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Institutions and training: A case of social franchising in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore two questions: how do institutions affect knowledge transfer in social franchises in Africa, and does training help social franchises respond to these challenges? Despite advances in the knowledge management literature, our understanding of the role of training in social franchising remains inadequate. Using the qualitative induction methodology, we examine a social franchise network operating in Africa. Our findings suggest that differences in formal and informal institutions affect knowledge transfer within the social franchise network. However, social franchises that understand the institutional environment have been successful in adapting their training strategies to scale up their social impact across African countries. We provide valuable insights into the expansion of a rapidly growing business model within social entrepreneurship, social franchising, and show how a successful social franchise managed to replicate its knowledge across different institutional frameworks in Africa.

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1. Introduction

Franchising has been globally acknowledged as an engine for entrepreneurial growth in Western economies. It involves a contractual agreement between two independent parties to use the proven technical knowledge, brand name and operational routines from the franchisor for a monetary fee paid by the franchisees (Alon, 2001). Knowledge transfer is critical in the franchising relationship because the success of a franchise network depends on the technical knowledge and business standards of the franchisor (Paswan et al., 2014). To identify the local market's needs, the franchisee also shares local knowledge (Altinay & Wang, 2006). Although the knowledge transfer in each direction is essential for the franchise's success, the knowledge flow from franchisor to franchisee is the key to ensuring the transfer of proven business concepts (Paswan et al., 2014).

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Recently, social enterprises have adapted the concept of franchising, creating the approach known as social franchising to scale up their social impact (Crawford-Spencer & Cantatore, 2016; Giudici et al., 2020; Tracey & Jarvis, 2007). Social franchising is the use of commercial franchising principles by social enterprises (Tracey & Jarvis, 2007). Its unique aspect lies in the franchisor's motive to provide social solutions rather than collecting profits from franchisees (Christensen et al., 2010). Given that social franchises provide solutions to social problems, the institutional voids in emerging markets justify their prevalence especially in Africa (Cumberland & Litalien, 2019; Naatu & Alon, 2019). Social franchises are knowledge intensive organizations (Granados et al., 2017) largely dependent on tacit knowledge (Weerakoon et al., 2020). Therefore, a sense of social mission is the basis for inspiring franchisees to engage in training programs. Research has suggested that training is the only successful knowledge transfer mechanism for conveying tacit knowledge from franchisor to franchisee (Domınguez-Falcon et al., 2021).

However, social franchises are constrained by their lack of resources and the institutional barriers of the countries where they are created to solve social problems. Given that most social franchises operate in developing countries (Kistruck et al., 2011) where institutions are weak, social franchisors may be hesitant to transfer proprietary knowledge (Chliova & Ringov, 2017). Therefore, social franchises that grow by replicating knowledge struggle to protect their unique knowledge to ensure their competitive advantage (Ringov et al., 2017). Additionally, the limited knowledge stock of developing countries makes it difficult for franchisors to find franchisees with the absorptive capacity for successful knowledge replication (Paswan & Rajamma, 2016).

To date, researchers have demonstrated the role of strong institutions in promoting the spread of franchising in developed countries. Little is known about how social franchises operating in emerging economies, particularly in Africa, manage to expand and protect their knowledge. While it can be easier to generalize some of the contextual characteristics across Africa (Zoogah & Nkomo, 2013), research exploring country-specific factors needs further attention. Our study, therefore, seeks to answer two questions. First, how do institutions affect knowledge transfer in social franchises? Second, does training help social franchises respond to these challenges?

We find that social franchises that expand successfully in African countries respond differently to the countries' institutions by adjusting the intensity of the franchisor's training. Some African countries have shown improvement in the formalization of laws and regulations, yet informal institutional frameworks still prevail to a large extent. As a result, we underscore the importance of examining the country-specific institutional environment and how it affects organizational practices. We contribute to the literature on the barriers to knowledge transfer by expanding the range of these barriers to include institutional barriers. We also add to the social franchising literature by arguing that the failure to adapt training strategies to the existing formal and informal institutions will undermine a social franchise's growth strategy.

The following section presents the literature review, followed by the methodology used in this study. Then, we report our findings and contributions. Lastly, the conclusion section discusses the implications of the study, its limitations, and areas for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Franchising

Social franchising is the use of commercial franchising principles in social enterprises (Christensen et al., 2010; Crawford-Spencer & Cantatore, 2016). Social franchising involves transferring knowledge to replicate the social impact of a well-established social solution (the social franchisor) to another individual or enterprise (the social franchisee) with the same social goals (Cumberland & Litalien, 2019; Ziólkowska, 2018). Franchising enables social enterprises to combat social problems, while making social entrepreneurs financially sustainable on a large scale (Alon & Misati, 2011; Christensen et al., 2010). Unlike commercial franchising, social franchisors help social franchisees with financial capital (Smuts et al., 2019). Although some social franchises started operation in developed countries, studies report the successful adaptability of the social franchising model in the bottom-of-the-pyramid (BOP) market (Giudici et al., 2020; Kistruck et al., 2011; Maciejewski et al., 2018), particularly in the health sector (Cumberland & Litalien, 2019; Naatu & Alon, 2019). Evidence from the Rosenberg International Franchise Center ("Franchise Indices," 2020) indicates that African countries rank high in the potential of social franchises and low in commercial franchises.

Social franchises offer a viable business approach to achieving the dual missions of having a social impact and making a profit (Alon et al., 2014; Chliova & Ringov, 2017). The business model allows social franchisors to combine resources from donors and investors (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021). Resources collected from donors help social franchisors share knowledge and co-invest with social franchisees who are also beneficiaries (McBride, 2015) and generate a profit. Thus, social franchising is an innovative business model within social entrepreneurship that helps scale up social impacts (Pratono et al., 2018). However, although social problems look similar in most countries in the BOP market, their institutional settings can yield different outcomes when replicating business templates in different countries (Chliova & Ringov, 2017).

Compared to commercial franchising, social franchising is unique in various aspects. First, in social franchising, social franchisors are inspired by social solutions rather than resource investments from franchisees (Giudici et al., 2020). Therefore, when choosing a social franchisee, the social franchisor must ensure that the candidates recognize and agree to the serious need for the social mission (Cumberland & Litalien, 2019). Second, given that social franchising balances social and business objectives, social franchisors receive funds from donors who want to fund the social cause and investors who are interested in the business objectives (Christensen et al., 2010). Third, as social franchises largely operate in low-income areas with the primary goal of meeting social needs, lack of resources is more persistent in social franchising than for-profit small businesses (Cumberland & Litalien, 2019).

Notwithstanding its focus on solving social needs, social franchises face several challenges. First, they must deal with conflicting logics (Doherty et al., 2014). For example, investors may emphasize the protection of their knowledge to retain a competitive advantage, whereas donors insist on knowledge sharing to scale up the social impact. Second, given that social franchises cover institutional voids in developing countries, they often tend to ignore the institutional factors surrounding them (Chliova & Ringov, 2017). Most social franchises ignore the critical implications of local politics for their operations. Third, social franchising also affects knowledge management. If the social franchisors loosen the requirements for the franchisees to join the network, resulting in more potential participants, the likelihood that the donors will fund the program increases (Crawford-Spencer & Cantatore, 2016; Cumberland & Githens, 2012). Fourth, given that social franchises operate in a population that lacks a business mindset and has a low level of education, they lack clear established standards for franchisee selection (Cumberland & Litalien, 2019).

2.2. Institutions in Africa

Institutional theorists categorize institutions into formal and informal structures (Morgan & Quack, 2005; North, 1990), which are the terms adopted in this study. Formal and informal institutions include the political system, the legal system, and social and cultural beliefs (North, 1990). Formal institutions are comprised of regulatory elements that have legal authority and guide the legal framework and economic activities of society. Informal structures, on the other hand, are comprised of cognitive and normative elements, which are unwritten codes of conduct (traditions, norms, culture, and customs) accepted by society to shape business activities (Scott, 2001). As North (1990) noted, organizations are constrained by either the formal or informal structures of institutions. These structures, however, tend to complement or substitute for each other (Estrin & Prevezer, 2011). Where informal and formal institutions are not incompatible, firms must deal with institutional misalignment (de la Chaux & Haugh, 2020; Williams & Vorley, 2015) or weak institutions when informal institutions dominate or substitute for formal ones (Estrin & Prevezer, 2011), as in the case of Africa and other developing countries (Zoogah, 2018).

Developed countries are characterized as having strong institutions due to well-established written rules and regulations that govern society (North, 1990). In contrast, emerging economies are considered as having weak institutions because of unstable and unpredictable laws and regulations (Zoogah et al., 2015). Institutions in emerging markets are not only unstable, but also differ by country (Rottig, 2016). Therefore, the findings from China and India, which are the most studied emerging market countries, might not apply to all emerging economies (Nielsen et al., 2018). More research is needed from other emerging countries to provide context-specific solutions for franchising companies operating in emerging countries.

Studies in Africa and other emerging markets have shown that the weak rule of law, the lack of business regulations and labor regulations, and the failure to protect property rights have a negative effect on a firm's performance (Rottig, 2016; Zoogah, 2018). Failure to enforce contracts, lack of transparency, and corruption have led organizations to prefer business arrangements such as equity joint ventures (Kamoche & Harvey, 2006; Nkakleu & Biboum, 2019) or low control governance modes such as master franchising (Rosado-Serrano et al., 2018; von Koch et al., 2020). In addition, most business arrangements in Africa require political connections with top government officials (Li et al., 2021), which has consequences for overall performance in general (Jibir et al., 2019; Katz-Lavigne & Kiggundu, 2019; Liedong & Frynas, 2018; Liedong & Rajwani, 2018) and knowledge transfer in particular (Monteiro et al., 2008; Su & Kong, 2020).

Corruption and poverty are still major problems in Africa. The UNDP reports that almost all countries in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from extreme poverty. In 2018, Transparency International stated that 10 out of the 20 most corrupt countries worldwide are from sub-Saharan Africa. Corruption (Zoogah, 2018) and tribalism influence the recruitment process in sub-Saharan African organizations, factors that have a strong impact on the effectiveness of knowledge transfer (Parboteeah et al., 2014).

Poor education systems in many African countries add to the challenges firms face in transferring knowledge (Osabutey & Jin, 2016). Lack of access to quality education and training programs in Africa create challenges in finding competent managers with managerial experience (Yessoufou et al., 2018; Zoogah et al., 2015; Zoogah et al., 2020). Likewise, given the lack of employment opportunities, many young people engage in informal businesses that are not formally registered with the legal authorities. While corruption influences the quality of judicial procedures and contract enforcement (Dixit, 2015; Knott & Miller, 2006; Zoogah et al., 2015), the failure to register businesses with the authorities limits the extent to which contract terms can be legally enforced (Chliova & Ringov, 2017). Overall, unstable government laws concerning business (Baena & Cervino, 2014) and lack of societal and economic support reduce entrepreneurial activities by prompting people to seek income from formal employment rather than becoming self-employed (Estrin et al., 2016; Luo, 2020).

Although there are 54 countries on the African continent, the degree of formalization across them differs. African countries are characterized by different formal and informal rules and regulations that govern business operations (Zoogah et al., 2015). Therefore, a proven business template that is successful in one market might not work effectively in another market (Rottig, 2016).

2.3. Training in Social Franchising

Training involves the acquisition of knowledge and continuous development of skills through learning activities that enable franchisees and their employees to perform their duties to improve the franchise network's performance (Tharenou et al., 2007). This form of knowledge transfer is the core practice in franchising (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013). It involves the transfer of the tacit knowledge that is crucial for a social franchise's performance (Granados et al., 2017). Training is offered to franchisees and their employees not only about the franchise's practices but also to improve their skills and increase their capabilities (Wang et al., 2004).

Given that social franchising relies on tacit knowledge, training is a critical element for the survival of social franchising (Granados et al., 2017). Social franchisors ensure that franchisees understand the value of their social mission and acquire the knowledge necessary to deliver solutions to their society (Domınguez-Falcon et al., 2021). For example, in a study conducted in Myanmar, Ghana and Kenya, the findings indicate that training was the main motivation for the franchisee in a subsistence economy to join the social franchise network (Huntington et al., 2012; Sieverding et al., 2015). Recently, Iddy (2020) theorized that training can be modeled to help franchisees with different market needs and experience within a social franchise network.

One challenge a social franchise faces is the regular changes in the franchise program to become the beneficiary of a donor's funding. As the Social Sector Task Force of the International Franchise Association reported, frequently conflicting opinions from donors and investors may disrupt the social franchise's scheme. These changes also affect training activities. For example, donors and investors may have conflicting opinions about knowledge protection and knowledge sharing, especially in countries with weak institutions. Nevertheless, to date we still do not know how social franchises strike a balance between protecting knowledge and sharing it in order to have an impact on the societies in which they work, or how they teach other franchisees to do so.

2.4. Institutions, Social Franchising and Training

Institutional theory is becoming an important perspective in research on Africa due to the distinct aspects of institutions in African countries. However, the extant literature about knowledge management in Africa lacks an institutional perspective (Chliova & Ringov, 2017; Littlewood & Holt, 2018; Rivera-Santos et al., 2015; Zoogah et al., 2015).

Franchising principles were originally built in countries with strong institutions that support the protection of proprietary knowledge (Caves & Murphy, 1976). Operating a franchise business in countries with weak institutions limits knowledge transfer because the franchisor may be worried that the franchisee will steal the franchisor's patented knowledge (Gaur et al., 2019). Despite the evidence that informal institutions weaken franchising firms (Aliouche et al., 2015; Kastner et al., 2019), we still find examples of social franchises that thrive and expand in Africa. How do they do so?

In countries with strong institutions such as the US, franchise regulations are established to guide and shape franchise contracts. However, enacting franchising regulations in countries that do not enforce the law is impractical. While large social enterprises may respond by trying to lobby the government to change some of the regulations (Chliova & Ringov, 2017) or bribe politicians to establish strong social networks (Zoogah, 2018), Jibir et al. (2019) suggest the need for institutional reforms of business policies in sub-Saharan Africa. However, institutional reformation may take many centuries. In contrast, Domınguez-Falcon et al. (2021) highlight the vital role of training in solving challenges in settings where there is a franchisor-franchisee relationship. In this regard, franchisors may need to establish strategies to protect their core knowledge while expanding (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013).

The existing literature agrees that franchisors must adopt different modes of governance based on the institutional environment in which they operate. However, researchers differ in the formats they recommend. For instance, while Jell-Ojobor and Windsperger (2014) proposed using master franchising in countries with weak institutions, (Alon, 2006) maintained that this format is well suited for countries with strong institutions. Master franchising is an agreement between a franchisor and a master franchisee, whereby the franchisor gives the master franchisee the right to use the business format to recruit and train franchisees in a specified territory (Alon, 2006; Brookes, 2014). Given the finding that training increases emotional control and metacognitive activity, which improve the ability to cope with new issues as they arise (Weerakoon et al., 2020), master franchisors may adapt their training according to the institutional challenges they face.

Additionally, passive ownership patterns prevalent in emerging economies may also be a major barrier to knowledge transfer in social franchising. Passive ownership franchising occurs when the franchisee owns the franchised unit but employs a manager to run the daily operations (Paswan et al., 2014). As Shane (2001) theorized, in such situations the knowledge shared will be affected as it passes through different ranks.

In emerging economies, it is difficult to generalize research findings due to the variability of the countries' institutions (Zoogah et al., 2015). Recent studies have started to recognize the diversity of African countries with different traditions, languages, and political, economic, and legal structures (Nkakleu & Biboum, 2019; Zoogah, 2018). Understanding the institutional parameters of each country and how they affect knowledge management in social franchising is of particular interest to franchises seeking to enter the African market (Aliouche et al., 2015). Although the literature has documented multiple barriers to knowledge transfer in social enterprises, little is known about how institutions impede the replication of knowledge in social franchising. Thus, we take our lead from (Kistruck et al., 2011) by investigating the institutional challenges to knowledge transfer in social franchises operating in Africa, and the responses to these challenges.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

To investigate the institutional challenges to knowledge transfer we used a grounded theory methodology based on qualitative data. Grounded theory is a general methodology that can be used with a qualitative or quantitative approach or a combination of the two (Glaser, 2005). The emphasis is on new discoveries that emerge from the study, constant comparisons, and theoretical sampling (Glaser, 1978). Additionally, grounded theory can facilitate any philosophical assumptions that the researcher uses, including interpretivist, positivist, and realist (Charmaz, 2000). We adopted an interpretivist research design to allow new concepts to emerge from the data.

To develop a deeper understanding of the effect of institutions and the role of training in social franchising, we studied a single case due to the unexplored nature of social franchising in Africa (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; Yin, 1989). As shown above, social franchising is increasing in Africa, but academic research lacks knowledge of the franchising practices and institutional challenges that social franchises face in the region. The uniqueness of the case study in expanding into various countries in Africa successfully where many social franchises are struggling, prompted us to use it to explore our research questions (Siggelkow, 2007).

We chose social franchising for this study because it offers a new frontier for research from an emerging market perspective (Zoogah et al., 2015). Additionally, training is the most crucial element in the success of the performance and growth of social franchising. Regarding our chosen social franchise, it is one of the few franchises with origins in Africa (Camenzuli & McKague, 2015; Smuts et al., 2019) that is successfully expanding into other African countries.

3.1.1. Case Selection

The selection of the case study was purposeful and theoretically based (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Theoretical sampling helped us select a case study that included the relationship between training, institutions, and the context of social franchising (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Goffin et al., 2019). The selection process started with the Social Sector Task Force made up of members of the International Franchise Association (IFA) that helps social enterprises and other non-government entities scale up their social impact through franchising rules. All of the authors are members of the IFA Social Sector Task Force and one is also a consultant for the Alpha social franchise, which is our case study. During Social Task Force meetings, Alpha was identified as a well-performing social franchise that was originally established in Africa, making it a unique exemplar for our research questions (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Of the eight franchised stores (embedded cases) we considered, four represent stores operated by a franchisee (owner-manager), while four represent stores operated by managers (employee-manager).

Most social franchises operating in Africa deal with healthcare and have many years of experience as non-government entities. Examples include Child and Family Wellness clinics, Marie Stopes International and Living Good. Others began their operations in North America or Europe and spread to Africa. Among the social franchises included in the Social Sector Task Force, Sidai is a non-healthcare social franchise but operates only in Kenya. We chose one company (here known as Alpha) because it was established in Africa as a social franchise in 2014 and has expanded to seven countries.

As Table 1 indicates, Alpha uses direct franchising in Kenya, Uganda, DRC-Goma, and Rwanda. It expanded to Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Burundi, and DRC-Bukavu through area master franchising (AMF) where one franchisee is given the right to recruit franchisees in a certain territory (Jell-Ojobor & Windsperger, 2017; Rosado-Serrano et al., 2018). We collected and analyzed data from Uganda and Rwanda because the company uses the same governance mode in both countries. In addition, Alpha began operations in Rwanda and Uganda at the same time, in 2014.

3.1.2. The Alpha Social Franchise

Alpha is a social franchise network in Africa that provides safe drinking water to under-served populations and business opportunities to local entrepreneurs. The company

Table 1. Data about the institutional factors related to doing business in the countries where Alpha operates.

		Uganda	Rwanda	Kenya	Tanzania	Zambia	Burundi	DRC
Started franchise		2014	2014	2017	2019	2020	2020	2018
Entry mode		Direct	Direct	Direct	AMF	AMF	AMF	Bukavu = AMF Goma = Direct
Overall ease of doing business	Index	60	76.5	73.2	54.5	66.9	46.8	36.2
	Rank	116 (Medium)	38 (Easy)	56 (Easy)	141 (Medium)	85 (Easy)	166 (Below average)	183 (Below average)
Ease of starting a business	Index	71.4	93.2	82.7	74.4	84.9	92.9	91.6
	Rank	169	35	129	162	117	44	54
Contract enforcement	Index	60.9	69.1	58.3	61.7	50.8	43	33.3
	Rank	77	32	89	71	130	158	178
Corruption	Index	28	53	28	37	34	19	19
	Rank	137	51	137	96	113	165	165
Literacy rate		76.5%	73.2%	81.5%	77.8%	86.7%	68.3%	77%
Urbanization		23.4%	17.3%	27.5	34.5%	44%	13.4%	45%
Unemployment rate		1.84	1.03	2.6	2	11.4	1.4	4.2
Population (mid-2020)		46 mil	12.6 mil	51.3	56.3	17.3	11.2	84
Number of franchisees		28	47	21	21	3	3	11
Number of franchised units		30	52	21	21	3	3	11
Number of company-owned units		3	1	0	1	1	1	2
Total units		33	53	21	22	4	4	13

Sources: Compiled from company archives, the World Bank, Transparency International, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, United Nations Population Division, and the OECD.

uses the franchise model to stimulate economic growth and create economic independence, while addressing the fundamental problems of unemployment and unsafe drinking water. To help many small entrepreneurs become social franchisees, Alpha co-invests with them by providing a water purification machine and guaranteeing them a start-up loan from micro-credit banks. It is currently operating in seven countries with 122 franchisees and at least 2000 retail points. The more water Alpha sells, the more it reaches a large population, while increasing sales. In doing so, it achieves its social and financial objectives. However, between 2017 and early 2019, Alpha started experiencing a stagnation in performance. In an interview with the founder, he partly attributed this situation to inadequate training for franchisees.

As part of its support incentives, Alpha provides on-going monthly training to franchisees and periodically to other employees using the same modules in all countries. Monthly training in Alpha is designed for franchisees. This is because the Alpha franchise contract, like any other franchise contract, requires a franchisee to supervise the store's daily operation. For stores operated by a manager, it is the franchisees' responsibility to pass on the information to the manager after the meeting. The manager then communicates this information to the rest of the team members. Franchisees should gather information from managers and provide feedback to the franchisor (trainer) during the next meeting.

Although the empirical focus here is on the institutional environment of Rwanda and Uganda, Table 1 provides an overview of the institutional environment of the seven countries in which Alpha operates. The table indicates how the company is expanding (the number of franchised units) in an improved institutional setting such as Rwanda and a poor institutional environment such as the DRC in terms of corruption, contract enforcement, and ease of doing business. Additionally, the table also shows the rapid improvement in Tanzania with medium scores of ease-of-doing businesses through area master franchising.

Since 2014, when the company started its first franchisees in Rwanda and Uganda, there has been a difference in performance. Growth in Rwanda in terms of the number of franchisees and franchised units has increased compared to Uganda. The difference in performance might be influenced by, but not limited to, the quality of the countries' institutions. The ease of doing business index, which considers regulatory factors such as the quality of judicial processes, and the costs and time involved in resolving commercial disputes in a local first-instance court, positions Rwanda as the second-best country in sub-Saharan Africa ("Market Overview," 2020). In 2019, the country's commercial guide for US companies and the International Trade Administration reported that since 2014, Rwanda's business environment has improved due to reductions in corruption, crime, and political conflicts. According to the Transparency International report of 2019, Rwanda listed as the least corrupt country in East Africa and the only country to score above the global average in that region.

In contrast, in Uganda, corruption is still a severe problem. There is little political will to fight it to encourage a business-friendly environment. Transparency International's 2019 corruption index ranked Uganda as the third-most corrupt country in East Africa, following South Sudan and Burundi. In addition, the country's commercial guide for US companies reports that unregistered economic businesses and the sale of smuggled counterfeit products, especially from China, hinder foreign and local producers of consumer goods in Uganda.

The improvement in legal enforcement, low corruption levels, and formal registration of businesses in Rwanda might be some of the reasons that Alpha permitted the growth of the company through multi-unit ownership there (Clarkin & Rosa, 2005; Hussain et al., 2018; von Koch et al., 2020).

3.2. Data Collection

To answer our research questions, we used different sources to collect qualitative data. Utilizing an inductive approach after collecting the data allowed insights to develop from the data rather than beginning with the preconceived notions of a particular framework (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Gioia et al., 2012). We conducted interviews with the top management level in the franchisor's headquarter and the franchisees in Uganda and Rwanda. Additionally, we interviewed the franchisees and managers separately to highlight the different perspectives of the franchisees, employed managers, and other employees. Doing so allowed us to compare the statements of the owner-managers and employee-managers. Interviews and field visits were conducted between 2018 and 2019. If clarifications were needed, we contacted the interviewees online. Table 2 provides a description and summary of each data source.

Semi-structured interviews. We conducted 14 interviews with the founder, national directors, franchisee relationship managers, a training director, general managers, and eight franchisees. All interviews were conducted in English. Franchisees were selected based on who operated the franchise store on a daily basis and who employed a manager recommended by the training director. The Uganda country director connected us to the country director of Rwanda for more interviews. In addition, after interviewing the franchisee relationship managers of Uganda, she recommended us to Rwanda's franchisee relationship managers for more details about operations in Rwanda. Interviews in Uganda were face-to-face but in Rwanda were conducted digitally via Zoom. We discontinued the interviews after no new information emerged from them (Bowen, 2008; Eisenhardt, 1989; Saunders et al., 2018). The average time for the interviews was approximately 42 min.

The semi-structured interview questions started with general questions for the training director at Alpha such as: How do you prepare training modules? Who do you target for training? What factors affect training practices? Franchisees, store managers and other employees were asked questions such as: Who attends the training? Who attends the monthly franchisee training? How does the training relate to what you do? We then linked the training and social franchise objectives by asking questions such as: Do you set performance targets for the franchisees? Do these monthly meetings and other training provided help the franchisees and/or employees achieve their targets?

Observations. We used both participant and non-participant observations in Uganda. Participant observations were conducted through field visits where the consultant allowed us to question the franchisees and unit managers. First, we listened to the conversation between the consultant and the informants and later asked questions regarding the topic being discussed. In particular, we asked the informants about the importance of the training they received from headquarters and how important it was in the operations of the units. The director also allowed us to participate in the franchisees' annual meeting but only as observers. We were able to watch how the training was conducted, observe the training content and how the franchisees shared their local knowledge.

Table 2. Overview of data collection sources.

Data Source	Informant		Time	Data collected
Interview Semi-structured	Founder	A1	23min	Understand training practices in both countries.
	Training director- Uganda	A3	18min	
	National Directors	A2-Uganda	38min	Understand factors affecting knowledge sharing in the network.
	Franchise Relationship Managers (both countries)	A4-Rwanda	24min	
		A5-Uganda	64min	Obtaining insight into the company's response to the factors affecting knowledge sharing
		A6-Rwanda	59min	
	Franchisees (8) (ZA to ZH)	ZA	35min	Understand socio-cultural attributes that affect business engagement.
		ZB	56min	
		ZC	56min	
		ZD	31min	Understand how training affects their performance
		ZE	43min	
		ZF	43min	
		ZG	49min	
		ZH	47min	
Participant observation- Field visit	Franchisees, managers of franchised and company-owned units, and company consultant		Four meetings	To understand the importance of training in their daily activities
Non-participant- Franchisees' annual meeting	Franchisees, Franchisor (training director, National director, and Founder), and consultant		One meeting	To observe how training is conducted, participation of franchisees in knowledge sharing, and training content.
Archives	Franchise contract, promotion document, training modules			Training programs, contractual terms and conditions Performance records
Secondary data	Company's website, media reports			Organizational performance

Archives, media reports and the company's website. Given that Alpha is among the social enterprises that has used the franchising model from the inception, it has received coverage in a number of news sources as an example of a successful expansion model. Some of these sources include the IFA's Social Sector Forces, *Global Franchise Magazine*, the World Food Bank, *BBC News, Global News Wire, Digest Africa, The Guardian*, and *Forbes*. The company's website describes the origin of the company and the revolutionary changes it has made in the franchising model. Following a special request to the founder, we were able to obtain additional information from the company's archival records, such as franchise contracts, promotion documents, and training modules. The company archives also revealed the growth of franchised stores in Rwanda where the majority of franchisees own and operate their stores. Thus, the owner-manager stores perform well compared to the employee-manager stores.

Data triangulation from different sources helped us validate our construct. In addition, we sent a draft of this paper not only to the key informants to ensure the accuracy of the reported findings but also to academics in the international business and franchising field to compare our results with those in already established theoretical frameworks (Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010). During the data analysis, internal validity was ensured by constant comparison between findings in each stage and the existing theoretical frameworks that guided this research (Yin, 1994). Moreover, collecting data from different franchisees in the same franchise network and different respondents at the franchisor level enhanced the study's external validity (Yin, 1994).

3.3. Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The first stage involved importing the interview transcriptions and other sources of data into the NVivo 12 software program. We then identified and grouped the themes that emerged from the interviews for references to the institutional effects on knowledge transfer. Second, guided by grounded theory techniques and Gioia et al.'s (2012) extended coding template, we categorized the excerpts from the interviews into first-order categories. The process was iterative between the raw data to make sure that the categories were comprehensive and mutually exclusive. The result was 12 first-order categories.

We then compared and contrasted the first-order categories and grouped the interrelated interview quotes into second-order categories, which we labeled using terms from the existing literature (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia et al., 2012). As a result, we had five second-order categories: different formal procedures for registering businesses, countries' informal business regulations, social behavior and business culture, training attendance and outlet management, and outlet ownership and business growth.

We constructed the final two aggregate themes from the second-order theoretical codes: the differing effects of formal and informal rules on knowledge transfer, and the effect of passive ownership on knowledge transfer. Doing so involved an iterative process between the first-order empirical data and the second-order theoretical codes to establish a link between existing theory and the data. Arriving at two aggregate themes that explained the institutional effects on knowledge transfer involved creating and rejecting several ideas. The data structure is presented in Figure 1.

4. Findings

Figure 2 provides a visual illustration of the analysis of our findings. First, we identify the institutional barriers to knowledge transfer in our case study. Then, we present a narrative account of the responses to the institutional effects based on our findings of how Alpha adapted its training strategies to overcome institutional challenges. By linking our empirical data and the literature, and from our grounded theory data analysis, we identified three approaches to responding to the institutional barriers to knowledge transfer: copying, adaptation of the business format, and flexibility in training programs.

4.1. The Effects of Institutions on Knowledge Transfer

Our interviewees indicated that both formal and informal institutions posed challenges to the transfer of knowledge needed to replicate the success of social franchises. They pointed to the different formal procedures for registering businesses, informal business regulations, and societal behavior and the business culture as creating obstacles that they had to overcome.

4.1.1. Different Formal and Informal Rules Effects to Knowledge Transfer

Different formal procedures for registering businesses. When establishing the business in Rwanda, the country's regulations supported the company through its

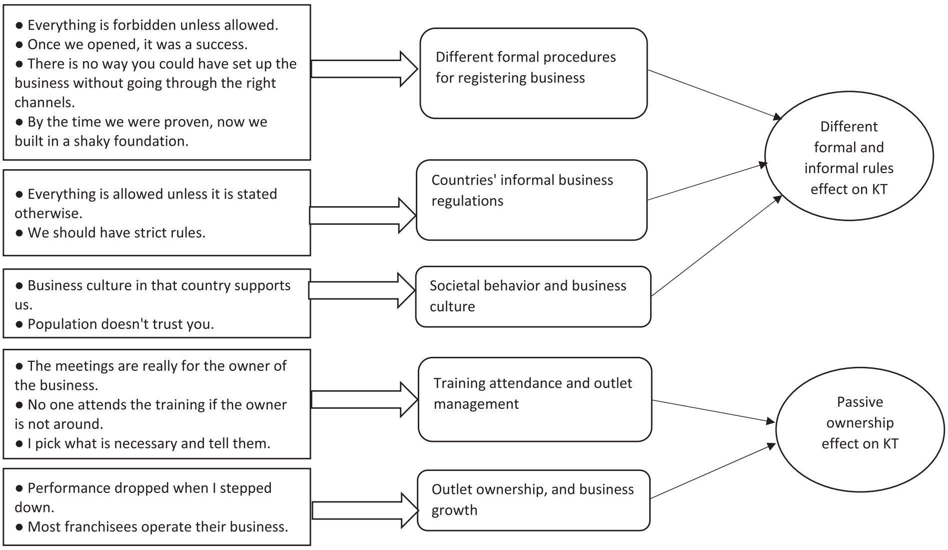

Figure 1. Institutional effects on knowledge transfer in social franchises.

formal authority and business regulations. Companies are not allowed to start business operations until receiving the approval of the government that they meet the country's requirements. The national director explained that, "*In Rwanda, culturally, everything is forbidden unless it is allowed. Once we opened Alpha, it was safe. So, people trusted us*" (A2).

Contrary to Rwanda, in Uganda businesses are allowed to operate while waiting for formal approval. Alpha acknowledged that starting operations without endorsement from the formal authority was socially accepted and not illegal. Taking the risk of signing franchisees into the network was risky because Alpha had little protection in the case of a contract dispute. The national director from Uganda explained:

> Now, in contrast to Rwanda, in Uganda, everything is allowed unless it is forbidden. So, … there are all kind of products out there. Maybe we should have strict rules. Then that is where the rules come in. Now, it is getting out of control (A2).

Given that the company started business before formal approval, the national director added, "*So, by the time we were proven, we had built on a shaky foundation*" (A2). Franchisees were skeptical about the model because many companies start operations informally, but later people realize that they have been recruited as part of a pyramid scheme. This skepticism affected the initial training of the franchisees, which is crucial to transfer the franchisor's knowledge and business routines.

Countries' informal business regulations. The presence of unregistered businesses impeded Alpha from attracting potential franchisees. Entrepreneurs were reluctant to join the Alpha network due to the lack of trust in a company that was not yet official. Alpha decided to launch the franchise model while waiting for formal recognition, but things did not go well. The founder said, "*We tried to start as a franchise by launching franchisees, and it did not work out, so we actually ended up buying back the franchisees and running them as company-owned stores.*"

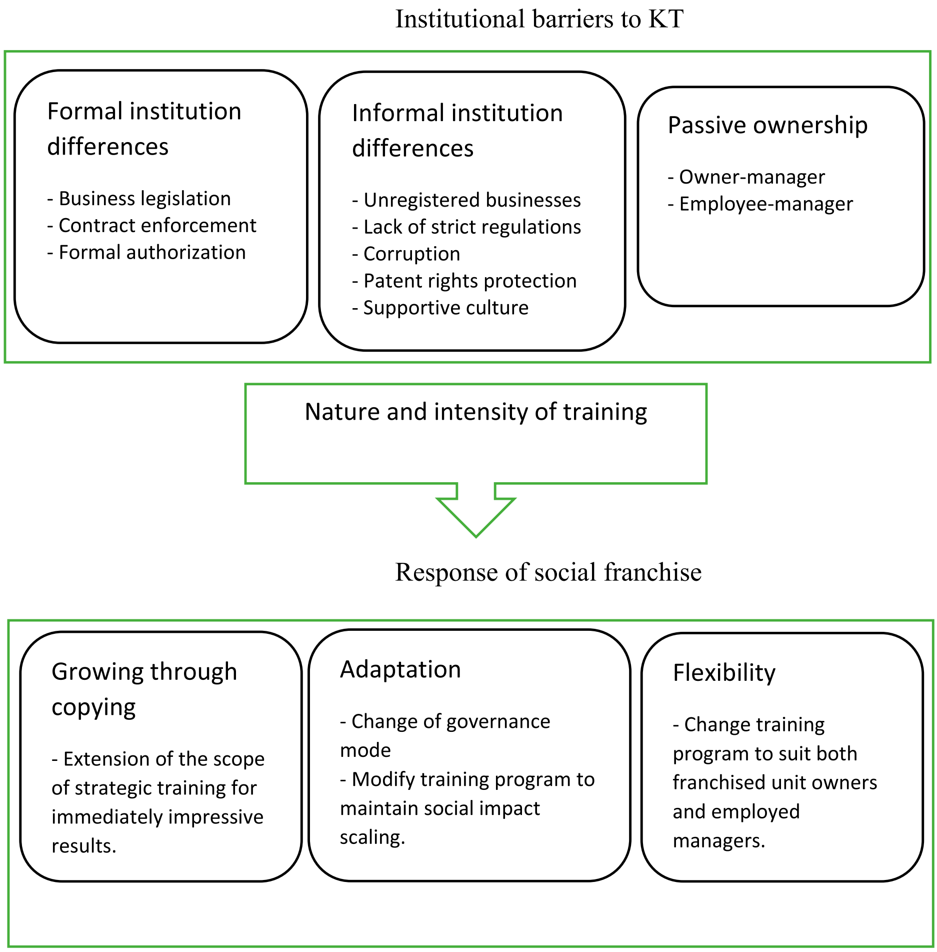

Figure 2. Institutional effects and social franchise responses.

To show the trustworthiness of the social franchise model, some of the local people who were on the board stepped down to start stores as franchisees. One franchisee explained that:

> Because nobody was starting the franchisee. Yeah, because really, for our concept to actually work, we needed to activate it, get someone willing to get started with it. It was a struggle at the start understanding franchising. It is a new concept. So, it was not very easy for people to analyze and understand as businessmen. I am actually one of the founding members of Alpha, so I was on the board to formulate this whole concept. So, I stepped down from the board, and I started the franchisees (ZA).

The trust and acceptance from the market come from the process of opening the business legitimately. Franchisees' trust in the business is supported by official registration of the business by the government authority. The presence of unregistered businesses in the market can explain the difference in competition in water production companies in Rwanda and Uganda. While four water companies were operating in Kigali, Rwanda, there were nineteen companies in Kampala, Uganda by the beginning of 2019. The absence of a method for registering a business legally makes the transfer of patent knowledge more difficult in social franchises. The national director in Rwanda pointed out that:

> They trust out of the fear, system, and government to the extent that if you put a product on the market, it has to be legitimate because there is no way you could have set it up without going through the right authority (A4).

Societal behavior and business culture. Alpha lacked support from two groups of people who were the beneficiaries of its activities. First, potential social entrepreneurs did not understand the franchise model and how it works, and therefore did not follow its rules and regulations. Initially, the franchisees would sign the contract but later refuse to comply with contractual obligations such as attending training and paying royalties. Given that they did not understand the model and its reliance on knowledge sharing, they built a business based on a partial understanding of the franchisor's know-how. The national director explained:

> Another thing is the franchisees. In Rwanda, they have really built a good infrastructure of franchisees. They recruited … fairly older, more connected, good social capital. So, they built a foundation. Here, our first franchisees were totally misaligned. So, we distorted the framework (A2).

Second, social support is an important factor for any business to succeed. Lack of a supportive culture and acceptance from society was another challenge Alpha faced in Uganda. They encountered resistance from the customers not because of the franchise model but rather due to their mission, which dampened their willingness to learn. One franchisee explained that when they started to market their product to customers, saying they distributed affordable, quality water to the underprivileged population, they always received a negative response such as: "*If the rich are not using it, we are not buying it. What are you selling to us that rich people cannot consume?*" (ZB).

In Rwanda, the company spread very fast because of the acceptance of the company in society. The social support was complemented by the formal approval of the company by the government authority. The national director highlighted that, "*As long as you are registered and approved by the government, people will accept you. So, one factor is that the business culture allowed us to be accepted in the market*" (A3).

4.1.2. The Effect of Passive Ownership on Knowledge Transfer

Most franchisees in Alpha joined the network after failing to find formal employment soon after finishing their higher education. In addition to the political involvement in registering a business, lack of support for investing in society as opposed to making a large profit has prompted franchisees to seek formal employment or work in full time commercial enterprises while employing managers to operate their franchise stores.

Training attendance and outlet management. We found that most franchisees in Uganda did not engage in the day-to-day operation of their stores. In some extreme cases, franchisees remained abroad doing other business. Alpha's monthly training requires franchisees to attend the meetings and then transfer the knowledge to their managers. A sales manager explained:

> Actually, I think they tell him what they have discussed, and then he refers everything this way. He comes here sometimes … he comes like once a week and some other days we

> talk on the phone. Yeah … we always have weekly meetings on Saturday; sometimes, he attends, sometimes he does not (ZF's manager).

He also added that, "*No one attends the meeting if the owner is not around. I am only at corporate when they call me that it is the sales managers' meeting or something else.*"

Managers complained that most of the time, the recommendations received from the franchisor failed to achieve the objectives because the franchisees who did not manage their stores just told their managers what they thought was necessary for them to know. One franchisee stated during the interview that, "*I pick what is necessary and tell them (the manager and employees) because they send us the minutes after the training meeting, so I will get what is necessary and share with them*" – ZB. Since the franchisees were not involved in the daily management of their stores, they either agreed with or did not comment on whatever the franchisor was recommending. They had no first-hand knowledge about what worked and what did not. As one sales manager stated: "*Those guys, whatever they decide they just allowed because the majority of them, the franchisees, are not there on the ground*" (ZC's manager).

Outlet ownership and business growth. The franchisees who owned and operated their stores confirmed that applying the techniques and strategies provided by the franchisor during the monthly training helped them achieve their targets. Comparing the growth between these two countries, most franchisees in Rwanda owned their stores and managed their daily operation. As a result, they could develop and expand through multi-unit ownership. During the interview, one respondent said:

> Apart from having a good relationship with customers, most franchisees operate their businesses, and they come to all meetings because it is a must. This is also why some franchisees manage to open more than one store. They understand the market and how to run things (A6).

Additionally, when the franchisee had the store manager operate the store, there was sometimes a decline in sales. One franchisee from Uganda said: "*The minute I stepped away, there was a decline in either customer service or the quality of the product*" (ZA). This finding corresponds with the results of Merrilees and Frazer (2006), who found that franchisees who manage and supervise their staffs have better performance because of their knowledge customer service provision.

4.2. The Response to the Institutional Effects on Knowledge Transfer

To overcome the obstacles of the institutional effects on knowledge transfer, our interviewees utilized three methods: growing through copying, adaptation of the business format, and flexible training programs.

Growing through copying. In areas where there are formal rules and proper business registration, social franchises expand rapidly through direct and multi-unit franchising. The rapid expansion is the result of the exact replication of the training (Szulanski & Jensen, 2008). Formal institutions allow social franchises to extend the scope of their strategic knowledge because the protection of the franchisor's knowledge is guaranteed (Chliova & Ringov, 2017). Data obtained from company archives and other secondary sources established that Alpha has grown rapidly through direct and area master franchising in Rwanda and more recently in Tanzania because institutions in these countries support the protection of proprietary knowledge.

Adaptation of the business format. Instead of avoiding operating in countries with poor legal enforcement, Alpha sought to adapt the franchise business format by repurposing its business format and changing the governance mode.

Repurposing the social franchise business format. Efficient contract enforcement and protection of patent rights are linked with the rapid growth and performance of franchising firms. To avoid long and costly litigation in weak institutions, Alpha decided to modify its model by allowing the person to continue with the business to ensure the scaling up of the social impact. However, the company reduced its training intensity to protect its tacit knowledge. The founder acknowledged:

> We terminate the license, not the franchisee. Depending on the situation. If someone has a debt, we have the right to claim those assets against the debt. If not, they can still own the business, but they cannot use the Alpha brand; they have to create their own business, which they do.

Adding to this comment, the national director in Uganda stated that because they are advocates for social change, forbidding an employee who knows how to produce water and distribute it to the underserved population from functioning would have a negative impact on the replication of social solutions as well as donor funding. He added, "*We have actually created a lot of our own competitors. For business it is bad, but when you think of the impact, as long as the quality is good, it's good*" (A2).

The company could not prohibit the terminated franchisees from using the knowledge they had learned to produce water because the donors encouraged such knowledge sharing to help achieve a social impact. To maintain donor funds, Alpha reduced its tacit knowledge sharing to protect its core business knowledge but allowed ex-employees to continue to produce water (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013). However, the repurposing of the social franchise program somewhat distorts the franchising program. This distortion, which occurred mainly in Uganda, explains why Uganda had fewer units than Rwanda.

Re-assessing the governance modes. After encountering different informal rules during the expansion, instead of reducing its expansion activities, Alpha opted to change its governance modes. By that time, Alpha had started to gain recognition from international organizations such as the World Food Program, which provided support for Alpha to expand the social franchise model into more countries. Alpha's lack of information about the institutional particularities of other countries prompted the company to adopt a lower control mode for knowledge management.

> Yeah … Area Master Franchising. That is how we expanded to Tanzania and Zimbabwe, which means we are basically selling a license for someone to become Alpha themselves. Just like we operate as Alpha in Uganda, Rwanda, and Kenya, there someone else buys the license from us, and they run a number of franchisees, they operate a franchise, and they finance the franchisees, all of that (A1).

Unlike Alon (2006), who proposed that master franchising is preferable in situations with strong institutions and fewer environmental uncertainties, Alpha's decision to opt for the master franchising model supports the findings of Jell-Ojobor and Windsperger (2014) and Smuts et al. (2019) that the franchisor will transfer residual control rights to a local partner when the institutional situation is uncertain.

Consequentially, Alpha found local partners who could deal with the socio-cultural changes and regulatory authorities of a particular country. The founder added, "*So, Alpha Tanzania is not us doing it; is a local person (name) is fifth-generation Tanzanian, but ethnically I think he is Indian, but he grew up, was born and raised in Arusha. He knows the market very well.*"

After achieving success in Tanzania by expanding through master franchising, the company decided to invest in area development master franchising as its model for expanding into informal markets. However, master franchising requires innovative ways to transfer training to avoid the loss of knowledge in an extended hierarchy (Shane, 2001). In this new approach, the franchisor trains the master franchisee who will then design the training strategies depending on the knowledge and conditions of its local franchisees (Rottig, 2016).

Flexibility in training programs. Having franchisees manage their stores helps them apply the knowledge they have acquired and see what works and what does not. They can then give that feedback to the franchisor for improvement. Our analysis coincides with the existing literature that training the franchisees who own and operate their franchised store has a positive impact on growth. Specifically, our findings support the existing literature that ownership moderates the effect of training on franchising performance (Brickley, 1999; Karatzas et al., 2020; Krueger, 1991).

However, realizing that most franchisees do not engage completely in the daily operation of their stores, Alpha decided to allow the franchisees' store managers to attend the franchisees' meeting as the daily operators of the franchise store, in addition to their own specific meetings. To scale its social impact, Alpha had to adjust its training programs to cater for passive ownership. To avoid the negative consequences that result from training an owner who does not operate the business as the franchising model requires, Alpha decided to include the manager-employees who operate the stores on a daily basis in the franchisee meetings and modify the training programs to suit both the franchisees and managers. The training director explained:

> The idea is that the meetings are for really the owner of the business. Because even the franchise manager should be receiving the items from the franchisee, the owner of the business, even the day-to-day information. But we relaxed that. They can come together; in some cases, they do; in some cases, the franchisee comes or just sends the representative.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to identify the effect of institutional barriers on knowledge transfer in social franchises by analyzing data collected from a successful social franchise network that operates in seven African countries. From our analysis, we determined that differences in business formalization, weak institutions, and passive ownership affect knowledge transfer in social franchises. Based on the interviews we conducted, we also determined that successful social franchises can expand by growing through copying, adapting their business format, and being flexible in their training programs. Thus, we contribute to the literatures on the barriers to knowledge transfer and social franchising.

Contributions to the literature on the barriers to knowledge transfer. There is a great deal of research about the barriers to knowledge transfer barriers in commercial ventures

(Karagoz et al., 2020; Khan, 2016; Olaniran, 2017). However, there are far fewer studies on this issue in social ventures (Bloice & Burnett, 2016; Granados et al., 2017; Weerakoon et al., 2020). The literature to date has identified trust (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013), the nature of the knowledge (Khan, 2016), distance, absorptive capacity (Guo et al., 2018), transfer mechanisms (Iyengar et al., 2015), compatibility (Ranucci & Souder, 2015) and culture (Cumberland & Githens, 2012) as obstacles in transferring knowledge. However, these studies were conducted in developed economies. In contrast, we identified how formal and informal institutions impede knowledge transfer in social franchises operating in developing countries. Therefore, we add to the literature by extending the range of external barriers to knowledge transfer.

In addition, we documented that training helps mitigate the institutional barriers to social franchising expansion. Our findings underscore the importance of context in analyzing the barriers to knowledge transfer and the responses to overcoming these obstacles. In response to issues related to knowledge protection, Bloice and Burnett (2016) suggest using measures to protect patent rights. While that approach might work in countries with strong formal institutions that respect the rule of law, the lack of law enforcement prevalent in countries with weak institutions requires other measures, often informal ones. Similarly, in countries with strong formal institutions and formalized business practices, it is easier to transfer knowledge through training. However, in countries with weak formal institutions, social franchises adjust their training practices to protect their core business knowledge and at the same time expand their social impact.

Contributions to the social franchising literature. We contribute to the social franchising literature by establishing a link between training and institutions in developing economies. Prior research on institutions established that weak institutions impede knowledge transfer practices and, consequently, the growth of social entrepreneurship (Chliova & Ringov, 2017; Granados et al., 2017). Given their focus on solving societal needs, social franchises often ignore the institutional factors surrounding them (Desa & Koch, 2014). Even if they consider issues related to government failure, they are not immune to institutional problems such as corruption, lack of contract enforcement, competition, and legislative requirements (Bacq & Janssen, 2011). Our analysis confirms that social franchising operating in environments with institutions of varying strengths can still replicate their knowledge and expand by responding to country-specific institutions. As such, our findings offer additional credence to the call for exploring Africa in general (Barnard et al., 2017) and social franchising in particular (Kistruck et al., 2011; Rivera-Santos et al., 2015) to extend or modify theories established in developed economies.

Reports by donor organizations such as USAID in 2015 indicate that more than US $1.5bn has been spent on donor-funded water projects in Africa and Asia, but many of these projects failed because of an unsustainable business model. Many social enterprise projects are difficult to replicate across Africa even though different countries face similar social problems. We show that social franchises make what Luo (2020) called first-order adaptations in their methods. Adapting the training practices in the social franchising model helps social franchises replicate their knowledge in different institutional contexts to suit their goal, which is the scaling up of their social impact. Training strategies that are flexible and balanced and give the franchisees enough knowledge to function but also protect the franchisor's knowledge provide the opportunity for social franchises to grow.

6. Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research

In examining the effect of the institutions on social franchises and the role of training, we found that informal institutions operating without franchise regulations, contract enforcement, business registration, and cultural support hinder the transfer of tacit knowledge. In response, social franchises adapt their training strategies to expand their social impact in different institutions. Our study is significant for understanding the importance of the institutional frameworks in specific countries because African countries vary greatly in their level of business formalization and regulations. This study provides a starting point for future research on social franchising and knowledge transfer in Africa and other emerging economies.

6.1. Implications for Practice

This study makes several contributions that foreign and local social franchises considering expanding across different countries in Africa and other emerging countries should find useful.

Social franchisors. Our findings provide some direction to social franchisors or social entrepreneurs looking to expand their business across different countries in emerging markets using the franchising model. Our research indicates that institutions matter in the successful replication of knowledge. As Rottig (2016) noted, business formats that are successful in one market might fail in another. Therefore, franchise managers should have a basic understanding that institutions matter. For instance, the franchising model is a contract-based business model that requires a strong legal framework to protect the franchisor's knowledge. Expanding a franchising business into countries where business agreements are established on informal, relationship-based mechanisms rather than formal laws might prove difficult. To succeed in such environments, social franchisors should be prepared to make decisions and adaptations that consider the disparities between the formal and informal institutions to develop context specific training strategies.

Franchisors should also recognize the differences between owner-managers and employee-managers and offer them different training programs. While some of the content will overlap, the training must acknowledge the difference between owners who reap the benefits of their investments and employee-managers who operate franchised units but receive fixed salaries (Ballesteros-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Additionally, franchisors should emphasize to employee-managers that they have an important position by forming a strong bond with them through regular communication to increase their productivity (Brand & Croonen, 2010).

Social franchisors and franchisees. Collaboration among social franchises can create associations that can approach the government about how to provide support for different business models and create rules and regulations for long-term support to protect companies. Eventually, changes in formal laws and regulation will influence changes in informal social norms and values, encouraging more businesses to enter the country (Williams & Shahid, 2016). For example, in March 2019, the prime minister of Tanzania ordered the merging of two government bodies, Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS) and Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA) because of continuous complaints from business owners.

Government bodies, investors, and donor agencies. As franchising is becoming an important business format for many entrepreneurs, our study informs policymakers about the importance of rules and regulations for the effective operation of franchising. In addition, donor agencies and investors should understand the importance of tacit knowledge for the performance of social franchises. They should help develop mechanisms that balance the protection of the franchisor's knowledge and the growth of the franchise's social impact.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

This study has four limitations that can be fruitful for future research. First, although the social franchise we studied operates in seven countries, our analysis was based on only two countries. Thus, the generalizability of our findings might be somewhat limited. Social franchises are not uncommon in most African countries, but there is no quantifiable data regarding the number of social franchises. Lack of accurate data undermines the ability of researchers to develop a clear understanding of the usefulness of social franchises in scaling up the social impact on Africa. It would be worthwhile to conduct multiple case analyses or quantitative studies based on a large sample. We expect that multiple case studies in countries other than Uganda and Rwanda might uncover more specific institutional effects and response techniques not presented in this study.

Second, we provided a limited understanding of the effect of cultural aspects on knowledge transfer practices. Research on cultural nuances and the development of social entrepreneurship has received much more attention in other emerging markets such as Asia (Mamabolo & Myres, 2020). While similarities are expected among emerging markets, specific cultural attributes might produce different results in African countries (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). Further research may investigate how the specific cultural variables of different countries in Africa such as language, religion, gender roles, traditions, and customs affect knowledge transfer practices in social franchising.

Third, methodologically our findings might suffer from some issues related to response bias because the franchisees interviewed in this study were selected by the franchisor. Future research might consider the selection of franchisees by the researcher to avoid any biases. In addition, future research should consider interviewing terminated franchisees who then opened businesses in the same industrial sector to assess the usefulness of the training they received when they were in the franchise network, and to examine their performance.

Fourth, one of the responses of Alpha was to adjust its training programs to include employed managers. However, we expect this strategy to have challenges in the long run not only with regard to knowledge transfer but also in broader areas. Future research could assess the risks associated with this strategy and how social franchises should proceed considering they do not have a direct contractual relationship with the employed managers. Finally, our knowledge would benefit from an exploration of other factors that moderate the effect of informal institutions on the operations of social franchises.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on Contributors

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