by Hunteter and Rowles (2005), is the channel through which the unique set of **values** held by a family is transferred to the community*.* Formally defined by Schwartz & Bilsky (1990), the family's social legacy is “the network of meanings associated with the family transferred through the use of stories or broader social tactics (e.g., community involvement)”. These authors also indicate that there is a strong argument about the social family legacy that is resulting in stronger social ties developed among the family members through manifesting a helpful, loving, and forgiving behavior. Sustaining a positive standing in the society (Blumentritt et al., 2007) or showing commitment to the family immigrant heritage (Habbershon, 2006) are two examples of behavioral outcomes concomitant with social family legacy issues. Markedly, some families may have a solid biological as well as social legacy orientation; a big desire to preserve the family bloodline and deeply interconnect with its society by assembling its family values in such a way that they become deeply rooted within the community. Hence, the transmission of family values through the social family legacy across the family business to reach the community at large. This is also conceptualized within the existing family firm literature as an “interest in non-economic goals such as a focus on family legacy, environmental sustainability, or socio-emotional wealth” (Mc-Kenny et al., 2011). In this regard, research suggests that priorities of a family firm could be viewed as a reflection of the “lifestyle the family wants to follow rather than rational business principles” (Gupta and Levenburg, 2010). This can be manifested via emphasizing very specific values and beliefs such as commitment to the family (Aronoff and Ward, 1995), history of the family (Mendoza and Krone, 1997), identity (Carney, 2007; Khanin, Turel and Mahto, 2012), traditions (Zellweger and Astrachan, 2008), philanthropy (Feliu and Botero, 2016), and entrepreneurial attitudes (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015).

It is therefore deduced that a salient social family legacy increases harmony amongst family members, fortifies ties with the public, and creates strategies focused on the continuity of the family's history and the preservation of the family's values.

*Culture & Social Connections*

From the various new activities that were created and performed by family firms in Lebanon as a direct response to the aftermath of the port blast, we find that there is a main focus on children and supporting their emotional health post trauma. We also find another major focus in relation to the renovation of the damaged historical buildings and restoration of houses so that people can go back safely to their homes (in the same shape that they left before the blast), distribution of food and medications, and needless to mention removing the debris and glass from the streets around the damaged area. This is a direct indication of the strong societal connection that family businesses have towards their communities, not discriminating between the diverse cultural backgrounds, age groups, or gender when it comes to responding to an exogenous shock. The family businesses in Lebanon intensified their philanthropic practices in a more creative and prompt way in order to respond to the Beirut Port blast regardless of their beneficiaries’ backgrounds. Evidently, this notion was brought to the table throughout the majority of the interviews conducted i.e. across cases. Further, upon conducting the second round of interviews, we observe that almost all participants mentioned that after one year of the blast and given the deteriorating circumstances of the country, they shifted their philanthropic focus towards their internal community (mostly represented by their employees). A major portion of the sample talked about prioritizing their giving based on their perception of community or social connection circles. And this is an interesting phenomenon whereby in a crisis context, it is observed that the nature and meaning of culture or society might change or take a different shape. The concept of circles by itself explains the change in dynamics of the philanthropic practice of a family firm in relation to the external societal conditions. We find in literature, particularly on crises thatfamily businesses with philanthropic values are more likely to sustain their giving, since they perceive it as a basic pillar shaping their relationship with the communities and cultural norms in which they operate (Gallo, 2000). This could be considered as an important role in practicing philanthropy; distinguishing a family firm from a normal corporate firm in the way they use their philanthropic capacities to respond to exogenous shocks. We can deduce that family businesses are more prone to be engaged in many “extraordinarily difficult and complex concerns” (Patrizi et al., 2013); in volatile environments where a weak state coupled with strained social fabric prevails and more importantly in times of crises. Another form of culture would be religion which is quite prevailing and dominant in many countries and societies across the globe. In countries were groups of people are associated with a specific religion or cult, most of the philanthropy in the country is rendered sectarian in nature. That’s why, it is quite common in such a setting to observe people donating to charities out of religious duty (Abu-Assi, 2015) or moral obligation. However, in light of our findings, this notion is changing towards a more inclusive cultural and social philanthropic practice (the nation-building pillar). Here, we find an interesting gap in literature whereby family business philanthropy is never probed from a cultural perspective. In this regard, Harrow (2010) highlighted that research has limitedly drawn on the importance of distinguishing between the two different notions 1) global philanthropy (cross-border giving) and 2) the globalization of philanthropy (the process of spreading philanthropic institutions and practices globally). In the same line of thought, Campopiano et al (2016) suggested that there is a big research opportunity to understand how family firms react to institutional rules and cultural norms which could impact their tendency to behave proactively as philanthropic actors in their community.

*Structuring of Philanthropy*

After presenting our results in the sections above, we find that there is controversy of the role and efficacy of family foundations as vehicles for family business philanthropy, among the interviewed cases. While most family businesses continue to channel their business lines for their philanthropic practices, one third are thinking to shift their strategy towards establishing a separate foundation. This confusion resonates with present literature that family enterprises believe that “philanthropy serves as a mechanism to demonstrate commitment to long term goals” (Neihm et al. 2008); however, the structural model of these enterprises is not standard when it comes to implementing philanthropic strategies. Moreover, those who argued for establishing a separate philanthropic vehicle also agree that it is impossible to be done in a crisis context.

**Future Research**

In light of the paucity in research on family business philanthropy as it is a very recent topic in academia, there is a big opportunity to expand the volume of literature (published papers in the field of philanthropy in family businesses) and contribute to the emerging stream of research (Drencheva and Au, 2021) in this area. Prominent scholars in this field, such as Campopiano et al., (2014), cited that even the studies that focus on the general subject of corporate philanthropy in the current management literature are rare.

Another opportunity lies in the small data sample that we managed to extract given the empirical setting’s small geographical area and given the many conservative family business owners who prefer not to disclose what they are doing in terms of giving. This open doors to conducting future research in broader empirical settings. Importantly, the fact that there is no clear definition of philanthropy in the literature is a strategic point and crucial trigger to conduct future research, raise questions, and collect findings (Feliu and Botero, 2016) in order to come up with standard definition for family business philanthropy. Scholars confirm that in order to have a comprehensive understanding of how philanthropy works in family firms, a combination of both, academic and practitioner research, has to be steered and evaluated (Feliu and Botero, 2016). This paper is a milestone in this direction and specifically on family business philanthropy in its empirical context; nevertheless it is still not enough. Therefore, further research linking practice and theory is necessary to better understand the role of philanthropy in family businesses - especially when responding to exogenous shocks given the recurrent global societal issues that are witnessed nowadays. For this reason, it would be interesting to replicate this paper by studying the philanthropy of family businesses in a different empirical setting (different country or different type of crisis) and see if the outcome produced will remain valid.

**Conclusion**

The way family business philanthropy is perceived among experts and implemented by family firms is still grey. Some interrogations might still arise from the results disseminated at the end of this research which could be interesting to explore. For example, in what sense family philanthropy differs from the CSR strategy of the family business when a crisis occurs? What are the various instruments? Which processes are adopted under each notion? How does it react to the prevailing cultural norms in countries other than the countries where the research study will be steered?

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