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## **Study 1**

### **Knowledge Management in Franchising: A Research Agenda**

#### **Abstract**

This paper offers a comprehensive systematic review of Knowledge Management in franchising literature over the past 29 years. By means of bibliometric citation analysis, ISI Web of Science (WoS) database is used to analyze articles from 1990-2018. A total of 169 articles by 369 authors across 40 countries published in 113 journals from 200 institutions were clustered and examined through HistCites and VOSviewer. The findings indicate that the exploration of knowledge management in franchising is associated with 3 factors: (1) governance structure; (2) performance outcome; and (3) franchise network growth. The findings also reveal that KM in franchising is still an emerging discipline encompassing conflicting results which offer potential for future research. Identified research gaps and contradicting views in the literature offer opportunities for researchers to contribute to this research domain by empirically testing the role of absorptive capacity, replication vs. adaptation strategies, and new franchising formats, such as micro/social franchising. This study is unique in its examination of knowledge management in franchising. It also highlights the value of knowledge in franchise chain performance.

#### **Keywords**

Franchising, knowledge management, knowledge transfer, absorptive capacity, social franchising, bibliometric citation.

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# 1 Introduction

Knowledge plays a central role in firms' ability to identify opportunities and respond to changes in the business environment. As a result, knowledge transfer and management have emerged as two main areas of interest to practitioners and academics. For instance, academics (Tang, 2011; Tsai, 2001; Weigelt & Miller, 2013) have focused on the role of Knowledge management (KM) in achieving competitive advantage at the intra-organizational level. Others (Easterby-Smith, Lyles, & Tsang, 2008; Gravier, Randall, & Strutton, 2008; Khamseh & Jolly, 2008; Kostova, 1999; Van Wijk, Jansen, & Lyles, 2008) have examined the role of knowledge management in the multinational and inter-organizational level. Given the heterogenous nature of the international business environment, knowledge-based research have largely focused on the dynamic role of local knowledge in the performance of MNCs (Casillas, Moreno, Acedo, Gallego, & Ramos, 2009; Nooteboom, 2000; Reus, Ranft, Lamont, & Adams, 2009).

More recently, the role of knowledge transfer and innovation in achieving competitive advantage has become a subject of significant interest in strategic alliances (Korbi & Chouki, 2017; Nair, Demirbag, Mellahi, & Pillai, 2018; Rui, Zhang, & Shipman, 2016). Minbaeva, Park, Vertinsky, and Cho (2018) claim that knowledge acquired from a parent organization affects firm survival in fiercely competitive markets. However, Krammer (2018) and Wong, Wei, Yang, and Tjosvold (2017) suggest that knowledge transfer in strategic alliances may decrease when partners are incompatible. Thus, to mitigate the challenge of incompatibility, partners in strategic alliance must evaluate each other in terms of absorptive capacity and business experience in the selection process (Antia, Mani, & Wathne, 2017; Beamish & Lupton, 2016).

Theoretically, a firm's competitive advantage depends on how it consolidates and utilizes intangible asset (knowledge) rendered by parties to a strategic alliance (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1996; Teece et al., 1997). The literature identifies two types of knowledge: explicit, which can be easily codified and transferred through manual, electronic and other mechanism; and tacit, which is imbedded in people and cannot easily be codified because it is acquired by learning (Darr et al., 1995; Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Pan & Yang, 2010). Firms can control physical assets but knowledge, which lies within individuals, can pose different challenges related to ownership, control and proprietary nature (Ferrary, 2015). Therefore, the integration of individual goals,

business objectives and knowledge management strategies is essential for organization performance (Sharp, 2006; Yang, 2007).

The value of knowledge is particularly crucial in the case of business format franchising given that it involves knowledge transfer from the franchisor to franchisee, making knowledge management a key factor (Madanoglu, Alon, & Shoham, 2017; Perrigot et al., 2017). Franchising involves a contractual agreement between one party (franchisor) passing authority to another party (franchisee) to use the proven business format over a long period of time in return for franchise fees and ongoing payments such as royalties and advertising (Hackett, 1976; Perdreau, Nadant, & Cliquet, 2015; Vázquez, 2008). Successful franchisor-franchisee knowledge-sharing requires partners to be collaborators rather than competitors (Butt et al., 2018; Kashyap, Antia, & Frazier, 2012; Minbaeva et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2017).

Knowledge Management, though vital, receives little attention in the franchising context (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Perrigot et al., 2017). A recent article by Rosado-Serrano and Paul (2018) reveals that the lack of knowledge transfer impairs franchising relationships and leads to poor performance. Despite the integral role of knowledge management in franchising, existing synthesis of KM literature have largely focused on the fields of management (Jakubik, 2007; Kakabadse, Kakabadse, & Kouzmin, 2003; Qiu & Lv, 2014), open innovation (Natalicchio, Ardito, Savino, & Albino, 2017) and information technologies (Iyengar et al., 2015). Arguably, the existing reviews in franchising have not focused on KM (Combs, Ketchen, et al., 2011; Combs, Michael, & Castrogiovanni, 2004; Nijmeijer, Fabbicotti, et al., 2014; Rosado-Serrano & Paul, 2018; Rosado-Serrano et al., 2018), thus, questions pertaining to the systematic and integrated relationship between the two concepts of knowledge management and franchising remain largely unanswered.

This paper contributes to the literature of KM and franchising by integrating these two concepts and systematically reviews the literature to explore and shape our understanding of KM in franchising. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What theories explain KM in franchising?
2. How does the literature on KM in franchising cluster?
3. Which research questions provide the most promise for the future?

Knowledge management is still an emerging field which needs further development (Metaxiotis, Ergazakis, & Psarras, 2005). This research has implications for both academics and practitioners. Identifying research gaps and emerging views should promote further research in the field. Practically, this study also provides reference information for managers and practitioners involve in managing franchising networks.

The paper is organized as follows: the next sections present an overview of KM in franchising, followed by methodology, findings from the most influential papers in the field, the discussion, future research directions and conclusion.



## 2 Knowledge Management in Franchising

Franchising firms hold patent rights for the unique business format they possess (Antia et al., 2017; Ferrary, 2015), making knowledge a key part of the equation (Perrigot et al., 2017). Franchising is a legal agreement that involve the granting of a business format by the franchisor to the franchisee for monetary compensation and ongoing payment (Combs & David, 1999; Lafontaine, 1992). The franchising contract contains the transfer of both tacit and explicit knowledge (Ghantous & Das, 2018; Windsperger & Dant, 2006). Since knowledge accounts for a major part of franchising, it must be inimitable in order to provide competitive advantage (Argote & Ingram, 2000) but it must also be understandable for franchisees to decode (Brookes, 2014; Perrigot et al., 2017).

Prior studies indicate that franchisees can modify products using local knowledge to enhance the competitiveness of the brand, this often leads to improve network performance (Darr et al., 1995; Ferrary, 2015; Nair et al., 2018). The modification must, however, be done with the explicit permission of the franchisor aimed at adapting knowledge to fit the local environment (Kaufman & Eroglu, 1999; Lopez-Bayon & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016). The success of franchise networks depends on the nature of the knowledge transferred, whether tacit or explicit (Brookes & Altinay, 2017; Darr et al., 1995; Lim, 2012); the mechanisms of the knowledge transfer (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013; Minguela-Rata et al., 2010; Perrigot et al., 2017) ; and the absorptive capacity of the parties to identify, transfer, integrate and apply the knowledge (Apriliyanti & Alon, 2017; Casillas et al., 2009; Mangematin & Nesta, 1999).

Knowledge transfer in multinational subsidiaries and joint ventures is different from that in franchising because franchisees are not employees since they make the full investment. They are residual claimants of the profits and therefore have an incentive to deviate from the original knowledge (standard product) to increase profits (Kashyap & Murtha, 2017; Kidwell, Nygaard, & Silkoset, 2007). Since franchisor performance depends on the success of franchisees, the former should effectively transfer knowledge to the latter for overall performance growth (Ghantous & Das, 2018).

Knowledge transfer in international franchising is more complex than within countries due to institutional and cultural barriers between countries (Boh, Nguyen, & Xu, 2013; Ghantous & Das, 2018; Korbi & Chouki, 2017). Successful knowledge transfer has potential positive effects on chain performance. However,



it is often hindered by various factors including trust, nature of knowledge, distance, absorptive capacity, transfer mechanisms, partner compatibility and cultural differences (Cumberland, 2012; Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013; Iyengar et al., 2015; Khan, 2016; Ko, 2010; Minguela-Rata et al., 2009; Okoroafor, 2014). Characterized by a high risk of employee turnover, free riding (Antia et al., 2017) and relationship conflicts (Antia, Zheng, & Fraizier, 2013), franchising firms must find ways to effectively utilize, store and transfer knowledge between individuals for sustainable competitive advantage (Ferrary, 2015; Simon, 1991).

### 3 Research Methodology

The present research is a systematic literature review of knowledge management in franchising using bibliometric methodology, a quantitative analysis of literature that uses citation and co-citation to examine the interconnections of literature in a research domain (Ma & Yu, 2010). In this approach, the focus of the analysis is on articles and their corresponding citations (Alon, Anderson, Munim, & Ho, 2018). It involves the use of software such as HistCite, VOSviewer, CiteSpace, BibExcel, and Sitkis which alleviate bias during the selection, analysis and evaluation of articles.

Prior reviews in the fields of sociology (Lin & Neldon, 1969), International Banking (Apriliyanti & Alon, 2017; Øyna & Alon, 2018), finance (Zamore, Djan, Alon, & Hobdari, 2018), accounting (Uysal, 2010) and transportation (Munim & Saeed, 2016) have applied the bibliometric techniques to systematically synthesized the extant literature in their respective fields of study. Compared to other techniques, the bibliometric approach relies on citation records and cited references to identify the similarities and patterns of scientific inquiry in a given field. Motivated by its extensive application in prior studies and the associated advantages, this paper uses HistCite and VOSviewer to analyze articles extracted from the Web of Science (WoS) database. The HistCite software is used to analyze the evolution of KM in franchising while VOSviewer is used to construct bibliometric maps based on distance and categorize articles into different research streams.

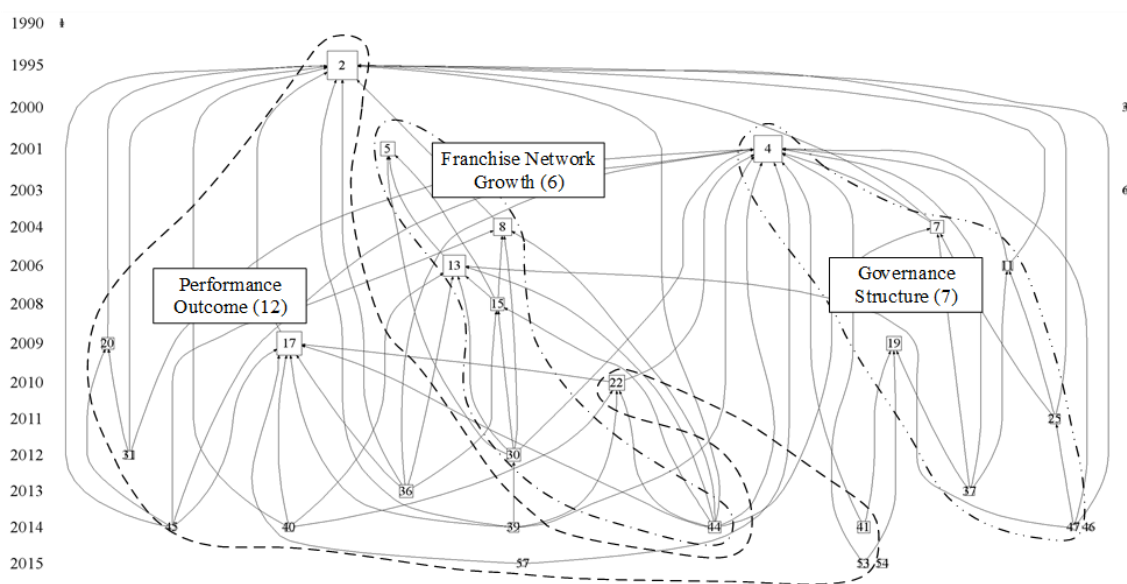
The articles were selected from the *ISI Web of Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)* database published by Clavariate (previously Thomson Reuters). The database includes leading journals across different fields of study spanning from year 1945 to the present. Four different keywords (found in author keywords, abstract or title), as summarized in Table 1, were used to search for articles. The search was limited to articles written in English. This process yielded 169 articles, forming the sample for this review. A total of 169 articles published between 1990 and 2018 by 369 authors from 40 countries in 113 journals across 200 different universities were exported to HistCites for analysis.

Table 1: Keywords used to search for analytic database

Keyword	Alternative/synonymous
Franchis*	Franchise, franchisee, franchisor, franchising, franchiser
Knowledge Management	N/A
Knowledge Creation	Know-how, knowledge building
Knowledge Transfer	Knowledge sharing, knowledge flow, knowledge exchange, knowledge spillover, knowledge distribution
Knowledge Integration	Absorptive capacity, knowledge application, knowledge acquisition

HistCites links articles, based on how they cite each other, into graphic diagrams called historiographs (Apriliyanti & Alon, 2017; Garfield, Paris, & Stock, 2006) as shown in Figure 1, with the vertical axis displaying the year of article publication. Each box represents an article, with the size of the box demonstrating the influence of an article based on the number of citations. Historiograph shows the interconnections of the most cited articles within the research domain (Garfield et al., 2006). HistCites also provides information about authors, journals, cited references, yearly output of publications, type of documents, institutions, and countries.

Figure 1: Historiography of 30 most cited paper



In addition to HistCite, VOSviewer was used to construct bibliometric networks and cluster articles into different research streams (Perianes-Rodriguez, Waltman, & Eck, 2016). VOSviewer visualizes similarities among articles based on the distance, as indicated by Figure 2. It also visualizes research streams grouped by similar colors and identifies the number of articles in each cluster (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Citation mapping in VOSviewer

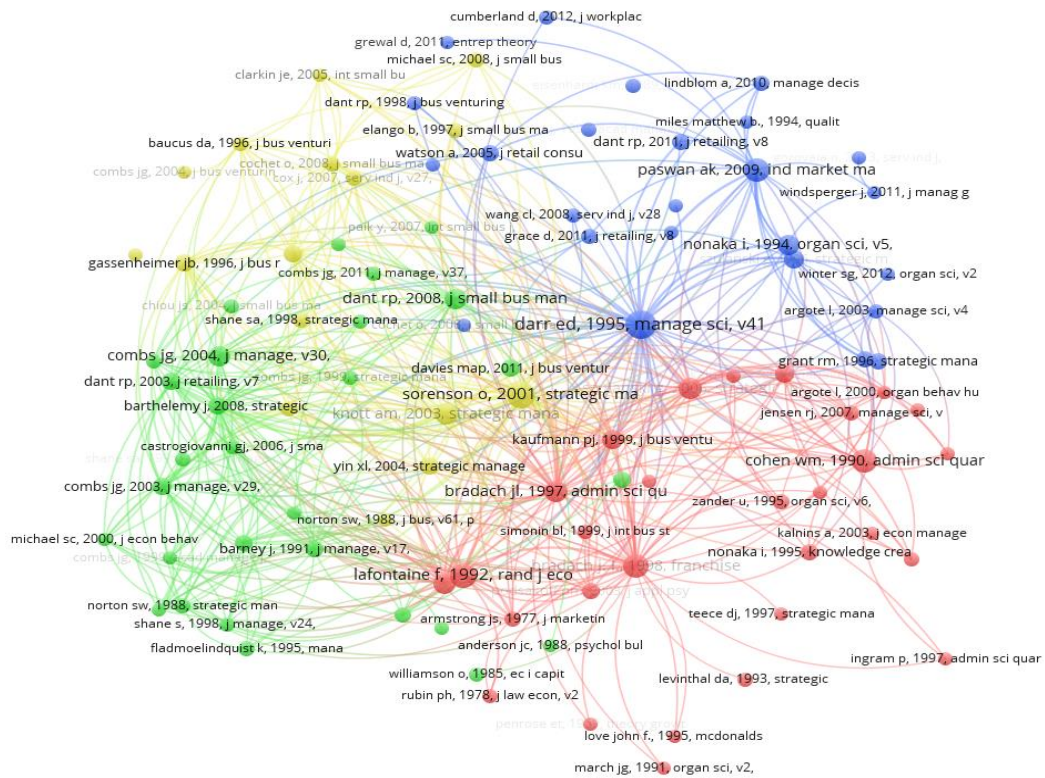
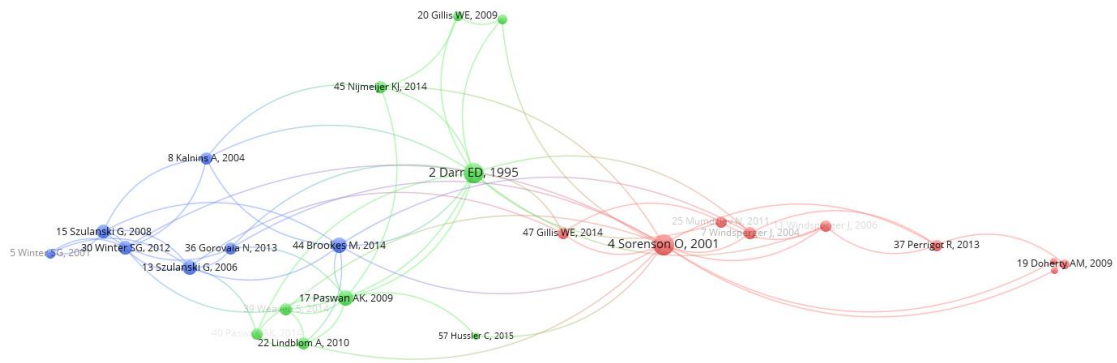


Figure 3: Knowledge Management Citation mapping and Clustering



The use of HistCite limits access to articles of the *ISI WoS* database only, which may exclude articles with major impact from other databases. But *WoS* is a more reliable database, with more than 3000 leading journals. The database is reliably used by previous research and used in this analysis following previous researchers (Alon et al., 2018), despite some methodological limitations (Dzikowski, 2018; Øyna & Alon, 2018; Zamore et al., 2018). Future research should consider the use of other software that utilizes multiple databases to provide wide coverage of the literature.

Results from HistCite and VOSviewer cluster articles into different research streams. Content analysis from each stream identifies findings, as presented in the next section.

## 4 Findings

### *4.1 Dimensions of Knowledge Management*

Franchising presents a unique setting for KM studies due to the role strategic assets (i.e., knowledge) play in the success of the franchising relationship (Alon, 2006; Jeon et al., 2016). In franchising, knowledge includes operational routines (explicit) and technological know-how (tacit) passed from the franchisor to franchisee (Alon, 2001;2005; Jakubik, 2007; Rubin, 1978). Because knowledge accounts for a significant part of franchising, it must be inimitable and unique to provide competitive advantage (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Argote & Ingram, 2000). Knowledge management in franchising is measured by three dimensions: creation, transfer and integration/application (Table 2). Other recent KM research also uses these dimensions (Martelo-Landroguez & Cepeda-Carrion, 2016; Migdadi & Abu Zaid, 2016; Ramadan, Dahiyat, Bontis, & Al-Dalahmeh, 2017).

Following the content analysis of the most-cited papers in current research, Table 2 shows the definition of each dimension and its measures. Both the franchisor and franchisee contribute to knowledge creation. Knowledge-based theories assert that continuous learning is necessary for the creation and improvement of knowledge for superior performance (Darr et al., 1995; Sorenson & Sorensen, 2001; Windsperger & Dant, 2006). The source of competitive advantage does not solely depend on the ownership of unique knowledge but rather on sharing knowledge with chain members for better performance outcomes (Brookes, 2014; Darr et al., 1995; Gillis, Combs, & Ketchen, 2014). Partners must have the capability to create, transfer or receive, and apply knowledge for performance (Darr et al., 1995; Moffett et al., 2014; Perrigot, Lopez-Fernandez, & Eroglu, 2013; Wu, 2015).

Table 2: Dimensions of Knowledge Management

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Citation</b>
Knowledge Creation	Knowledge creation in franchising involves the creation of new contents, updating products or procedures by either franchisee or franchisor for value creation. Firm's ability to recognize new ability and innovation are necessary for continual knowledge creation	Innovation, local market knowledge, change of routines	Windsperger (2004), Windsperger and Dant (2006), Darr et al. (1995)
Knowledge Transfer	Knowledge transfer is the flow of knowledge in a codified mechanism or face-to-face meetings between franchisors and franchisees. Knowledge transfer is realized when franchise system is affected by the knowledge shared. The transferring ability is crucial for successful knowledge transfer.	Training duration, communication (email, phone, fax), codified documents, freedom of expressing new ideas, individual competence.	Gillis et al. (2014), Windsperger and Dant (2006), Altinay, Brookes, Yeung, and Aktas (2014), Wu (2015), Darr et al. (1995), Brookes (2014)
Knowledge Integration	Knowledge integration is the process of synchronizing the new acquired knowledge with the existing knowledge for business performance. This requires a franchisor or franchisee to have the absorptive capacity for successful knowledge integration.	Prior industry experience, individual competence, intellectual curiosity.	Brookes (2014), Perrigot et al. (2013)

#### ***4.2 Theoretical Application***

Traditionally, most franchising studies rely on agency and resource scarcity theories to explain franchising behaviors. While resource scarcity argues that firms use franchising to exploit scarce resources (Castrogiovanni, Combs, & Justis, 2006; Oxenfeldt & Kelly, 1969), agency theorists postulate that firms franchise to

reduce monitoring costs in dispersed locations (Alon, Ni, & Wang, 2012; Barthélemy, 2011). Though Alon (2001) explains these theories as competing, other researchers such as (Carney & Gedajlovic, 1991; Combs et al., 2004) find the latter supplements the former. However, these theories have gained no attention in explaining knowledge management in franchising. Knowledge-based theory, replication strategy theory, network theories and property right theory are thus the theories considered in this review.

Knowledge is the core part of business format franchising, as noted. Knowledge-based theories generally investigate knowledge management in franchising relationships. The resource-based view (Barney, 1991; Brookes, 2014; Gillis et al., 2014; Wu, 2015), the knowledge-based view (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013; Grant, 1996; Hussler & Ronde, 2015; Paswan et al., 2014) and dynamic capabilities theory (El Akremi et al., 2015; Teece et al., 1997) consider knowledge the most strategic resource for competitive advantage. It must be unique and inimitable (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1996) while not being too complex for franchisees to replicate (Enz, Canina, & Palacios-Marques, 2013; Minguela-Rata et al., 2009; Rivkin, 2001). From an organizational learning perspective (Brookes, 2014; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Hussler & Ronde, 2015; Lindblom & Tikkanen, 2010), knowledge gain influences performance (Darr et al., 1995). The plural form of franchising considers franchising strategy as a way for new knowledge from franchisees to align with a new environment for performance and network growth (Kalnins & Mayer, 2004; Szulanski & Jensen, 2006). However, knowledge created by franchisees must be communicated to the franchisor and tested before being transferred to the rest of the franchisees to avoid negative outcomes (Darr et al., 1995).

Replication strategy and the structure of inertia theory assess the implications of adaptation and exploitation of original knowledge for strategic competence across dynamic contexts (Szulanski & Jensen, 2008; Winter & Szulanski, 2001; Winter et al., 2012). The standardization strategy constitutes the strength of franchising and thus the flexibility to adapt must be communicated during contract formulation to avoid conflicts and failure (Lopez-Bayon & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016; Meiseberg, Mignonac, Perrigot, & El Akremi, 2017). Deviations from franchisor's knowledge is assessed by evaluating the extent of compliance in implementing agreed contractual terms (Brookes, 2014; Szulanski & Jensen, 2008; Winter & Szulanski, 2001) and selling other non-standard products (Winter et al., 2012).



Social network theories, which have been integrated to investigate their influence in KM, include social exchange theory (Altinay et al., 2014), relation governance theory (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013; Wu, 2015), and network theory (Dada, Watson, & Kirby, 2012; Paswan & Wittmann, 2009). Trust plays a central role in the transfer of tacit knowledge within the franchise chain, as a result, the relational theory has been used to understand the dynamic role of trust in successful knowledge transfer (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013; Weaven et al., 2014).

Given the dominant role of brand name and local knowledge in franchise chains, (Windsperger, 2004) applied the property right theory to explain the allocation of decision rights in the distribution of knowledge. For instance, decision right can entail either centralization or decentralization in franchise chain. Centralization occurs when the residual surplus in the chain arises from the franchisor's specific assets (Windsperger, 2004). The property right is also used to explain the governance structure where the decision to franchise depends on the contractibility of franchisor and franchisee knowledge (Windsperger & Dant, 2006). Oxenfeldt and Kelly (1969) , Mumdziev and Windsperger (2011) and Windsperger and Dant (2006) found that franchisors will continue to franchise if the local knowledge becomes non-contractible.

### ***4.3 Research streams***

The analysis of 169 articles in HistCite produces a map of the 30 most influential articles (Fig. 1), which represent about 17 percent of the total 169 articles.

Following the content analysis strategy of (Gaur & Kumar, 2018), five out of the 30 most-cited articles (also displayed in the historiograph) are disconnected from the remaining 25 articles and therefore disregarded in the analysis. VOSviewer identified three clusters and after content analysis of each cluster, the names of clusters were assigned based on the similarities of their topics, context or unit of analysis. Content analysis found three articles not related to the cluster where they are located in VOSviewer and therefore they were reallocated to their corresponding cluster. The three clusters (list of articles in Table 3) are governance structure (7 articles); performance outcome (12 articles); and franchise network growth (6 articles).

Table 3: List of articles in each cluster resulted from the most 25 cited articles

<b>Governance Structure</b>	<b>Performance Outcome</b>	<b>Franchise Network Growth</b>
Perrigot et al. (2013)	Weaven et al. (2014)	Kalnins and Mayer (2004)
Gillis et al. (2014)	Paswan et al. (2014)	Brookes (2014)
Sorenson and Sorensen (2001)	Paswan and Wittmann (2009)	Szulanski and Jensen (2008)
Doherty (2009)	Darr et al. (1995)	Winter and Szulanski (2001)
Windsperger (2004)	Gillis and Combs (2009)	Winter et al. (2012)
Windsperger and Dant (2006)	Lindblom and Tikkanen (2010)	Szulanski and Jensen (2006)
Mumdziev and Windsperger (2011)	Hussler and Ronde (2015)	
	Nijmeijer, Fabbriotti, et al. (2014)	
	Altinay et al. (2014)	
	Dada et al. (2012)	
	Gorovaia and Windsperger (2013)	
	Wu (2015)	

#### ***4.3.1 Governance structure***

This stream focuses on franchising versus company-owned outlets (Gillis et al., 2014; Perrigot et al., 2013; Sorenson & Sorensen, 2001). Studies in this stream emphasize that knowledge influences decision of franchising. Perrigot et al. (2013) and Sorenson and Sorensen (2001) explain that franchising involves selling a business format to franchisees so they replicate the standard knowledge from the franchisor to operate their business. Adaptation of local knowledge among franchisees to fit their environment makes using the original template difficult because standardization is the strength of the franchising model. The difficulty in adaptation may lower the benefits of organizational learning across the chain (Sorenson & Sorensen, 2001).

The governance structure depends on the need for adaptation and standardization (Doherty, 2009; Gillis et al., 2014; Perrigot et al., 2013; Sorenson & Sorensen, 2001); ownership and contractibility of specific knowledge

(Mumdziev & Windsperger, 2011; Windsperger & Dant, 2006); and the cost of knowledge transfer (Windsperger, 2004). Franchisors tend to own outlets in the same environment as franchisees in order to maintain standardization (Perrigot et al., 2013; Sorenson & Sorensen, 2001) because franchisees with high incentives to maximize profit add little to chain performance by exploitative behavior.

However, Gillis et al. (2014) state that having the right mix of franchising and company-owned outlets facilitates both standardization and innovation environments for chain performance. Franchisees can play a major role in innovation when they are knowledgeable about local markets (Doherty, 2009). But when this local knowledge is tacit and non-contractible (Mumdziev & Windsperger, 2011; Windsperger & Dant, 2006) or the cost of transferring is high (Windsperger, 2004), the franchising decision is preferred by franchisors. Due to heterogeneity and the competitive nature of franchisees in the chain, knowledge or innovation acquired by franchisees must be transferred to the franchisor (Mumdziev & Windsperger, 2011), where it can be developed and tested through company-owned outlets (Gillis et al., 2014; Sorenson & Sorensen, 2001) and then standardized and transferred to the rest of the chain members.

#### ***4.3.2 Performance Outcome***

This stream focuses on the performance results of franchise actors. Weaven et al. (2014) and Paswan et al. (2014) investigate the value creation of knowledge management (*creation, synthesis, transfer, application*) in franchising from the perspective of franchisor, franchisee and customer wellbeing. Knowledge sharing between franchisors and franchisees is considered the most crucial factor in franchising relationships because firms franchise to share strategic resources (brand name and local knowledge) for competitive advantage (Paswan & Wittmann, 2009; Wu, 2015). To ensure that knowledge extends across the franchise chain, the franchisor must communicate through a channel that transfers it to all the beneficiaries (Darr et al., 1995; Gillis & Combs, 2009).

In their study of learning by doing, Darr et al. (1995) find that knowledge can be shared more easily between outlets owned by the same franchisee than between outlets owned by different franchisees, highlighting the need to manage the knowledge flow for the benefit of the whole chain (Hussler & Ronde, 2015; Lindblom & Tikkanen, 2010). Hussler and Ronde (2015) suggest that knowledge only flows vertically from franchisor to franchisees even if its creation may have occurred among one of the franchisees. Other franchising literature criticizes this

suggestion based on the importance of local knowledge learned or experienced by franchisees (Darr et al., 1995) and places the emphasis on knowledge sharing rather than top-down knowledge transfer (Darr et al., 1995; Gillis & Combs, 2009).

Value creation (Paswan et al., 2014; Paswan & Wittmann, 2009) and financial performance (Nijmeijer, Fabbrocetti, et al., 2014) of franchising chains come from benefits as a result of shared knowledge among partners. Moreover, trust (Nijmeijer, Fabbrocetti, et al. (2014) and absorptive capacity (Paswan et al., 2014) have been identified as the most essential elements that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and they strengthen the franchising relationship (Altinay et al., 2014; Gillis & Combs, 2009; Wu, 2015). The more the franchisee and franchisor trust one another, the higher the tendency that they will share rich information (Dada et al., 2012; Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013; Lindblom & Tikkanen, 2010).

#### ***4.3.3 Franchise Network Growth***

Replication strategy and adaptation dominate in this stream. Research offers conflicting results, for instance while (Brookes, 2014) and (Kalnins & Mayer, 2004) find that adaptation of local knowledge is needed immediately for a quick fit with local environments, Winter and Szulanski (2001), Winter et al. (2012) and Szulanski and Jensen (2008) recognize the importance of precisely copying knowledge from franchisors for fast network growth. Winter et al. (2012) find significant results for replicating franchisor knowledge in the US and believe that international markets may have different results. Testing the replication strategy in international markets, Szulanski and Jensen (2006) and Szulanski and Jensen (2008) provide empirical evidence that even in international settings, franchisees must replicate exactly the knowledge transferred from franchisors to get the original knowledge base before adapting for local fit. In their study, Szulanski and Jensen (2008) confirm that exact copying is significant until the eighth year. Therefore, on average, based on their study, firms must use the same knowledge from the franchisor for the first eight years before making significant changes to fit local markets.

Additionally, Szulanski and Jensen (2006) show that the franchise chain growth is dependent on the extent to which outlets successfully replicate the original franchisor's template. Thus, poor replication of the original template often leads to failure. In contrast, Brookes (2014) conducts a single case study in the hotel industry and finds that instant adaptation, especially in international markets, is crucial for firm survival. Further, the results show that both franchisor and

franchisee admit the need for adaptation but question the appropriate timing and extent of needed adaptation in local markets.

More research is needed in this area to indicate when and where replication is most essential; the role of absorptive capacity of franchisees to replicate the knowledge; the influence of culture in adaptation strategy; the extent of local knowledge necessary in the adaptation strategy; and mechanisms through which franchisor knowledge can shape local environments for maximum growth.

The results of content analysis also show how constructs are operationalized in each research stream (table 4). For instance, governance structure is often operationalized using propensity to franchise which is a ration of franchised outlets to total outlets owned by franchisors (Gillis et al., 2014; Sorenson & Sorensen, 2001). Performance outcomes are also operationalized using measures of economic benefits, innovation and strategic performance (Brookes, 2014; Darr et al., 1995; Gillis et al., 2014). Franchisee failure rate is used to study network growth by investigating the effect of replication and adaptation strategy.

Table 4: Measurement of constructs in each research stream

Measures/Items	Citations
<b>Governance Structure (Cluster 1)</b>	
<i>Propensity to franchise</i>	
Brand-name recognition	Doherty (2009)
Contractibility of intangible knowledge	Windsperger (2004), Windsperger and Dant (2006)
Number of franchisee and franchisor-owned outlets	Gillis et al. (2014), Sorenson and Sorensen (2001)
Intangible know-how allocation	Windsperger (2004), Mumdziev and Windsperger (2011)
Centralization of franchising network	Windsperger (2004)
<b>Performance Outcome (Cluster 2)</b>	
<i>Economic Benefit and Value creation</i>	
Brand reputation, number of outlets	Gillis and Combs (2009), Wu (2015)
Reduced cost and revenue increase	Wu (2015), Darr et al. (1995), Dada et al. (2012)
Expertise	Paswan et al. (2014)
Quality time	Paswan et al. (2014), Wu (2015)
Risk taking abilities	Paswan et al. (2014)

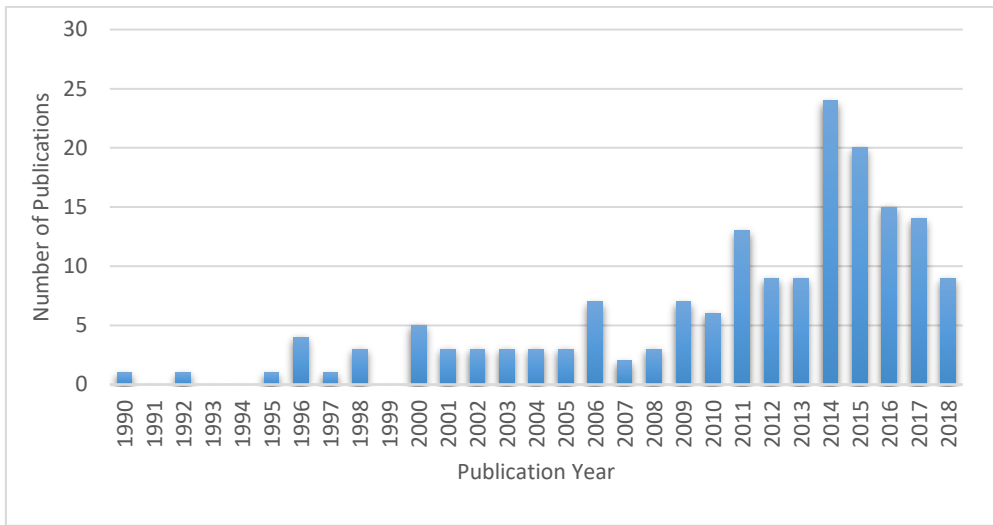
<i>Innovation</i>	
System adaptations	Dada et al. (2012)
Solution to business problems	Dada et al. (2012)
Product development	Dada et al. (2012), Paswan et al. (2014)
<i>Strategic</i>	
Market leadership	Dada et al. (2012)
Satisfaction of customers	Altinay et al. (2014)
Relationship development	Gorovaia and Windsperger (2013)
Quality of service	Wu (2015)
<b>Franchise Network Growth (Cluster 3)</b>	
<i>Survival and Failure rate</i>	
Copy exactly the original knowledge	Szulanski and Jensen (2006), Szulanski and Jensen (2008), Winter and Szulanski (2001)
Adaptation to local knowledge	Brookes (2014), Kalnins and Mayer (2004)
Selling of non-standard products	Winter et al. (2012)

#### ***4.4 Evolution and Growth of Knowledge Management in Franchising***

##### ***4.4.1 By publications***

Figure 4 shows the growth of knowledge management in franchising over the last 15 years. The graph shows the trend in publications from 1990 to 2018. KM in franchising is still an emerging field, thus, more research is needed to analyze the management of this strategic resources (knowledge) in business format franchising. The current study sorts and synthesizes the literature and offers suggestions for future research.

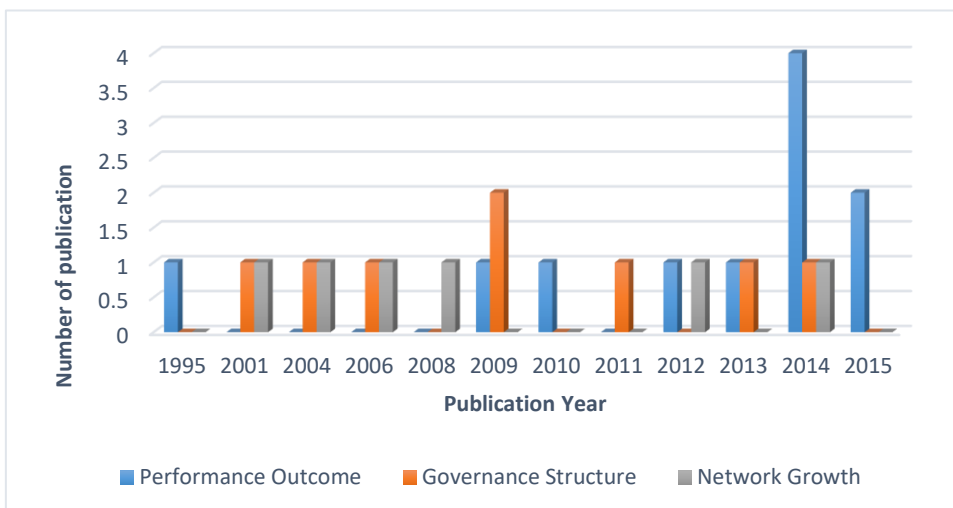
Figure 4: Total number of publications per year



#### 4.4.2 By research streams

Figure 5 shows the development and publication trend of each stream from 1995 to 2015. Some years (1996-2000, 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2007) have no publications in any stream. Figure 5 also shows that in recent years research in performance outcomes comprises the most publications.

Figure 5: Number of Publications by stream



The dimension of KM, the theories used, research streams and evolution of the field show how KM variables are operationalized (Tables 2 and 4), how articles

are clustered together (Table 3) and how the field has evolved over time (Figures 4 and 5). These results help to identify research gaps and suggest areas for future research as indicated in the next section (Table 5).





## 5 Discussion and Future Research

This bibliometric analysis research uses articles to analyze KM in franchising, with different results concerning the theories applied, the evolution of the field, measurement of constructs and research streams from the sample of the 30 most-cited articles.

The first research question in this paper asks about the theories used to explain KM in franchising. Based on the theoretical arguments of the most-cited articles, knowledge-based theories (RBV, KBV and dynamic capabilities); replication strategy and structure of inertia; social network theories and property rights were mostly used. Knowledge-based theories argue that performance and competitive advantage come from possessing unique knowledge. These theories fail to ascertain the characteristic of uniqueness and difficult-to-imitate knowledge that leads to performance. Also, these theories do not indicate how firm knowledge can be measured. This is also indicated in Tables 2 and 4 where knowledge dimension is measured by proxy but not directly by knowledge resource. For example, innovation is used to measure knowledge creation, but this does not show how this knowledge is unique, as explained by theories. We find that owning knowledge by itself does not bring competitive advantage. Rather, the application of knowledge for commercial ends brings performance and competitive advantage. This can be explained by the concept of absorptive capacity, which is not fully explained in this field.

Replication strategy explains growth in franchising but needs more research to identify reasons for possible franchisee failure to replicate franchisor knowledge. The only empirical explanation is the fact that franchisees adapt local knowledge for environmental fit. More research is needed to assess the absorptive capacity of franchisees to copy the exact knowledge from franchisors or to integrate it with specific local needs. Social network theories (social exchange, relational governance and network theory) were applied by researchers analyzed in the present article to assess the successful transfer of knowledge between partners since trust and relational governance within the network facilitate the ease and broad sharing of knowledge. However, property right theory was also applied to explain that firms will franchise if local knowledge is difficult to contract or costly to transfer. In this situation the decision rights will reside with the franchisee due to the specific knowledge ownership.

The second question concerns factors that cluster articles together and streams that receive more attention in publications. With the aid of citation mapping in HistCite and VOSviewer, 25 articles were identified to form research streams and names were assigned based on topic or contextual similarities. These three research streams are governance structure, performance outcome, and network growth.

Governance structure (7 articles) relates to the role of knowledge in the decision to franchise. The influence of local knowledge and innovation determine whether the franchisor should franchise or own outlet. Largely, articles in this stream suggest that the plural form of franchising is driven by the need for standardization and adaptation especially in international markets. If local knowledge is essential for firm success, the franchisor will franchise outlets. Additionally, franchise also results from the need for innovation because the franchisor-owned outlet managers do not have an incentive to innovate compared to franchisees. However, these innovations must be monitored by franchisors, who use their own outlets to test new knowledge before communicating it to all partners. Also, to ensure sustainable competitive advantage, franchisors transferring knowledge to franchisees and company-owned outlets need to have the disseminative capacity to reduce business failure (Antia et al., 2017).

The performance research stream (12 articles) analyzes the role of KM in the strategic and financial performance of franchise chains. This cluster shows that performance in franchise chains is driven by sharing strategic knowledge among partners. Traditionally, knowledge flows from franchisor to franchisees, but the term knowledge-sharing is widely used to indicate that franchisees also transfer knowledge to the franchisor (Darr et al., 1995; Kashyap & Murtha, 2017). As governance structure literature in cross-border knowledge transfer indicates, performance improves if franchisees are able to increase their competitive advantage through innovation and a full exploitation of local knowledge (Contractor & Woodley, 2015; Evanschitzky, Caemmerer, & Backhaus, 2016). Although competitive advantage comes from possessing unique knowledge, knowledge resources have no effect if they are not shared within the chain (Badrinarayanan et al., 2016; Blomkvist, 2012). Changes in firm performance (especially financial performance) is used as a proxy to measure the effect of knowledge sharing (Baum & Ingram, 1998; Swift et al., 2010). Consistently, this review also reveals a lack of empirical evidence to directly test knowledge variables that influence performance. As indicated in Table 2, only face-to-face

training and documents are used to measure knowledge transfer. More direct knowledge-specific measures are needed for theory testing and theory building research on knowledge transfer.

The network stream (6 articles) analyzes the importance of knowledge transfer for chain survival and network growth. More attention in this stream was given to replication and adaptation strategy to reduce failure rates in franchises. The content analysis indicates that replicating franchisor knowledge ensures the growth of franchise chains. This stream offers conflicting empirical results on whether adaptation is necessary and, if so, when does adaptation yield optimal results and total growth. The findings in this stream are consistent with those streams concerning other types of inter-firm alliances (Gielens & Dekimpe, 2001; Ingram & Baum, 1997; Kapoor & Lim, 2007; Kostova, 1999; Kostova & Roth, 2002). However, more empirical research is needed. In line with this argument, Kashyap and Murtha (2017) empirical work in the hotel industry suggests that franchisee flexibility beyond knowledge stipulated in the contract may lead to better performance by increasing customer satisfaction. Gielens and Dekimpe (2001) and Szulanski and Jensen (2006) also highlight the importance of both strategies if adopted in the right time and context.

The performance outcome research stream (12 articles) has received more attention compared to governance structure (7 articles) and network growth (6 articles). Figure 5 shows the total number of publications in each stream, with performance having more publications, which indicates research opportunities in the other streams.

### ***5.1 Direction for Future Research***

This subsection answers the third question about suggested future research questions. Content analysis of the most influential articles suggests research questions for future studies (Table 5).

Table 5: Suggested Future Research Questions

#	Research Stream	Future Research Questions	Authors
1.	Governance structure	What other organizational variables can be used for exploration and exploitation in franchising?	Sorenson and Sorensen (2001)
2.		What is the optimal number of franchising outlets for chain's performance?	Windsperger (2004)
3.		How does knowledge distribution affect franchise chain's performance?	Windsperger (2004)
4.		What knowledge attributes are considered in franchising partner selection?	Doherty (2009)
5.		What are the effects of trust and knowledge-sharing routines in plural form franchising?	Gillis et al. (2014)
6.	Performance outcome	What are the dynamic processes involved in creating knowledge chain competitive advantage?	Lindblom and Tikkanen (2010)
7.		How do franchisee create new knowledge for both strategic and financial performance?	Lindblom and Tikkanen (2010)
8.		How can franchisees maximize their knowledge innovation without jeopardizing the standardized franchisor's knowledge?	Dada et al. (2012)
9.		What are the performance consequences of the partners' absorptive capacity?	Gorovaia and Windsperger (2013)
10.		What is the impact of culture on the successful transfer of knowledge?	Gorovaia and Windsperger (2013)
11.		How does the process of knowledge management affect the franchisors, franchisees and customers wellbeing?	Weaven et al. (2014); Paswan et al. (2014)
12.		To what extent is chain performance influenced by specific knowledge and competences among franchisees?	Hussler and Ronde (2015)
13.	Franchise Network Growth	What is the importance of local knowledge in firm's survival and franchise growth rate?	Kalnins and Mayer (2004)

14.		What are the necessary conditions for successful local knowledge adaptation?	Szulanski and Jensen (2006)
15.		Do copy exactly lead to high growth of franchise network? If yes, at what stage and where is exact adaptation most pertinent?	Szulanski and Jensen (2008)
16.		How can large-scale franchising organization shape and influence local environment?	Winter et al. (2012)
17.		How does the absorptive capacity of franchising partner affect replication and adaptation strategy?	Winter et al. (2012)
18.		What are the knowledge-specific variables that should be considered under KM in franchising?	Brookes (2014)

Research questions suggested here may further develop the field of KM in franchising. Articles in this field concentrate more on knowledge transfer and less on how franchisors, franchisees and customers create knowledge and whether the capacity to recognize and use this knowledge (absorptive capacity) matters.

In governance structure, the required local knowledge of franchisees determines the proportion of franchising outlets, as identified in this research stream (Perrigot et al., 2013). Standardization is the primary goal of franchisors, but environmental heterogeneity requires innovation for local market fit (Gillis & Combs, 2009). Knowledge and cultural-specific constructs are used to explain the need for standardization and adaptation in franchising, but further research is required to 1) identify the optimal number of franchises if adaptation is necessary for performance; 2) how much knowledge to share under adaptation given different local contexts; and 3) what and how much of the local knowledge are considered advantageous during franchisee selection. Also, governance strategy affects the choice of governance mode as explained by (Jell-Ojobor & Windsperger, 2017). The choice between different forms of franchising (joint venture, wholly-owned subsidiary or master franchising) in overseas markets depends on the nature of knowledge transferred and the degree of local partners' contributions to strategic resources. Thus, future research should also focus on the dynamics in these emerging forms of governance in franchise agreement. Future

research should also focus on reviewing the contributions of recent articles not included in this analysis due to a low number of citations.

The strategic and financial performance outcome stream includes studies on the importance of knowledge creation, sharing and application for the success of franchising chains. For the chain to succeed, both franchisor and franchisee knowledge are important for competitive advantage as well as for financial performance (Wu, 2015). This is the most studied area of KM in franchising (figure 5), as firms argue that knowledge exchange between parties is vital for the success of franchise chains. This research area also analyzes the importance of trust and close relationships between parties for the transfer of tacit knowledge. Further research is still needed to analyze the contribution of information technology in knowledge transfer mechanisms, customer involvement in knowledge creation and absorptive capabilities of partners to transfer knowledge.

The franchise network growth research stream develops the argument of replication versus adaptation strategy in franchising. The research area debates the impact of exact copying and adaptation on the growth of franchise networks. While some researchers have empirically argued for exact copying from the beginning of the franchise or after several years (Szulanski & Jensen, 2006; Winter et al., 2012), others have argued against it by providing empirical evidence in the international context (Szulanski & Jensen, 2008). Even those who argue for a gradual adaptation process specify no exact time where adaptation can begin (Kalnins & Mayer, 2004; Szulanski & Jensen, 2008). Recently, Kashyap and Murtha (2017) find that franchisees who added additional value beyond what franchisors provide recorded higher customer satisfaction. Their results show that many innovations that bring changes to particular brands come from franchisees. This lack of consensus calls for more research to establish the time, the processes and the environment where replication and adaptation can work for maximum growth, as supported by (Lopez-Bayon & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016). In addition, more empirical insight is needed on how much adaptation franchisees can make to fit the local context. Furthermore, more empirical research is needed to indicate at which point the adaptation is enough to allow for the replication of newly innovated knowledge by other franchisees in the chain (Jonsson & Foss, 2011).

Knowledge management in social and born-global franchising is one emerging domain that is yet to receive empirical inquiry, thus, future research should shed light on this subject. Social franchising and micro-franchising (Christensen, Parsons, & Fairbourne, 2010), like commercial franchising, are

forms of franchising that operate mainly in base-of-pyramid (BOP) markets (developing countries) where franchisors' main focus is to solve social needs while making profit (Kistruck et al., 2011). It is a new model in BOP markets for social enterprise expansion (Crawford-Spencer & Cantatore, 2016; Machackova, 2013). In some instances, social or micro-franchisors provide investment capital to franchisees to help them establish an outlet (Combs, David, & Jeremy, 2011). Arguably, this is a new phenomenon in franchising with few academic articles (Kistruck et al., 2011; Tracey & Jarvis, 2007), thus, it presents an opportunity for further research on how knowledge is transferred within social franchising.

Born-global companies start to franchise overseas within three years of their establishment (Cavusgil & Knight, 2015; Øyna & Alon, 2018). Research is needed in this area to show how born-global franchisors can transfer knowledge in the international market given their absorptive capacity and knowledge competency as new firms (Mohr & Batsakis, 2014; Park & Rhee, 2012).

The authors of this paper are interested in the role of absorptive capacity in successful knowledge transfer for performance and growth as an area for future research. Tacit and explicit knowledge are transferred through different mechanisms. More personal and high rich information transfer strategies such as training, conferences and meetings are used to transfer tacit knowledge while codified strategy such as emails and manuals are preferred in transferring explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge which cannot easily be codified has been identified as the source of competitive advantage because it is difficult for competitors to copy. To improve performance, franchisors must make sure that tacit knowledge is successfully transferred to franchisees. Since trust facilitates the use of rich information to transfer knowledge (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013), the authors want to investigate the role of absorptive capacity in franchise performance from both franchisor and franchisee viewpoints. From the franchisor perspective, absorptive capacity will be measured as the capacity to transfer both tacit and explicit knowledge while from the franchisee perspective absorptive capacity will be measured as the ability to recognize, understand, receive and apply knowledge for commercial ends.

Additionally, the role of absorptive capacity can be measured under replication strategy to investigate the survival of franchise chains. This concerns the capacity and capability of franchisees to replicate tacit knowledge through training and codified methods. This will provide empirical evidence on whether deviations from standard franchisor knowledge a matter of adaptation or the



absorptive capacity of franchisees to replicate the knowledge. Following the work of (Minbaeva et al., 2018; Wang, Tong, & Koh, 2004), research on franchisor capacity to transfer knowledge in addition to franchisee absorptive capacity will shed light on the assessment of KM in franchise chains.

## 6 Conclusions

This study is a bibliometric analysis of KM in franchising using Histcite and VOSviewer. The concept of knowledge management has been studied in strategic management from the early 1990s but only widely examined in the franchising literature since early 2000, as indicated in our study (fig. 4). Our findings reveal three major research streams, based on the most influential articles in the field. These streams are 1) governance structure studies which state that plural franchising depends on the balance between exploration and exploitation; 2) performance outcome studies which posit that franchise performance depends on the successful transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge; and 3) franchise network growth studies that examine replication or adaptation for firm survival.

The findings show that more research is needed to establish knowledge-specific variables in franchising literature; to examine knowledge factors influencing franchising performance; and to investigate the role of absorptive capacity in KM for franchise growth and performance. Results also points to born-global and social franchising as potential blue-ocean areas for future research. Absorptive capacity in franchising is important to measure the capability of a firm or individual to create, store, transform, receive, replicate and apply knowledge.



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