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EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF FAMILY BUSINESS

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EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF FAMILY BUSINESS

Generational Attitudes in SME Family Hotels: Practical Implications for Employer Brand Profiles

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Abstract The hospitality workforce is characterized by various generations working together, who share different values and expectations towards their employer. The purpose of the study was to examine which attitudes differentiate Generations X, Y and Z employed in SME family hotels. A quantitative method using an online questionnaire was used to collect data from former and present employees in the Austrian hospitality industry. In this context, an eight-dimensional model derived from a systematic literature review, was tested. The re-sults of the study illustrate that Generations X, Y and Z differ significantly in their attitude towards work ethic and values, career opportunities, task attractiveness, and instrumental and symbolic characteristics. As practical implications, we created employee personas to represent the values and expectations of each generation working in SME family hotels.

Actitudes generacionales en los pequeños y medianos hoteles familiares: implicaciones prácticas para determinar el perfil de la marca de empleador

Resumen El sector de la hostelería se caracteriza por la coexistencia de varias generaciones entre su personal, que comparten valores y expectativas diferentes con respecto a su em-pleador. El objetivo del estudio es examinar qué actitudes diferencian a las generaciones X, Y y Z empleadas en pequeños y medianos hoteles familiares. Con la utilización de una metodología cuantitativa y datos procedentes de un cuestionario online se han recopilado datos de antiguos y actuales empleados y empleadas del sector hostelero austriaco. En este contexto, se puso a prueba un modelo de ocho dimensiones derivado de una revisión sistemática de la literatura. Los resultados del estudio muestran que las generaciones X, Y y Z difieren significativamente en su actitud hacia la ética y los valores laborales, las oportunidades profesionales, el atractivo de las tareas y las características instrumentales y simbólicas. Como implicaciones prácticas, los resultados señalan que las personas emplea-das representan los valores y expectativas de cada generación que trabaja en pequeños y medianos hoteles familiares.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the workforce landscape has evolved significantly, with new generations entering and older employees retiring, a trend evident in the tourism industry, including family-run hotels (Gursoy et al., 2013; Hayes et al., 2018). As a result, the working environment is currently characterized by a multi-generational structure, where different generations are working side by side (Glass, 2007; Hayes et al., 2018; Heo et al., 2018). This leads to numerous opportunities but also challenges for companies, since each generation has unique values, characteristics and capabilities (Anderson et al., 2017; Becton et al., 2014; Bujan, 2020; Gursoy et al., 2013; Ismail et al., 2018). Understanding these generational nuances is crucial for individuals involved in family-run hotels and businesses in the tourism industry to optimize their workforce management (Barron et al., 2014; Goh & Lee, 2018; Heo et al., 2018). Moreover, the job market in the tourism industry is experiencing a decline with a notable high fluctuation rate. This underscores the importance of specifically addressing the needs of new employees in order to navigate these challenges effectively (Goh & Okumus, 2020; Heo et al., 2018).

Currently, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z represent the three largest generational cohorts of the hospitality industry workforce (Self et al., 2019) and have different motivations regarding their employment (Kim et al., 2016). Thus, the individual motivations, work values and the engagement differ between those generations (King et al., 2017; Park & Gursoy, 2012; Winter & Jackson, 2016). Therefore, it is a challenge for both family-run and non-family businesses in the industry to be an attractive employer for each of these generations (Arijs et al., 2018). By understanding the values and attitudes of different generations, businesses are able to improve the work atmosphere and employee motivation through targeted activities. The needs of the different employees can thus, be better evaluated and their work performance can be improved (Costanza et al., 2016; Gursoy et al., 2013; Smola & Sutton, 2002). In addition, companies also have to consider the generational differences of the workforce, to establish an employer brand (Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012). Accordingly, it can be assumed, that the age of the employees is a significant criterion of differentiation and is just as important as their culture and gender (Gursoy et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2017). As a result, it is essential, that companies focus on a generationally conscious approach, when recruiting and retaining employees (Lub et al., 2012; Murray & Ayoun, 2011).

Especially in the hotel industry, where human interactions are significant and where here the service space is a critical component of the customer experience, it is even more important to address employees according to their generation and meet their expectations at the workplace (Barron et al., 2014; Chi et al., 2013; Goh et al., 2017; Penny-Wan et al., 2014). Given that hospitality employees essentially embody the brand to the public, it is imperative for companies to understand and leverage the motivating factors that resonate with their staff (King et al., 2017; Konu et al., 2020; Solnet et al., 2016). For family-run establishments, acknowledging and integrating the diverse values and characteristics of each generation is key to creating a harmonious and productive working environment (Babin et al., 2017; Deery & Jago, 2015; Frye et al., 2020; Konu et al., 2020). By recognizing and catering to these generational dynamics, hotels can enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and ultimately, the quality of service delivered within the service space (Ismail et al., 2015). This approach aligns with the principles of service marketing (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Kandampully & Solnet, 2018; Palmer, 2014;), where the intangible and inseparable nature of services necessitates a deep understanding of employee motivations and their impact on brand perception.

Internal marketing strategies play a crucial role in shaping and projecting the external employer brand in service companies, particularly within the hospitality industry (Zeithaml et al., 1996). This involves ensuring that employees, serving as brand ambassadors, understand and embody the core values and mission of the brand and are more likely to reflect these values in their direct interactions with customers when delivering the service (Byju, 2013). And engaged and satisfied employees are more likely to deliver exceptional high-quality services, which positively impact the reputation of the employer brand (Tsai & Tang, 2008).

Therefore, a significant focus for family businesses in the hospitality sector is on adopting a generationally conscious approach in their recruitment and retention strategies. This approach ensures that the unique needs of different generational groups are met, fostering a workplace where all employees, irrespective of their age, feel valued and engaged (Gursoy et al., 2013). Thus, to identify the differing attitudes of Generations X, Y, and Z employed in SME family hotels and to understand how these differences can be effectively managed in the unique context of family business operations, we pose the following research question: *Which attitudes differentiate Generations X, Y and Z employed in SME family hotels?*

2. Theoretical Foundation and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Employer branding and generational attractiveness in family businesses

In today's competitive marketplace, corporate branding is essential for competitive advantage, enhancing recruitment, employee retention, and productivity (Ahmad & Daud, 2016; Aldousari et al., 2017; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Fernandez-Lores et al., 2016; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Mölk & Auer, 2018; Sullivan, 2004; Theurer et al., 2018; Tkalac Verčič, 2021). Employer branding is crucial for attracting and retaining talent (Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). The brand image, which is a combination of both tangible and intangible attributes such as pay, job security, innovativeness, and prestige, is conceptualized within the instrumental-symbolic framework (Arijs et al., 2018; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens et al., 2007).

Facing a skilled worker shortage, companies are focusing on enhancing their employer brand and attractiveness (Baum & Kabst, 2013; Berthon et al., 2005; Chapman et al., 2005; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). Employer attractiveness, as defined by Berthon et al. (2005), is the perceived benefits of working for a specific organization. A study by Baum and Kabst (2013) highlights the importance of factors like working atmosphere, career opportunities, and work-life comfort in shaping employer attractiveness and influencing job application intentions. However, preferences for organizational characteristics vary across generations, indicating that the desirable attributes of an employer evolve with the employees' age (Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

With a focus on family businesses, recent studies highlight that both instrumental and symbolic attributes significantly influence employer attractiveness across generations (Botero, 2014; Danler & Zehrer, 2017; Hauswald et al., 2016; Lievens et al., 2007). The concept of 'familiness' and the identity of being a family business are seen as competitive advantages, affecting the company's success and its public image (Covin, 1994; Krappe et al., 2011; Moreno-Menéndez et al., 2021; Zellweger et al., 2010, 2012). Family businesses are generally perceived as more sustainable, long-term oriented, and fairer than non-family firms, yet also as less flexible and more stagnant. The impact of these perceptions on the decision-making processes of potential job applicants, particularly in relation to different generations, is an emerging area of interest, indicating a need for further research in understanding how family business identity influences employer branding and attractiveness from both consumer and employee perspectives (Babin et al., 2017).

2.2 Hypotheses development

According to the literature, Generations X and Y are similar in their intention to work in SME hotels in general. For these two generations, the hotel industry is not seen as a privileged sector, as highlighted by Chen and Choi (2008), Kim et al. (2016), and Lub et al. (2012). This perspective likely stems from their shared experiences and socio-economic influences during their formative professional years.

In contrast, Generation Z perceives the hotel industry very positively, as demonstrated by Goh and Okumus (2020) and Self et al. (2019). This generation particularly values the interaction with people, the varied work tasks, and the travel opportunities, which are aspects further supported by Goh and Lee (2018) and Goh and Okumus (2020). Such positive attitudes suggest that Generation Z might be seeing and experiencing the hospitality sector through a different lens compared to their predecessors.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). The attitude towards intention to work in SME family hotels differs between Generations X, Y and Z.

With regard to loyalty, it is observed that none of the three generations exhibit a strong allegiance to their employer. However, literature suggests that Generations X and Z demonstrate a relatively higher degree of loyalty compared to Generation Y, as outlined in studies by Berkup (2014), Chillakuri and Mahanandia (2018), Gursoy et al. (2008), and Park and Gursoy (2012). Factors such as respectful treatment (Goh & Okumus, 2020; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015), job security (Kim et al., 2016; Lub et al., 2012; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015), and a certain degree of autonomy in the workplace are valued across all generations (Berkup, 2014; Brown et al., 2015; Chen & Choi, 2008). Additionally, the inclination to multitask and a pronounced emphasis on technology usage are characteristics that distinguish the younger generations (Generations Y and Z) from the older ones (Generation X), as highlighted by Berkup (2014), Chillakuri and Mahanandia (2018), and Self et al. (2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). The attitude towards work ethic and values differs between Generations X, Y and Z employed in SME family hotels.

Generations Y and Z are found to prefer teamwork, as supported by findings from Goh and

Okumus (2020), Kim et al. (2016), and Ozkan and Solmaz (2015). In contrast, Generation X tends to favor working independently, a preference documented by Gursoy et al. (2008). All three generations value a close contact with management and a friendly workplace atmosphere, evidenced by studies from Glass (2007), Gursoy et al. (2008), Schroth (2019), Chen and Choi (2008), Chi et al. (2013), Kong et al. (2015, 2018), and Park and Gursoy (2012). Yet, it is the younger generations, particularly Generations Y and Z, who particularly seek out more frequent interaction and regular feedback from management, as highlighted by Glass (2007), Ozkan and Solmaz (2015), and Schroth (2019).

Additionally, differences in work communication styles are evident among the three generations, as detailed by Berkup (2014), Glass (2007), Schroth (2019), and Stewart et al. (2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). The attitude towards work atmosphere differs between Generations X, Y and Z employed in SME family hotels.

Various training and development opportunities are highly valued across all three generations, as evidenced by studies from Berkup (2014), Chi et al. (2013), Goh and Lee (2018), and Kong et al. (2015, 2018). Similarly, all generations appreciate recognition of their achievements, a sentiment supported by research from Brown et al. (2015), Glass (2007), Goh and Lee (2018), Gursoy et al. (2008), and Kim et al. (2016).

However, there are notable differences in how each generation views recognition and rewards. Generations X and Y, in particular, show a strong desire for recognition and tangible rewards, as documented by Barron et al. (2014), Brown et al. (2015), Glass (2007), and Gursoy et al. (2013). On the other hand, Generation Z is characterized by a distinct performance orientation and a drive for continuous growth and achievement, as found in studies by Goh and Lee (2018) and Schroth (2019). Based on these differences, the following hypothesis emerges:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). The attitude towards career opportunities differs between Generations X, Y and Z employed in SME family hotels.

The literature highlights that both Generations X and Y place a high value on maintaining a good balance between their professional and personal lives. Studies such as those by Barron et al. (2007), Brown et al. (2015), Cennamo and Gardner (2008), Chen and Choi (2008), Glass (2007), and Lub et al. (2012) all suggest that these generations prioritize personal goals over work-relat-

ed ones, indicating a preference for jobs that allow for flexibility and time for personal pursuits. In contrast, Generation Z appears to have a different approach to work-life balance. Unlike their predecessors, this generation does not prioritize a strict separation between professional and private life. According to Iorgulescu (2016) and Schroth (2019), Generation Z is characterized by a willingness to invest more time and effort into their work, driven perhaps by different economic conditions or career aspirations that favor job security and career progression over immediate work-life balance. Thus, the following hypothesis is derived:

Hypothesis 5 (H5). The attitude towards work-life balance differs between Generations X, Y and Z employed in SME family hotels.

Fulfillment emerges as a critical factor influencing the attractiveness of work tasks, as emphasized by Brown et al. (2015), Chillakuri and Mahanandia (2018), and Kim et al. (2016). The desire for fulfilling work transcends across all generational lines, highlighting its universal appeal as a motivator. Moreover, different generations also share a common desire for achievement, challenge, and variety in their professional roles. This is supported by literature from Brown et al. (2015), Chen and Choi (2008), Goh and Lee (2018), and Ozkan and Solmaz (2015), which suggests that these factors significantly contribute to job satisfaction and employee retention. The following hypothesis should provide further insights:

Hypothesis 6 (H6). The attitude towards attractiveness of tasks differs between Generations X, Y and Z employed in SME family hotels.

Regarding salary expectations, literature indicates that Generations X and Y value adequate compensation for their work, as demonstrated by studies from Chen and Choi (2008) and Kim et al. (2016). However, these generations also show a willingness to prioritize work-life balance over high pay. For instance, Glass (2007) and Kim et al. (2016) found that these individuals are open to accepting lower-paying jobs if such positions offer greater flexibility and a better balance between their personal and professional lives.

In contrast, members of Generation Z, who are at the outset of their careers, typically have lower salary demands. According to Iorgulescu (2016), this generation's current focus may not be on achieving high income immediately but rather on opportunities for learning and growth that can later translate into career advancement. Based on the findings from the literature, the following hypothesis is derived:

Hypothesis 7 (H7). *The attitude towards attractive income differs between Generations X, Y and Z employed in SME family hotels.*

Moreover, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) evaluate the perception of instrumental and symbolic characteristics of the employer image between the different generations. Based on this evaluation, the following hypothesis is derived:

Hypothesis 8 (H8). *Generations X, Y and Z have different views on the attractiveness of an employer brand, based on instrumental and symbolic characteristics.*

3. Methodology

In accordance with the methodology employed in analogous studies (Brown et al., 2015; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; King et al., 2017; Richardson & Thomas, 2012), this study adopted a quantitative approach and utilized a standardized online questionnaire as its primary survey instrument, hosted on the EFS Survey platform by Questback (Questback, 2021). Participants, comprising current and former employees in family-run hotel businesses, were asked about eight dimensions related to their employment. These dimensions, comprising between four to twelve items, were derived from literature and existing studies on generational differences in the workplace (Häder, 2022). The following validated item batteries were used in order to test the dimensions: intention to work in SME family hotels (Arijs et. al, 2018), work ethic and values (Lub et. al, 2012), working atmosphere (Baum & Kabst, 2013), career opportunities (Baum & Kabst, 2013), work-life balance (Gursoy et. al, 2013), task attractiveness (Lub et. al, 2012), income attractiveness (Baum & Kabst, 2013), and instrumental and symbolic employer brand characteristics (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

The questionnaire was structured in three sections. The first part determined the employment status (current or former) in family-owned hotels, the size of the hotel, country, and department, using nominal scales. The second section assessed the eight dimensions on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. This ordinal scale approach was chosen to gauge the intensity of each attribute (Häder, 2022). The final section gathered demographic information such as gender, education level, and age, categorized into Generations X, Y, and Z, using nominal and ordinal scales.

The survey was distributed through social media channels and direct email to various Austrian family-owned hotels, primarily reaching industry professionals from Austria, Italy, and Germany.

The target population consisted of SME employees in the Austrian hotel industry, born between 1981 and 2002. A total of 226 participants (n = 226) completed the survey. The completion rate, which corresponds to the proportion of completed questionnaires in the adjusted sample, is 42.34 percent. A total of 68.6 percent of the respondents were female and 31.4 percent male. In terms of the different generations, 23.5 percent of the participants are assigned to Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), which corresponds to 53 participants. 22.1 percent of the participants are allocated to Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1994), which corresponds to 50 participants. The largest number of participants can be attributed to Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2002) with 54.4 percent, which corresponds to 123 participants.

4. Study Results

The data was analyzed utilizing the statistics and analysis software SPSS. To evaluate the generational differences of the three generations, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted (Lub et al., 2012) for each of the eight dimensions. Regarding the multivariate tests, the Wilke' lambda statistic was chosen for the interpretation of the result. This statistic is considered as a good compromise between the four given statistics and provides credible results, independent of the data (Ateş et al., 2019). The significance level of the values is $p < .05$. This analysis is followed by a post-hoc univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA), in order to evaluate the significant differences between the generations in the individual dimensions more precisely (Chen & Choi, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2013). Thereby, a significance level of $p < .05$ was assumed. For the pairwise comparison between the individual generations, a Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test is subsequently performed for each dimension. Also, for this evaluation, the mean difference is significant at the .05 level. The affected values are marked with an asterisk in the respective statistics. This test has already been used in similar studies investigating generational differences and is therefore appropriate for the present paper (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Chen & Choi, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2013).

4.1. Intention to work in SME family hotels
As assessed by Levene's test, the dimension intention to work in SME hotels shows homogeneity of the error variances based on mean for all items ($p > .05$), except the item "I find that the hotel industry has a good employer image". In addition, there was homogeneity of covariances,

as assessed by Box's test (p > .001). The one-way MANOVA found no statistically significant differences between the generations on their intention to work in SME hotels, F(14, 434) = 1.372, p = .163, partial η^2 = .042, Wilk's Λ = .917.

In summary and based on the statistical analysis, H1 is not confirmed with regard to the dimension intention to work in SME hotels. This means, that there is no significant difference between Generations X, Y and Z regarding their attitude towards the intention to work in SME hotels.

a. Work ethic and values

The dimension of work ethic and values, as indicated by Levene's test, shows homogeneity of error variances for most items (p > .05), except for the item emphasizing personal values alignment with the company's values. However, Box's test (p < .001) indicates a lack of homogeneity of covariances, suggesting significant generational differences in this dimension. The one-way MANOVA supports this, revealing significant differences between generations in attitudes towards work ethic and values, F(24, 424) = 1.924, p = .006, partial η^2 = .098, Wilk's Λ = .813.

Post-hoc tests from univariate ANOVAs show significant generational differences in specific items: 'My acceptance of bureaucracy and rules at work is low', 'I am loyal and therefore find it difficult to change jobs', and 'I would describe myself as self-confident', with respective F values of 4.050 (p = .019), 5.032 (p = .007), and 3.412 (p = .035). Tukey HSD tests reveal significant differences between Generation X and Generations Y and Z in these items, particularly highlighting Generation X's lower acceptance of bureaucracy and higher loyalty and self-confidence compared to younger generations.

Descriptive statistics further underscore these findings. For example, Generation X reports lower acceptance of bureaucracy (mean 2.85) compared to Generation Y (mean 2.22) and Generation Z (mean 2.36), and higher loyalty and self-confidence than Generation Z, with means of 3.96 versus 3.41 for loyalty and 4.40 versus 4.02 for self-confidence.

In conclusion, based on these statistical analyses, H2 is confirmed, establishing a significant difference between Generations X, Y, and Z in their attitudes towards work ethic and values.

b. Work atmosphere

Levene's test revealed no homogeneity of error variances for the work atmosphere dimension across most items (p < .05), except for two items related to teamwork preference and SMS/WhatsApp communication. Box's test (p < .001) also indicated no homogeneity of covariances. Consequently, a significant generational difference in work atmosphere attitudes was confirmed, as evidenced by the one-way MANOVA results, F(20, 428) = 2.810, p = .001, partial η^2 = .116, Wilk's Λ = .781.

Post-hoc analysis of the univariate ANOVAs identified significant generational differences in four items related to work atmosphere. These include perceptions of bonding with the entrepreneurial family, F(2.223) = 6.592, p = .002; importance of support in everyday work problems, F(2.223) = 7.112, p = .001; preference for personal or telephonic conversations over emails, F(2.223) = 5.932, p = .003; and suitability of social media for company communication, F(2.223) = 4.898, p = .008. Tukey HSD tests showed significant differences in these aspects particularly between Generations X and Z.

Further analysis of descriptive statistics highlighted that Generation X feels a stronger bond with the entrepreneurial family and prefers personal conversations or phone calls more than Generations Y and Z. Generations Y and Z, in comparison, showed a lesser preference for support in work problems and use of social media for company communication than Generation X. These findings suggest notable variations in work atmosphere preferences and communication styles among different generational cohorts.

In summary and based on the statistical analysis, H3 is confirmed with regard to the dimension of work atmosphere. This implies a significant difference between Generations X, Y and Z regarding their attitude toward the work atmosphere.

c. Career opportunities

As assessed by Levene's test, the dimension career opportunities show no homogeneity of the error variances based on mean for all items (p < .05). In addition, there was no homogeneity of covariances, as assessed by Box's test (p < .001) and the one-way MANOVA found no statistically significant differences between the generations and their attitudes towards career opportunities, F(14, 434) = 1.505, p = .105, partial η^2 = .046, Wilk's Λ = .910.

In summary and based on the statistical analysis, H4 is refuted with regard to the dimension career opportunities. This means, that there is no significant difference between Generations X, Y and Z regarding their attitude towards career opportunities.

d. Work-life balance

As assessed by Levene's test, the dimension work-life balance shows homogeneity of the error variances based on mean for all items (p > .05), except the item "I am willing to work hard and accept overtime". In addition, there was homogeneity of covariances, as assessed by Box's

test (p > .001). The one-way MANOVA found no statistically significant differences between the generations on their attitude towards work-life balance, $F_{(10, 438)} = 1.556$, $p = .117$, partial $\eta^2 = .034$, Wilk's $\Lambda = .933$.

In summary and based on the statistical analysis, H5 is not confirmed with regard to the dimension work-life balance. This means, that there is no significant difference between Generations X, Y and Z regarding their attitude towards work-life balance.

e. Attractiveness of tasks

Levene's test showed no homogeneity of error variances for the attractiveness of tasks dimension across most items ($p < .05$), with an exception for the item related to feeling connected to work tasks. Box's test ($p < .001$) also found no homogeneity of covariances. Consequently, a significant generational difference in attitudes towards task attractiveness was evident, as confirmed by the one-way MANOVA, $F_{(16, 432)} = 1.676$, $p = .048$, partial $\eta^2 = .058$, Wilk's $\Lambda = .887$. Post-hoc univariate ANOVAs identified significant differences between generations in valuing challenging work tasks, $F_{(2.223)} = 3.417$, $p = .035$, and feeling connected to work tasks, $F_{(2.223)} = 4.661$, $p = .010$. Tukey HSD tests showed significant differences between Generations X and Z for both items, with Generation X placing higher importance on challenging tasks and feeling connected to work.

Descriptive statistics further revealed that Generation X, compared to Generation Z, places significantly more importance on the challenge and connection to their work tasks, with means of 4.30 vs. 3.99 and 4.64 vs. 4.22, respectively. This indicates a stronger preference in Generation X for engagement with their tasks. Thus, H6 is confirmed, indicating a significant difference between Generations X, Y, and Z regarding their attitudes towards the attractiveness of tasks.

f. Attractive income

The dimension attractive income shows homogeneity of the error variances based on mean for all items ($p > .05$), except the item "Good payment is important to me", as assessed by Levene's test. As shown by Box's test ($p > .001$), there was homogeneity of covariances. The one-way MANOVA found no statistically significant differences between the generations on their attitude towards an attractive income, $F_{(8, 440)} = .742$, $p = .654$, partial $\eta^2 = .013$, Wilk's $\Lambda = .974$.

In summary and based on the statistical analysis, H7 is not confirmed with regard to the dimension attractive income. This means, that there is no significant difference between Generations X, Y

and Z regarding their attitude towards attractive income.

g. Instrumental and symbolic characteristics

Levene's test indicated homogeneity of error variances for most items in the dimension of instrumental and symbolic characteristics ($p > .05$), with an exception for the item on the influence of social and team activities. However, Box's test ($p < .001$) showed no homogeneity of covariances. Consequently, a significant generational difference in attitudes towards instrumental and symbolic characteristics was confirmed by the one-way MANOVA, $F_{(16, 432)} = 1.763$, $p = .034$, partial $\eta^2 = .061$, Wilk's $\Lambda = .881$.

Univariate ANOVAs revealed significant differences between generations in two key items: the influence of social and team activities, $F_{(2.223)} = 4.220$, $p = .016$, and the importance of cultivation and sustainability, $F_{(2.223)} = 7.538$, $p = .001$. Tukey HSD tests showed significant disparities between Generations Y and Z in valuing social and team activities, and between Generation X and both Generations Y and Z in prioritizing cultivation and sustainability.

Further analysis of descriptive statistics highlighted that Generation Z values social and team activities more (mean 3.93) than Generation Y (mean 3.22), and Generation X places higher importance on cultivation and sustainability (mean 3.94) compared to Generations Y (mean 3.12) and Z (mean 3.51).

In conclusion, the statistical analysis confirms H8, establishing significant differences between Generations X, Y, and Z in their attitudes towards instrumental and symbolic characteristics.

5. Discussion

This study addressed the question, *"Which attitudes differentiate Generations X, Y, and Z employed in SME family hotels?"* and found significant generational differences in attitudes towards work ethic and values, career opportunities, task attractiveness, and instrumental and symbolic characteristics.

In the realm of work ethic and values, Generation X exhibited lower acceptance of bureaucracy than Generations Y and Z, aligning with literature that portrays Generation Y as rule-questioning and both Y and Z valuing individuality (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018; Gursoy et al., 2008). The overall low mean response to bureaucracy across generations indicates a general trend towards disagreement or neutrality. Regarding loyalty, our findings support Lub et al. (2012), showing Generation X as more loyal than Y and Z, contrary to views of Generation Z's loyalty (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018; Park & Gursoy, 2012; Self et

al., 2019). The study also substantiates the literature's indications of Generation Z's diminished self-confidence, a characteristic attributed to less work experience, especially in more demanding and challenging situations (Goh & Lee, 2018; Schroth, 2019).

Concerning career opportunities, an interesting finding was Generation X's higher valuation of mentoring programs, traditionally associated with Generation Y (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Chen & Choi, 2008). This suggests a universal need for mentorship irrespective of age. However, Generation X seems more receptive to such programs. Contrary to expectations, Generation Y demonstrated a lower demand for feedback compared to other generations, possibly reflecting their desire for autonomy and confidence in the workplace (Barron et al., 2007; Brown et al., 2015; Glass, 2007; Gursoy et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2016; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015).

In task attractiveness, Generation X placed more importance on challenging tasks and connection to work, resonating with the literature highlighting their pursuit of achievement and fulfillment (Chen & Choi, 2008; Kim et al., 2016). Conversely, for Generation Z, aspects like technology and dynamism are more pivotal (Goh & Lee, 2018; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015).

Lastly, in the dimension of instrumental and symbolic characteristics, Generation Z showed a higher preference for social and team activities than Generation Y. Meanwhile, Generation X was more influenced by an employer's cultivation and sustainability practices than the younger generations, underlining distinct generational preferences.

6. Conclusions

This study underscores significant generational differences in work-related attitudes within SME family hotels, emphasizing the importance of tailored and generation-specific strategies for effective employer branding and operational management. Understanding nuanced differences in work ethics, values, and preferences among Generations X, Y, and Z is crucial for attracting and retaining a diverse workforce in family-owned hospitality businesses. Implementation of such insights can contribute to the development of more targeted and inclusive approaches to human resource practices in the dynamic landscape of family-owned businesses in the hospitality sector.

However, the research faced limitations, primarily due to its timing during the spring of 2021 amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The sample size was constrained as many hotels were preparing to reopen after prolonged closures, affecting participation rates (Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012; Baum & Kabst, 2013; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Gursoy et al., 2013; Maxwell et al., 2010). This also led to the fact that convenience sampling had to be applied by directly contacting some hotels, which distributed the questionnaire to employees, but also by directly contacting employees. Of course, this is a limitation. Also the uneven generational distribution and lack of differentiation by gender, education, or department, suggests that the findings should be interpreted with caution. The study's focus was mainly on comparing generational differences across eight dimensions without delving deeply into each aspect.

Future research must continue to explore generational differences in SME hotels, particularly considering the dynamic nature of workforce demographics and the evolving societal contexts. Future studies should aim for more comprehensive analyses, including deeper dives into the distinctions among generations and the inclusion of more diverse sociodemographic variables such as gender. Expanding the research to include different countries and comparing family-run with non-family-run hotels could provide broader insights into generational attitudes and values (Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012; Baum & Kabst, 2013; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Gursoy et al., 2013; Maxwell et al., 2010). Other avanues for further research could be to look at the group-level and analyze different generational teams in SME family hotels regarding their attitudes and other relevant variables. In addition, looking at generational differences in attitudes for non-family and family SME hotels would be interesting.

This would not only enhance the understanding of generational dynamics in the hospitality industry but also contribute to the development of more effective human resource strategies tailored to diverse employee needs.

7. Practical Implications

The findings of this study aim to provide SME family hotels with insights into the diverse needs and preferences characteristic of different generational cohorts in their workforce. As part of this effort, we have utilized the data from our literature review and survey to create respective employee personas for Generations X, Y, and Z (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Defining the prototype employees of generations X, Y, and Z: Traits, values, and workplace dynamics

Xenia & Xaver	Employee Persona Generation X

REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

**Born between 1965 and 1980
Very good professional experience**

For Generation X, the cultivation and sustainability of a company positively influences its attractiveness as an employer

Work ethic & values
- Very loyal workforce
- Appreciates independent work
- Prefers structure within a company
- Very self-confident due to their work experience
- Values security

Preferred working atmosphere
- Feels very comfortable in a harmonious and informal work environment
- Working in a team is more difficult for Generation X, than for the younger generations
- Appreciates support when problems arise
- Prefers face-to-face communication and a phone call over written communication by mail

Career expectations
- Appreciates regular feedback
- Values mentoring programs, which support their professional development
- Is pleased about recognition and rewards
- Appreciates social benefits

Intention to work in the family owned-hotel business
- Appreciates the flat hierarchies and small structures of family businesses
- Values a close bond with the entrepreneurial family - has a positive effect on their attitude to work
- Unlike the younger generations, Generation X sees good career opportunities in the hotel industry
- Nevertheless, the hotel industry is not a privileged sector

Work-life balance
- Values a good work-life balance
- A separation between private and professional life is important to them
- Flexible working hours are appreciated
- Personal goals are more important than career related goals

Work task requirements
- Appreciates challenging work tasks and intellectual stimulation
- A connection to the work tasks and fulfillment is very important for them
- Strives for achievement & power

Yvonne & Yannik	Employee Persona Generation Y

REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

**Born between 1981 and 1994
Good professional experience**

Work ethic & values
- Not a very loyal workforce
- Very tech savvy and well educated
- Values independence and responsibility
- Very self-confident due to their work experience
- Known as a skeptical and sophisticated workforce
- Appreciates respect and qual treatment
- Trusts in collective action and central authority

Preferred working atmosphere
- Appreciates a friendly working atmosphere with many social interactions
- Prefers teamwork
- Recognition form the management is important to them
- Strives less for managerial support than other generations
- Prefers a written communication by mail or text message over a face-to-face communication and a phone call

Career expectations
- Places less value on regular feedback than other generations
- Places less value on mentoring programs than other generations
- Values recognition for performance, rewards and promotion
- Appreciates a respectful treatment
- Has high career expectations and strives for training opportunities

Intention to work in the family owned-hotel business
- Values close contact with people
- A close relationship with the entrepreneurial family is appreciated
- Enjoys the fact, that a job in the hotel industry requires creativity
- Nevertheless, the hotel industry is not a privileged sector

Work-life balance
- Values a good work-life balance
- Flexible working hours are appreciated
- The life outside of work and their friends and family have priority

Work task requirements
- Appreciates challenging work tasks
- Meaningful work tasks which provide fulfillment are important
- Values creativity
- Strives for commitment

Zuzanna & Zac	Employee Persona Generation Z

REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

**Born from 1995
Little professional experience**

For Generation Z, the social and team activities of a company positively influences its attractiveness as an employer

Work ethic & values
- Not a very loyal workforce
- Compared to other generations, Generation Z is less self-confident due to their lack of work experience
- Very tech savvy and innovative
- Has good communication skills
- Values freedom and individuality
- Known as an efficient worker
- Appreciates trust and respectful interaction

Preferred working atmosphere
- Appreciates support when problems arise
- Value teamwork and a good team spirit
- Feels tensed and stressed when high performance is expected
- Prefers a written communication by mail or text message over a face-to-face communication and a phone call

Career expectations
- Values regular feedback
- Strives for constant growth and training opportunities
- Is willing to work hard and advance their career
- Very performance oriented

Intention to work in the family owned-hotel business
- Has a positive impression of the hotel industry but some concerns about the working environment
- Values the interaction with people
- Appreciates the diversity of a job in the hotel business
- Sees less career opportunities in that sector due to the flat hierarchies and small structures
- Does not have such a close bond to the entrepreneurial family

Work-life balance
- Compared to older generations, a good work-life balance is not that important for them - they are willing to work harder and advance their career
- Places less value to a strict separation between work and professional life than Generation X and Y

Work task requirements
- Conciseness to the older generations, also Generation Z appreciates challenging working tasks which they feel connected to
- Nevertheless, they value the technical aspects, the diversity, the excitement and safety of work tasks

These personas are intended as general representations, capturing key traits and tendencies commonly associated with each generation. These personas are designed to serve as a reference point for understanding generational differences in the workplace. They are not definitive models but rather illustrative tools that synthesize broad tendencies into accessible profiles. The purpose is to offer family-run hotels a framework to consider when developing strategies to engage with a multigenerational workforce effectively. By considering these personas, family hotels can gain a clearer perspective on the varied expectations and motivations that characterize their diverse employee base.

Author contribution statement

The authors contributed equally to the work.

Conflict of interest statement

None.

Ethical statement

The authors confirm that informed consent was obtained from all participants involved. *The authors confirm that data collection for the research was conducted anonymously and there was not possibility of identifying the participants.*

Declaration on the use of generative AI in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT (GPT-4) in order to revise spelling and grammar. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Funding

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

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