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Unraveling the CSR - Franchising connections
A Literature Review on the Intersection of Corporate Social Responsibility and Franchising in International Business

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Abstrakt (German)

Diese Studie untersucht die Schnittstelle zwischen Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) und Franchising im Kontext des internationalen Geschäfts in den letzten 15 Jahren. Ziel ist es zu verstehen, wie CSR-Praktiken in verschiedenen Franchise-Modellen reflektiert werden und wie sie sich als Reaktion auf die Erwartungen der Stakeholder entwickelt haben. Durch eine semi-systematische Literaturübersicht, unterstützt durch bibliometrische und thematische Analysen, werden aufkommende Trends, Herausforderungen und Chancen bei der Umsetzung von CSR in Franchise-Netzwerken identifiziert. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass zentralisierte Franchise-Modelle eine größere CSR-Konsistenz aufweisen, während dezentralisierte Modelle aufgrund lokaler Anpassungen eine größere Variabilität zeigen. Darüber hinaus unterstreicht die Entwicklung von CSR-Praktiken von einem primären Fokus auf wirtschaftliche Dimensionen hin zu einem integrativeren Ansatz, der soziale und ökologische Dimensionen umfasst, den Einfluss stakeholdergetriebener Anforderungen. Diese Forschung leistet einen Beitrag zum theoretischen Verständnis von CSR im Franchising und bietet praktische Einblicke zur Förderung nachhaltiger und sozial verantwortlicher Praktiken in globalen Franchise-Netzwerken.

Stichwörter: Unternehmerische Sozialverantwortung (CSR), Franchising, Stakeholder-Theorie, Prinzipal-Agent-Theorie, Franchisemodelle, Nachhaltigkeit, Internationales Geschäft, CSR-Entwicklung, Praktiken der sozialen Verantwortung.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intersection of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and franchising within the context of international business over the last 15 years. It aims to understand how CSR practices are reflected in various franchise models and how they have evolved in response to stakeholder expectations. Through a semi-systematic literature review, supported by bibliometric and thematic analyses, the study identifies emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in CSR implementation within franchising networks. The findings reveal that centralized franchise models exhibit greater CSR consistency, while decentralized models show more variability due to local adaptations. Furthermore, the evolution of CSR practices, from a primary focus on economic dimensions to a more inclusive approach incorporating social and environmental dimensions, highlights the influence of stakeholder-driven pressures. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of CSR in franchising and offers practical insights for fostering sustainable and socially responsible practices in global franchise networks.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Franchising, Stakeholder Theory, Agency Theory, Franchise Models, Sustainability, International Business, CSR Evolution, Social Responsibility Practices.

Resumen (Español)

Este estudio investiga la intersección entre la Responsabilidad Social Corporativa (RSC) y el franquiciamiento en el contexto de los negocios internacionales durante los últimos 15 años. Su objetivo es comprender cómo se reflejan las prácticas de RSC en diferentes modelos de franquicia y cómo han evolucionado en respuesta a las expectativas de los grupos de interés. A través de una revisión semi-sistemática de la literatura, respaldada por análisis bibliométricos y temáticos, el estudio identifica tendencias emergentes, desafíos y oportunidades en la implementación de la RSC dentro de las redes de franquicias. Los resultados revelan que los modelos de franquicias centralizados muestran una mayor consistencia en RSC, mientras que los modelos descentralizados presentan mayor variabilidad debido a adaptaciones locales. Además, la evolución de las prácticas de RSC, desde un enfoque primario en las dimensiones económicas hacia un enfoque más inclusivo que incorpora dimensiones sociales y ambientales, resalta la influencia de las presiones impulsadas por los grupos de interés. Esta investigación contribuye al entendimiento teórico de la RSC en el franquiciamiento y ofrece perspectivas prácticas para fomentar prácticas sostenibles y socialmente responsables en las redes de franquicias globales.

Palabras clave: Responsabilidad Social Corporativa (RSC), Franquicias, Teoría de los Stakeholders, Teoría de la Agencia, Modelos de Franquicia, Sostenibilidad, Negocios Internacionales, Evolución de la RSC, Prácticas de Responsabilidad Social.

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Introduction

This study embarks on a journey to unravel the intricate relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and franchising within the international business landscape. Positioned at a crucial intersection, it seeks to explore how these two realms influence one another in the context of global commerce. In an era where the imperatives of ethical business practices and sustainable development command the global stage, the urgency and relevance of investigating the integration of CSR within franchising models are unmistakably significant (Lawrence et al., 2024).. This study seeks not only to contribute to the broader societal and academic debates on ethical business conduct but also to illuminate the nuanced dynamics of CSR implementation and evolution in the franchise networks

Franchising, as a distinctive business model, offers a unique lens through which to examine CSR practices. Its global economic impact, coupled with the operational dynamics between franchisors and franchisees, provides a rich backdrop for this investigation (Farooq et al., 2020). The decentralized nature of franchising poses specific challenges and opportunities for CSR implementation, making it a fertile ground for research into how these models can be leveraged for positive societal impact (Lawrence et al., 2024).

Despite the growing emphasis on CSR, there are notable gaps in understanding how CSR initiatives evolve and sustain their impact within franchise systems (Quinn & Alexander, 2002). One major gap lies in the limited exploration of CSR's long-term performance implications and how temporary CSR campaigns can disrupt existing CSR routines within franchise networks (Lawrence et al., 2024). Additionally, the effectiveness of CSR communication across different franchise types and the variations in franchisee autonomy have received limited attention, which poses challenges for standardizing CSR practices within global networks (Oueslati et al., 2023). Another area requiring further study is the alignment between franchisor CSR objectives and franchisee engagement, as CSR efforts are often hindered by inconsistent adoption across locations (Meiseberg & Ehrmann, 2012).

Research Question

Central to this investigation is the research question: **How are Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices reflected and evolved in international franchises over the last 15 years?**

This question anchors the study's aim to delve into the mechanisms through which franchising can foster or hinder CSR initiatives, looking at the varying structures of franchise models and their impact on CSR practices. Franchising, with its diverse operational structures, presents unique challenges and opportunities for CSR adoption, particularly as models vary in their degrees of centralization, control, and flexibility (Meiseberg & Ehrmann, 2012). By synthesizing findings from recent studies, this review seeks to identify patterns, impacts, and challenges associated with CSR implementation in franchises, as well as contribute to the understanding of CSR in franchising and offer insights into how franchises might enhance the consistency and impact of CSR efforts across international business.

The relevance of this research is twofold. Firstly, it focusses on literature by searching the intersection of CSR and franchising, a domain that has seen limited exploration despite its importance in the current global economy. Secondly, the study's findings have the potential to inform both theoretical frameworks and practical strategies for integrating CSR into franchising models, thereby contributing to the ethical footprint of franchised businesses worldwide. To address this study, two hypotheses are proposed.

- ✓ H1: *Different franchise models reflect distinct approaches to CSR.*

This hypothesis addresses how CSR practices are reflected across various franchise models. Lawrence et al. (2024) argues that franchise systems face challenges in maintaining consistent CSR routines due to differences in franchise structures. That study examines how CSR routines can deteriorate or recover depending on franchise models and disruptions to routines, indicating that different franchise structures affect the consistency and stability of CSR practices (Windsperger & Dant, 2006). Therefore, with this hypothesis, it is wanted to observe whether the possible influence of a specific type of franchise model on the implementation of CSR (e.g., Direct franchising) leads to greater consistency in the implementation of CSR in international markets.

It will be expected to see whether centralized franchise models (like Direct franchising) will lead to more uniform CSR practices across all franchises, while decentralized models (like Master franchising) will show varied CSR implementations due to franchise autonomy and local adaptations, or whether territorial or temporal variations (like in Multi-Unit and Area) bring some kind of balance in CSR practices in franchises (Meiseberg & Ehrmann, 2012). It is intended to measure this reflection by the consistency of CSR dimensions across franchise models.

- ✓ H2: *CSR practices within franchises have evolved over the last 15 years, driven by stakeholder expectations.*

Tracking CSR adaptations over time highlights an evolutionary trend in franchise CSR practices. The hypothesis examines whether franchises have expanded CSR activities in response to expectations (Oueslati et al., 2023), moving from primarily economic initiatives to more comprehensive practices that include other dimensions more related to sustainability. This shift reflects a timeline of CSR adaptation within franchise networks, demonstrating how franchises increasingly incorporate stakeholder expectations and societal values into their decision-making processes.

It is expected that literature will reveal an increase in stakeholder-driven CSR mentions over time, supporting the idea that franchises are adopting CSR practices not only to align with corporate goals but also to satisfy growing stakeholder demands. This shift suggests that franchise networks are evolving to integrate CSR in a way that reflects a deeper commitment to sustainable and socially responsible business practices, highlighting how franchise systems adapt CSR strategies dynamically to meet both organizational and community needs (Lawrence et al., 2024). It is intended to measure this evolution by analyzing the presence of stakeholders in relation to CSR in franchise contexts.

These hypotheses will provide a critical lens through which the intricate relationships between franchisors and franchisees can be examined, particularly in the context of CSR practices. To understand this type of connection from an academic perspective, some theories from the field of international business will be considered. Stakeholder Theory, with its emphasis on the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders in business operations, aligns with the goals of CSR by promoting practices that benefit society at large (Carroll, 2021). Agency Theory, on the other hand, sheds light on the potential conflicts and alignments between franchisors (principals) and franchisees (agents), especially regarding the adoption and implementation of CSR practices (Windsperger & Dant, 2006). Sustainability fosters long-term viability for both franchisors and franchisees by promoting economic, environmental, and social responsibilities (Calderon-Monge et al., 2017). This balance enhances relationship quality, trust, and stakeholder satisfaction, leading to franchise success and resilience (Jang & Park, 2019).

A 15-year period has been selected for this review to provide a balanced perspective that manages to capture trends on the most relevant recent developments in CSR and franchising. This time frame is comprehensive enough to encompass key evolutions in franchising models and CSR practices, while maintaining a focus on relevant and up-to-date practices and theoretical advances (Paul & Criado, 2020). While a minimum of 10 years is typically used to ensure depth and historical context in literature reviews, extending the review period to 15 years allows for a more robust exploration of changes within CSR and franchising, revealing both persistent themes and emerging areas of research (Snyder, 2019). It is hoped that this extended time frame will allow for the identification of knowledge gaps and areas where CSR practices in franchising are underexplored, thereby laying the groundwork for future research directions.

The study's methodology, a semi-structured literature review, is meticulously chosen to navigate the complexities of this topic. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of existing literature (Snyder, 2019), facilitating the identification of key themes, gaps, and emerging trends in the relationship between CSR and franchising. Moreover, a semi-structured review provides flexibility to explore the breadth and depth of this relationship, accommodating the evolving nature of CSR practices and franchising models over the past 15 years.

By unraveling the factors that influence CSR adoption and effectiveness in franchising, this thesis aims to make a substantive contribution to the understanding of how franchising models can serve as platforms for the effective adoption and implementation of CSR initiatives. Through a rigorous literature review, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in this field, offering theoretical and practical insights that will inform future research and guide the development of socially responsible franchising practices. The exploration of this intersection is not only timely but imperative, as businesses worldwide navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by a rapidly changing global landscape marked by increasing demands for ethical and sustainable operations.

Thesis Structure

In the introduction to this study, we outline the journey ahead, focusing on the intersection of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and franchising within the international business sphere. **Chapter 1** lays the theoretical groundwork, defining the core concepts of franchising and CSR and their interplay within the international business context. It examines the evolution of CSR, its dimensions, and practices, alongside an overview of franchising models and their global significance. The integration of Stakeholder and Agency Theories provides a lens for understanding CSR implementation in franchising, offering insights into the governance and relational dynamics between franchisors and franchisees.

Chapter 2 presents the methodology that details the semi-systematic literature review (Snyder, 2019) approach used to explore the relationship between CSR and franchising. Following the SPAR-4-SLR framework, it outlines the rigorous selection criteria, data collection process, and analytical tools, including bibliometric analysis. The chapter explains how this methodology facilitates a comprehensive understanding of trends, gaps, and themes in the literature over a 15-year period.

Chapter 3 presents the findings of the literature review, addressing the research question and hypotheses. The results explore how different franchising models reflect distinct approaches to CSR (H1) and track the evolution of CSR practices within franchises over time (H2). It identifies patterns, stakeholder influences, and variations in CSR implementation across franchise networks, supported by visual representations of bibliometric data and thematic analyses.

Chapter 4 synthesizes the findings, highlighting emerging themes such as stakeholder-driven CSR evolution and challenges in aligning CSR across franchise models. It delves into external factors, including cultural differences and regulatory environments, which influence CSR in franchising.

Chapter 5 recaps the study's key findings, emphasizing their contribution to the understanding of CSR in franchising. It reflects on the theoretical and managerial implications, underlines the study's contributions to the field, and identifies gaps in the literature. The chapter concludes by proposing directions for future research, focusing on expanding cross-national studies and exploring CSR in emerging economies.

1. Key Concepts and Definitions

This theoretical chapter provides a framework for understanding the relationship between franchising and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the context of international business. The section contributes to explaining how franchise models influence the implementation and effectiveness of CSR practices.

It begins by examining the definition of franchising networks in international organizations, highlighting the common models, which will be used in the analysis of the literature review. These models are critical as they could indicate the structural relationships between franchisors and franchisees, and their impact in the implementation on CSR strategies.

The chapter then explores the Corporate Sustainability definition, focusing on CSR as central mechanism through which businesses contribute to sustainability, encompassing ethical practices and environmental stewardship. After that, the chapter delves into further theories.

Stakeholder Theory, on one hand, emphasizes the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders—including customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and investors—in business decisions. In franchising, this theory is especially pertinent because franchisees operate semi-independently while still representing the franchisor’s brand. CSR initiatives must, therefore, meet the diverse expectations of stakeholders across the entire network.

On the other hand, Agency Theory focuses on the principal-agent relationship between franchisors (principals) and franchisees (agents). This relationship often presents challenges in aligning interests, particularly regarding CSR practices. While franchisors may advocate for CSR initiatives aligned with the company's strategic goals, franchisees, driven by local market conditions and profitability, may prioritize different objectives.

Together, these elements form a cohesive theoretical foundation for analyzing how franchise models have influenced CSR practices in international businesses.

1.1 Franchising Networks in International Organizations

In the context of international business, Hollensen (2020) present the franchising as a strategic and dynamic business model, derived from the French term meaning "to be free from servitude". It represents one of the most prominent intermediate entry modes, when firms with competitive advantages face resource constraints but can transfer these advantages to external partners. This model involves long-term contractual arrangements where firms share intermediate goods, such as knowledge and skills, across different countries (Hollensen, 2020).

Franchising is described as both a business model and a relational system. As a business model, it offers a structured approach to expanding a brand through a network of independently owned franchise units, where the franchisor grants the franchisee the right to operate under its established brand and operational model, and this structured relationship facilitates brand consistency while allowing local entrepreneurs to manage daily operations (Hollensen, 2020). Importantly, franchising is also a system of relational exchanges where the franchisor and franchisees cooperate to mutually promote a brand and co-create value (Raha & Hajdini, 2023). Franchisees, while receiving ongoing support from the franchisor, retain a level of managerial autonomy. However, the franchisor's goal is to maintain service uniformity across all locations, often at the expense of franchisee autonomy, a dynamic that can lead to tensions and disputes between the parties (Raha & Hajdini, 2023).

The contractual nature of franchising, as highlighted by Raha & Hajdini (2023), underscores the importance of these relational exchanges in expanding a business while balancing standardization and local market adaptability. The system involves not only the sale of goods or services but also the transfer of vital assets like operational guidelines and continuous support, ensuring brand integrity across various regions (Windsperger, 2002).

Ownership rights and decision-making authority within franchising networks are central to the effective functioning of these networks. Decisions about centralization or decentralization of control have a direct impact on brand uniformity and responsiveness to local market conditions. The proper allocation of rights and obligations between franchisor and franchisee is essential for optimizing performance and encouraging mutual investment in brand development (Windsperger & Dant, 2006). According to this idea, if CSR values and practices are contractible and aligned, they can strengthen the franchising network, ensuring consistent CSR implementation across franchise locations.

Moreover, Herz et al. (2015) emphasize the role of trust and decision-rights delegation within franchising networks. Trust between franchisors and franchisees is crucial for effective delegation, allowing franchisees to adapt to local conditions while maintaining alignment with the franchisor's broader objectives. This relational trust is also pivotal for the successful integration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices. In this context, trust enables smoother adoption of CSR initiatives, making franchising a key driver for promoting responsible business practices on a global scale.

After this revision, for this study, the definition of franchising is in the context of the global market, it is in international business. It would be understood as a multifaceted strategic alliance, as a dynamic system, where cooperation, trust, and the careful balance of control and autonomy are critical for success (Windsperger, 2004). Under that definition, the franchising models can be effectively leveraged to verify their impact in the implementation of CSR initiatives.

1.1.1 International Franchising Models

Building on the previous search for a definition of franchising networks, it is essential to understand how different franchising models can shape management styles, decision-making processes, and the delegation of rights. These structural variations have a direct impact on the implementation of CSR initiatives within franchise systems. For instance, these models introduce an additional layer of management, allowing here the assumption that they can create both challenges and opportunities for CSR practices. The degree of control and independence granted to franchisees in each model influences how CSR policies are adopted, adapted, and executed across diverse markets. This dynamic underscore the importance of aligning CSR strategies with the specific franchising model to ensure consistent and effective implementation throughout the network.

It is now relevant to describe the types of franchise models that will be considered as categories in this study's literature review. These four models—direct franchising, master franchising, area development, and multi-unit franchising—were selected because they represent the most used structures in an international business context (Jell-Ojobor et al., 2022; Windsperger, 2004), each with distinct characteristics that could influence the adoption of CSR practices in different ways.

This categorization not only offers a solid framework for analysis but also aids in identifying specific CSR-related challenges and opportunities unique to each model. These aspects will be examined in greater depth during the literature review.

Franchising structures vary, each offering distinct approaches to how franchisors manage relationships and operations with franchisees, profoundly impacting the implementation and monitoring of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies, for example, the direct franchising structure allows franchisors to exert considerable control over franchisee operations, facilitating the straightforward implementation and diligent monitoring of CSR policies. This close oversight ensures that CSR standards are maintained uniformly across all locations, fostering consistent ethical practices and sustainability measures across the network (Windsperger, 2004). In contrast, it introduces complexity in the enforcement of CSR initiatives, as the franchisor's direct influence is diluted. The success of CSR policies in such structures relies heavily on the master franchisee's commitment to uphold and cascade the franchisor's standards to the sub-franchisees (Jell-Ojobor et al., 2022). Additionally, both Area Developers and Multi-Unit Franchising allow franchisees to manage multiple units or cover a larger geographic area. This structure strikes a balance, allowing for expansion and maintaining a degree of control that helps in implementing consistent operational and CSR standards across all units. While like master franchising, area developers do not have the right to establish sub-franchises (Windsperger & Dant, 2006).

Another characteristic that differentiates franchising structures and that affects CSR is the degree of operational control that franchisors maintain, since it varies significantly. For example, direct franchising offers the highest level of control, allowing franchisors to ensure that CSR policies are not only implemented but also strictly adhered to throughout the franchisee's operations. In contrast, master franchise and multi-unit franchise structures require more nuanced control mechanisms and strong communication strategies to maintain standardization of CSR practices (Jell-Ojobor et al., 2022).

In the same way, to carry out the implementation and compliance of CSR policies, direct franchising simplifies the implementation and compliance of CSR policies, because it promotes consistency and compliance directly aligned with the values of the franchisor. However, in master franchise settings, it is challenging to ensure consistent compliance with CSR standards because franchisors are required to design effective monitoring and compliance mechanisms that extend through the franchisee's levels of operations, from the franchisee to the individual points of sale (Windsperger, 2002).

Figure 1

Four (4) Best-known structures of the international franchise business model, based on (Herz et al., 2015; Jell-Ojobor et al., 2022; Windsperger, 2004; Windsperger & Dant, 2006a)

Direct Franchising	Franchisor directly manages relationships with each franchisee
	Ensures control over brand standards and operational uniformity
	Allows close monitoring and enforcement of business models and CSR practices
	Generates a high level of loyalty
	Reference: Windsperger, 2004
Master Franchising	Franchisor grants rights to a master franchisee to develop and manage franchising activities in a specific geographic area
	Master franchisee can establish sub-franchises, extending brand reach rapidly
	Beneficial for international expansion due to local knowledge and presence
	Requires high levels of trust and cooperation between franchisor and master franchisee
	Reference: Jell-Ojobor et al., 2022
Area Development Franchising	Allows franchisees to open multiple units in a specified area without selling sub-franchise rights
	Balances rapid expansion with control
	Enables franchisors to grow network while maintaining influence over operations
	Requires high levels of planning, coordination, and communication
	Reference: Windsperger & Dant, 2006
Multi-unit Franchising	Single franchisee owns and operates multiple outlets or units
	Reduces managerial costs and ensures operational consistency
	Enhances market penetration and innovation for franchisor
	Drawbacks include loss of autonomy, increased conflict, and legal liability
	Reference: Herz et al., 2015

1.1.2 Economic and global significance of franchising

From the above, it can be inferred that franchises play a fundamental role in the global economic landscape, serving as a powerful vehicle for business expansion and economic development. This business model leverages the strengths of both franchisors and franchisees to create expansive networks that foster entrepreneurship and facilitate the rapid transfer of goods, services, and innovations between markets and cultures.

That is why the economic importance of franchising is deeply rooted in its ability to promote economic growth, which is sustained by facilitating the rapid expansion of proven business concepts. As described by Farooq et al. (2020), franchises go beyond mere business expansion by incorporating strategies intertwined with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This approach enhances the socioeconomic impact of businesses across various locations and, consequently, on a global scale. Franchising also stimulates job creation and local economic growth through the multiplier effect inherent in establishing new businesses.

Another role of franchises in international business is particularly notable, given their ability to adapt and thrive in diverse geographic and economic environments. In this context, Jell-Ojobor et al. (2022) explore how master franchises facilitate deeper market penetration, especially in international contexts. This franchise model leverages local cultural knowledge and experience, which is crucial for customizing business operations to meet local consumer demands and comply with local regulations. One example is the strategic use of the Master Franchise, which can significantly accelerate market entry and expansion, making it a preferred strategy for companies seeking global reach with localized adaptations.

Continuing along that conceptual line, franchising acts as a conduit for knowledge transfer, particularly through established franchises that provide comprehensive training and operational guidelines to franchisees. To support this, Herz et al. (2015) highlight the importance of trust and the delegation of decision rights in franchise networks, pointing out how these elements improve performance and innovation within franchised establishments.

Hence, Windsperger (2002) maintains that franchising reveals the way in which the strategic allocation of property rights can align incentives throughout the franchise network, which has managed to improve operational efficiency and economic results. Given the structure of property rights within franchises, the distribution of rights and obligations between franchisors and franchisees can optimize network performance and profitability, as well as work on ethical and responsible business practices.

To argue the importance of the franchise at an international level, Lawrence's contributions are valuable when he states that Franchising not only facilitates rapid market expansion and scalability but also contributes to economic growth by creating numerous employment opportunities and stimulating local economies. The system's structured approach allows franchisors to disseminate successful business models quickly across various markets, ensuring brand consistency while leveraging local franchisees' market knowledge. This ability to balance global branding with local operations makes franchising a powerful strategy for international business expansion (Lawrence et al., 2024).

As stated above, the vast network of franchised businesses also enhances innovation as franchisees adapt the core business model to local conditions, driving improvements in products and services that can feedback into the entire network. This dynamic interplay between global standards and local adaptation helps franchises remain competitive and relevant in various markets.

Hence, for these reasons franchising's economic and global significance is marked by its ability to efficiently expand businesses, create jobs, foster innovation, and enhance CSR implementation across international markets, making it a cornerstone of modern global commerce and an essential subject of study in international business strategy (Lawrence et al., 2024).

1.2 Corporate Sustainability (CS) ties with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

For this study, a concept of Corporate Sustainability has been sought that explains its current relationship with CSR and franchises. To this end, the description provided by Hart & Milstein (2003) is relevant, who articulate the concept of sustainable value creation as generating wealth for shareholders alongside efforts to create a more sustainable world. This dual focus on economic performance and sustainability enables companies to drive profitability while addressing global environmental and social challenges.

1.2.1 Corporate Sustainability (CS)

To this study, it is understood that in general terms Corporate Sustainability is a comprehensive business strategy that seeks to generate long-term value by integrating

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations into a company's core operations and decision-making processes. Sheehy & Farneti (2021) note that sustainability has evolved beyond the corporate definition and encompasses broader policy frameworks in creating long-term strategies that align with global sustainable development goals. Likewise, international businesses, such as franchises, can incorporate sustainability principles into their global operations, thereby gaining sustained competitive advantage.

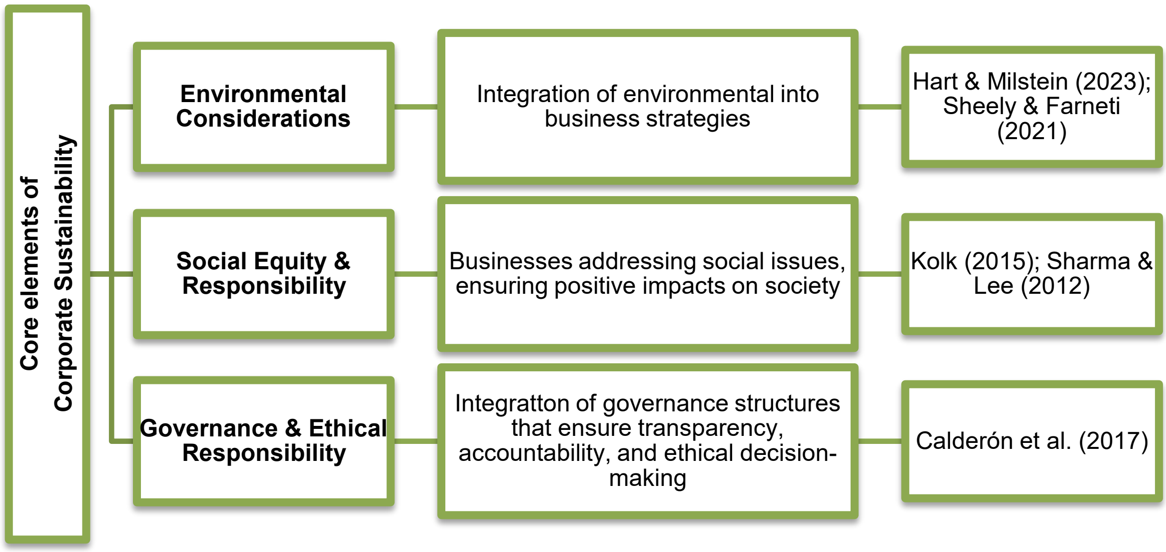
An EGS integrates sustainability into both global and local operations, addressing pressing environmental and social issues while generating economic value. This model is particularly relevant in the international business context, where companies must balance local adaptation with global integration (Sharma & Lee, 2012). Growing awareness of environmental degradation, social inequality, and governance failures has increased pressure on companies to adopt sustainable practices. Therefore, corporate sustainability is not only an ethical consideration but also a strategic necessity for companies operating in a globalized economy.

Stakeholders, including governments, investors, consumers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are demanding greater transparency and accountability from companies. Sheehy & Farneti (2021)highlight that companies that fail to adopt sustainable practices risk losing competitive ground, facing regulatory scrutiny, and damaging their reputation in the eyes of socially conscious consumers and investors. B. Kim & Lee (2020) argue that investments in sustainability, whether material (core to the business) or immaterial (social or peripheral activities), directly impact company performance.

Sustainability also plays a crucial role in risk management. Calderon-Monge et al., (2017) highlight that economic sustainability is a key factor for franchise survival, noting that sustainable growth strategies lead to more stable and profitable systems. As franchise networks expand globally, ensuring that operations are sustainable in both environmental and economic terms become vital to their long-term success. This is particularly important in a globalized economy where brands must maintain consistency across markets while also adapting to local sustainability challenges.

Figure 2

Core elements of Corporate Sustainability, based on (Calderon-Monge et al., 2017; Hart & Milstein, 2003; Kolk, 2016; Sharma & Lee, 2012)



1.2.1.1 Tying of Corporate Sustainability and CSR

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is closely related to corporate sustainability but is more limited in scope. CSR traditionally refers to voluntary efforts by companies to address environmental, social, and ethical issues, often through philanthropy, community involvement, or efforts to go beyond compliance (Kolk, 2016). Corporate sustainability integrates these efforts directly into core business strategy, making them part of the long-term value creation process.

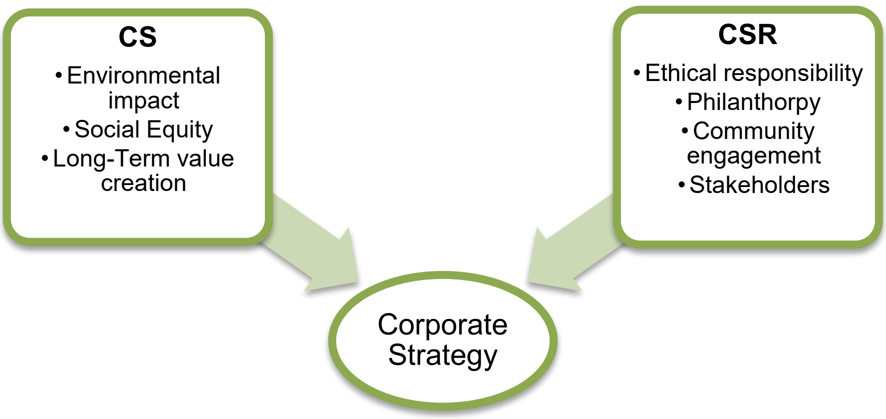
As Hart & Milstein (2003) argue, sustainability involves integrating these efforts into a company's operations, ensuring that CSR initiatives are not merely peripheral activities but critical components of achieving competitive advantage. The difference is noted by Sheehy & Farneti (2021), laying their scope and approach: CSR is defined as self-regulation by companies, linked to international law and soft regulations, and focused on the ethical behavior of companies in relation to stakeholders; it applies specifically to business activities and is linked to moral and legal responsibilities within business operations. Corporate sustainability is seen more as an organizational policy that does not directly address broader systemic issues beyond individual business operations, as it can be applied to a variety of actors or activities without implying any direct responsibility.

In practice, CSR and sustainability intersect in that they both address stakeholder concerns related to environmental and social performance. Halme et al. (2020) caution that companies should avoid "decoupling" CSR from current results. Decoupling occurs when companies promote CSR for reputational purposes but fail to make significant progress toward sustainability goals. Instead, CSR should be leveraged as part of a broader sustainability strategy that delivers tangible benefits across environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

In the context of franchising, Jang & Park (2019)suggest that CSR plays a critical role in ensuring the sustainability of the franchisor-franchisee relationship. Franchisors must establish a clear framework for sustainability, while franchisees, who often operate with significant autonomy, must tailor these strategies to their local markets. The decentralized nature of franchising can both challenge and enable effective CSR, as franchisees can tailor sustainability efforts to meet local needs, while maintaining alignment with broader corporate sustainability goals.

Figure 3

Tying of Corporate Sustainability and CSR, based on (Jang & Park, 2019; Kolk, 2016; Sharma & Lee, 2012; Sheehy & Farneti, 2021)



1.2.1.2 Linkage between Corporate Sustainability in International Business and Franchising

In international business, sustainability is essential to maintain competitiveness in a rapidly evolving global marketplace. Kolk (2016) emphasizes that multinational corporations must integrate sustainability into their operations to meet global consumer expectations, comply with diverse regulatory frameworks, and address growing concerns about environmental and social impacts. Global sustainability frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (*THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development*, n.d.), encourage companies to align their operations with broader environmental and social goals, which have become increasingly important for global competitiveness.

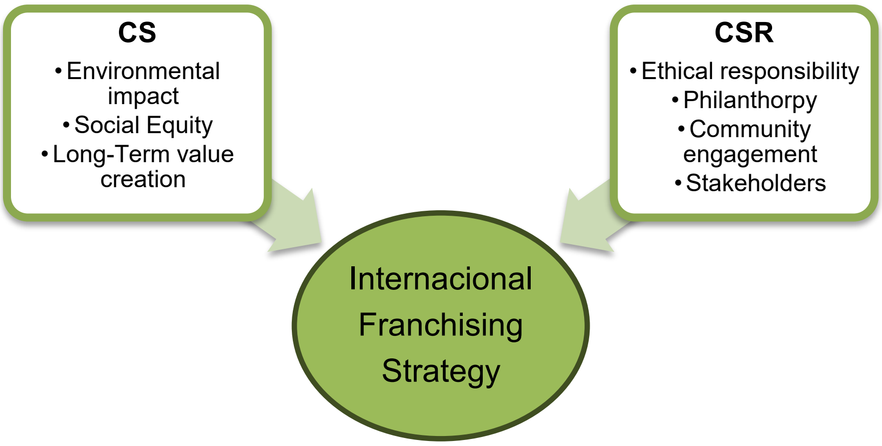
Franchising presents unique challenges and opportunities in the pursuit of corporate sustainability, as franchisors must develop global sustainability strategies that can be adapted to local contexts, and they must ensure that sustainability efforts resonate with diverse stakeholder groups. Jang & Park (2019)suggest that the sustainability of the franchisor-franchisee relationship is key to ensuring that sustainability practices are effectively implemented at the local level, given the decentralized nature of the business model.

Hart & Milstein (2003) offer a framework to explain how sustainability can generate competitive advantage in global markets. They argue that sustainability is not just a risk management tool, but a driver of innovation and market leadership. Franchisors that embrace sustainability can differentiate their brands, enhance their global reputation, and open new markets, particularly in regions where environmental and social considerations are paramount. For example, Hart & Milstein (2003) also emphasizes opportunities at the base of the economic pyramid, where sustainable business models can meet the needs of underserved populations while creating profitable growth opportunities. Franchise networks could leverage these opportunities to sustainably expand into developing markets, contributing to poverty reduction and local economic development.

This relationship is central to this study because it helps explore how franchises, as part of the larger international business ecosystem, can drive sustainability by ensuring that CSR initiatives are globally consistent and locally relevant, ensuring long-term success and resilience in diverse markets.

Figure 4

Interconnection between Franchising, Corporate Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility, based on (Jang & Park, 2019; Kolk, 2016; Sharma & Lee, 2012; Sheehy & Farneti, 2021)



In this study, Corporate Sustainability will be understood as a business approach that integrates environmental, social, and governance considerations into core strategies to create long-term value for both the company and its stakeholders (Hart & Milstein, 2003). In international business and franchising, this requires sustainability strategies that adapt to local markets while maintaining global standards (Kolk, 2016; Sharma & Lee, 2012, 2012).

Corporate sustainability includes CSR within its framework, embedding CSR into core operations to balance economic, environmental, and social goals (Hart & Milstein, 2003). While CSR is often seen as peripheral or focused on stakeholder expectations, integrating it into sustainability ensures it addresses larger systemic issues, such as climate change and inequality, while supporting business goals (Kolk, 2016).

In franchising, corporate sustainability integrates CSR as a strategic objective, ensuring shared value across networks, with franchisors and franchisees collaborating to adapt CSR practices locally while maintaining global alignment (Jang & Park, 2019; Sharma & Lee, 2012). Given CSR's critical role in operationalizing sustainability, it is now essential to explore the concept in greater detail, including its evolution, dimensions, and its impact on sustainable practices in global business.

1.2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has come a long way, transitioning from a secondary consideration to a pivotal element in companies' strategic planning worldwide. In today's context, CSR involves businesses acknowledging their impact on society and the environment, going beyond mere profit-making to encompass ethical practices, economic development, environmental care, and community welfare (Carroll, 2021).

The contemporary significance of CSR is evident in its integration into the core functions of many corporations, moving beyond earlier views that mainly focused on philanthropy. An examples is the concept of Creating Shared Value (CSV) by Porter and Kramer, which emphasizes that addressing societal challenges can lead to economic success, highlighting the interplay between competitive advantage and social responsibility (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Likewise, strategic CSR emphasizes aligning CSR efforts with business objectives, showcasing how it not only benefits society but also boosts corporate performance. For example, the research of Barnett et al. (2020) indicates a positive correlation between robust CSR practices and improved financial performance, stronger stakeholder relationships, and a more competitive market position. Moreover, CSR goes beyond business impact to tackle broader societal issues. Companies are increasingly seen as partners in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with CSR initiatives playing a vital role in fulfilling these global commitments (Carroll, 2021).

The subsequent sections of this chapter will delve deeper into the evolution and modern definitions of CSR, exploring Carroll's historical insights, Dahlsrud's framework on the diverse dimensions of CSR, and the integration of CSR with broader business concepts. The chapter will also touch on the current impact and relevance of CSR in today's global business landscape. Later on, it will be explored the variety of CSR practices and strategies across different industries, illustrating how various sectors tailor CSR uniquely to their operational contexts and industry-specific challenges. This comprehensive examination lays a foundation for understanding the multifaceted nature of CSR and its pivotal role in contemporary business.

1.2.2.1 Evolution of the concept of CSR and contemporary definitions

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has come a long way from its beginnings, reflecting changes in how society views businesses and their responsibilities. Initially, CSR was mostly about giving back through charity, but now it covers a wide range of social, ethical, and environmental considerations in how businesses operate. Understanding the history, the related frameworks and concepts, as well as the current impact of CSR help to see how it has adapted to meet global challenges and opportunities.

Carroll's Historical Perspective on CSR

A pivotal figure in the study and development of CSR, Archie Carroll, has been instrumental in shaping the understanding of this field. Carroll is best known for his seminal work in CSR, particularly through his authorship and co-authorship of influential books. His contributions to the field extend to over 100 articles and more than 20 books, underscoring his profound impact on business ethics, corporate social responsibility, and related disciplines. Carroll's research interests span across business ethics, corporate social performance, stakeholder management, strategic management, sustainability, and nonprofit governance & management. His work has not only enhanced academic understanding but has also provided practical frameworks for businesses to integrate CSR into their core strategies, emphasizing the importance of aligning economic goals with societal expectations (Terry College of Business, 2024).

According to Carroll (2021), the concept of CSR dates to the early 20th century, but it wasn't until after World War II that it gained widespread attention. He explained that early pioneers like Bowen, in 1953, laid the groundwork for CSR by highlighting the need for businesses to consider societal values and objectives, not just profits. Over the years, CSR evolved from a simple act of charity in the 1950s to a more comprehensive business practice in the 1960s, incorporating ethical, legal, and environmental aspects.

The 1970s marked a turning point for CSR, with a growing focus on environmental issues, civil rights, and labor relations. Concepts like Corporate Social Responsiveness (CSR2) emerged, stressing the importance of businesses being proactive in addressing social concerns. This era also saw the rise of Corporate Social Performance (CSP) models, providing a framework for evaluating the social impacts of business activities (Carroll, 2021).

By the 1980s, CSR had become a significant topic in academic and business circles, thanks in part to stakeholder theory introduced by Freeman in 1984. This theory expanded the discussion on CSR by emphasizing the need for businesses to consider the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders, linking CSR closely with strategic. The 1990s saw further diversification of CSR into areas like corporate citizenship, sustainability, and business ethics, reflecting a broader understanding of CSR as encompassing various aspects of business conduct. As we entered the 21st century, CSR became a global phenomenon, shaped by globalization and the expanding role of multinational corporations in diverse economies (Carroll, 2021).

This overview of the historical evolution of CSR shows the transformation of the concept from a peripheral concern to a central element of strategic management, highlighting the interconnectedness between businesses and society. Within, this evolution underscores the idea that business success is increasingly tied to societal well-being (Carroll, 2021).

Dahlsrud's Dimensions of CSR

In today's business landscape, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is characterized by a dynamic interplay of economic, social, and environmental objectives. The current definitions and frameworks of CSR reflect a holistic approach where ethical behavior, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable practices are not just add-ons to business strategies but are fundamental to the organization's mission and values. These frameworks assist companies in navigating the complex terrain of modern business operations, ensuring accountability not only to shareholders but to a diverse range of stakeholders crucial for sustained business success.

One notable framework, presented by Andreas Dahlsrud in 2008 in his study "How Corporate Social Responsibility is Defined: An Analysis of 37 Definitions," aims to shed light on global perceptions and implementations of CSR by dissecting and categorizing its definitions into manageable dimensions (Dahlsrud, 2008). Rather than advocating for a singular definition of CSR, Dahlsrud's work delves into the intricate and multifaceted nature of CSR, categorizing it into five distinct dimensions. This analytical approach acknowledges the diverse interpretations and applications of CSR across different business, cultural, and societal contexts (Dahlsrud, 2008).

This framework not only enriches theoretical understanding of CSR but also provides practical guidance for businesses to develop responsive CSR practices tailored to their specific objectives and aspirations. It pushes the boundaries of how CSR is conceptualized and implemented in the contemporary business environment, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable approach to corporate responsibility.

Figure 5

CSR Dimensions, based on (Dahlsrud, 2008).

Stakeholder Dimension

- Emphasizes significance of considering all stakeholders impacted by a company's activities, including shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, and the wider community.
- Underscores responsibility of businesses to manage these relationships ethically and responsibly.

Social Dimension

- Focuses on a company's contributions to societal well-being beyond its economic pursuits.
- Encompasses initiatives aimed at enhancing community welfare, such as supporting education, healthcare, and local development projects.

Economic Dimension

- Involves integrating social and environmental concerns into the company's economic decisions.
- Stresses that CSR should complement, rather than detract from, a firm's economic performance, advocating for initiatives that benefit both society and the company's financial bottom line.

Voluntariness Dimension

- Highlights actions taken by companies that go beyond legal mandates.
- Underscores CSR as encompassing voluntary efforts by companies to exceed statutory requirements for social and environmental gains.

Environmental Dimension

- Addresses environmental impact of a company's operations, including efforts to minimize environmental footprints, optimize resource utilization
- Adopts sustainable practices for the preservation of the planet for future generations.

Current Impact and Relevance

The contemporary relevance of CSR is rooted in its ability to address critical global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and social justice. Businesses are increasingly expected to go beyond profit-making to contribute positively to society. The rise of the conscious consumer, who prefers to engage with brands that demonstrate social responsibility, has made CSR a business imperative rather than an optional add-on. As an example, companies th.at invest in robust CSR practices are likely to experience benefits including enhanced brand loyalty, improved employee satisfaction, and greater innovation capacity (Carroll, 2021)

One of the significant impacts of CSR in today's business practices is its focus on environmental sustainability (Dahlsrud, 2008). Companies are under increasing pressure from consumers, investors, and governments to reduce their carbon footprints, manage resource use efficiently, and minimize environmental degradation. The shift towards sustainable business practices is not only about mitigating negative impacts but also about creating positive environmental value through innovative approaches to business operations and supply chain management (Carroll, 2021).

From what has been described above, it can be deduced that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) significantly influences social dimensions by enhancing community engagement, improving labor practices, and fostering equitable growth. Companies are actively participating in CSR activities that support better healthcare, education, community development, and empowerment of vulnerable groups (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). These endeavors not only contribute to social welfare but also strengthen the social capital of the organization, cultivating strong community ties that can result in a loyal and supportive customer base. Prioritizing CSR practices that positively impact society allows businesses to create enduring value (Siltaloppi et al., 2021) for both their communities and their own long-term sustainability.

In addition, the linkage between CSR and financial performance has been a topic of much debate and research. Recent studies suggest that there is a positive relationship between effective CSR practices and financial performance (Barnett et al., 2020). This relationship is mediated by factors such as improved risk management, enhanced brand value, and increased competitive advantage. Companies with strong CSR commitments often enjoy better access to capital, lower costs, and higher profitability.

Looking to the future, CSR is expected to become even more integrated into the core strategic frameworks of businesses. The concept of 'strategic CSR' will likely dominate, where CSR is not just reactive or compliance-driven but is an essential part of strategic planning that aligns with business goals (Porter & Kramer, 2011). The future of CSR will also see greater emphasis on creating shared value (CSV), where companies will design their business models to include social progress as a core objective, thereby not just doing "good," but doing "well" by doing "good."

In reflecting on the future of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the context of franchising, it becomes evident that there are challenges ahead. These challenges include the call for stricter and more transparent reporting standards, as well as the necessity to align CSR initiatives with global sustainability objectives. Despite these obstacles, they also signify opportunities for innovation and leadership in the realm of CSR. Companies that can adeptly navigate these challenges stand poised to establish fresh benchmarks for corporate behavior and pave the way for a more sustainable and fair global economy.

1.2.2.2 Variety of CSR practices and strategies across industries

The range of CSR practices and strategies across industries reflects the specific challenges and opportunities each sector faces. By aligning CSR initiatives with industry-specific issues and integrating them into core business functions, companies can effectively contribute to sustainable development while meeting the evolving expectations of their stakeholders.

While CSR practices vary widely across industries, there is a movement towards integrating these efforts into core business strategies and aligning them with global sustainability standards. This integration not only helps companies manage risk and foster innovation but also enhances their competitiveness and reputation in the global market. Moreover, industries are increasingly adopting international CSR standards and frameworks, such as the Global Reporting Initiative or the Sustainable Development Goals, to standardize practices and improve transparency (Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017).

Particularly in the franchising industry, CSR implementation showcases how standardized practices can adapt to the structural nuances of various business models, maintaining both consistency and integrity in social responsibilities across extensive networks.

Franchising, as a business model, uniquely leverages the franchisor’s influence to enforce CSR policies across disparate franchisees. This centralized control is crucial for ensuring that each unit upholds the brand’s CSR commitments uniformly, irrespective of geographical location. According to Le Bot et al. (2022), franchisors play a pivotal role in shaping the CSR agenda for their networks, thereby ensuring consistent application of these practices that enhances the brand's reputation and its effectiveness in achieving CSR goals.

Figure 6

CSR strategies across industries, based on (Fatima & Elbanna, 2023; M. S. Kim, 2018; Kolk, 2016; Kuzey et al., 2021; Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017; Siltaloppi et al., 2021)

Financial Sector

1. Ethical practices, transparency, and risk management
2. Financial literacy, inclusive financing
3. Sustainable investment in social and environmental projects
4. Reference: Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017

Technology and Telecommunications

1. Innovation in sustainable technology, data privacy
2. Digital inclusion
3. Reducing electronic waste, improving energy efficiency in data centers
4. Reference: Kim, 2018

Retail

1. Sustainable sourcing, reducing packaging waste
2. Energy-efficient operations
3. Commitment to local development, transparency in the supply chain
4. Reference: Kolk, 2016

Manufacturing

1. Improving labor practices, workplace safety
2. Greener production processes, reducing environmental impact
3. Community development
4. Reference: Siltaloppi et al., 2021

Hospitality and Tourism

1. Sustainable management of energy, water, and waste
2. Preserving cultural heritage, promoting eco-tourism
3. Community involvement, equitable treatment of employees
4. Reference: Kuzey et al., 2021

Healthcare

1. Improving access to medical care, supporting community health outreach
2. Responsible research and development
3. Focusing on ethics related to patient rights and data security
4. Reference: Fatima & Elbanna, 2023

However, the concept of social franchising brings a further dimension to CSR in franchising by integrating traditional business objectives with explicit social aims. Naatu & Alon (2019) explore this aspect extensively, noting that social franchising models are designed to balance economic and social value creation, which makes them particularly effective in industries where social impact is as crucial as financial performance. These models not only aim to achieve commercial success but also seek to address specific social needs, thus broadening the scope of CSR within the franchising sector.

The structured nature of franchising as a potent method for embedding CSR into business operations across different locations is essential for maintaining consistency in CSR practices, which is a significant challenge in the decentralized operations typical of many franchising networks, as Farooq et al. (2020) explained. Likewise, the complexities involved in sustaining CSR practices over time within franchising networks can decay unless there is continual reinforcement and innovation in CSR strategies, as Lawrence et al. (2024) exposes, and emphasizes the need for ongoing adaptability and responsiveness to keep CSR practices effective and aligned with broader societal values.

These industry-specific approaches highlight the dynamic interplay between economic objectives and social responsibilities, shaping how companies across sectors engage with their stakeholders and contribute to the wider community. The adaptability of CSR practices across industries underscores the evolving nature of CSR as it becomes increasingly integrated into strategic business frameworks.

1.3 Further Theories

Stakeholder theory and Agency theory offer important insights into franchise networks and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as they provide the basis for understanding how franchisors and franchisees can collaborate on CSR practices that align with local and global goals. This chapter will explore how these theories, when combined, can create a robust framework for implementing CSR in franchising.

Stakeholder theory ensures that CSR practices address the diverse needs of all stakeholders by encouraging the participation of various groups, such as customers, employees, franchisees, and communities, whose interests are affected by franchise operations. This approach promotes collaboration between franchisors and franchisees to co-create CSR initiatives that are locally relevant and ethically sound.

Meanwhile, agency theory provides the necessary governance mechanisms, such as contracts, monitoring, and incentives, to ensure that these CSR practices are effectively implemented across the franchise network.

This combination allows this research to seek global consistency in CSR goals and flexibility for franchisees to tailor initiatives to different local markets in their international business.

1.3.1 Stakeholder Theory and Its Relation to Franchising and CSR

Stakeholder Theory challenges the traditional shareholder-centric view of business strategy by expanding it to encompass a broader range of stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers, shareholders, and the community ((Freeman & Mcvea, 2001; Parmar et al., 2010). This theory emphasizes the importance of engaging all stakeholders, rather than focusing solely on shareholder value, to create long-term, sustainable business success.

In the context of franchising, Stakeholder Theory is particularly relevant because franchising networks inherently involve a diverse group of stakeholders, in these cases indeed international, even with very different cultural backgrounds. Franchisors and franchisees have distinct, yet interconnected roles, and their success is interdependent on how well they manage relationships with local communities, customers, employees, and suppliers (Freeman & Mcvea, 2001). For example, CSR practices within franchises are especially crucial, as these initiatives must address not just the expectations of shareholders but also the social and environmental concerns of the communities in which franchises operate.

In the franchising model, the integration of Stakeholder Theory enhances the ability of franchisors to engage local franchisees in the development and execution of CSR policies. This theory emphasizes that stakeholders' interests must be at the forefront of decision-making processes, particularly when it comes to balancing social responsibilities with profitability (Parmar et al., 2010). For example, franchises may face varying expectations regarding labor practices, environmental policies, and community engagement, and aligning these with stakeholder interests is key to long-term sustainability (Raha & Hajdini, 2023).

The decentralized nature of franchising networks, where franchisees often operate independently within a global brand structure, necessitates a broader strategic approach (Windsperger, 2004). Franchisors, guided by Stakeholder Theory, must balance the different needs and expectations of local franchisees and other stakeholders, integrating them into their decision-making processes to ensure consistency with global CSR objectives. This balance is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the brand while allowing flexibility to adapt to local conditions (Freeman & Mcvea, 2001).

Furthermore, Stakeholder Theory's ethical dimension (Hart & Milstein, 2003) intersects with CSR by proposing that businesses have a moral obligation to mitigate the negative impacts of their operations on all stakeholders, which provide them a sustainable value. This is particularly pertinent in franchising, where franchisees' localized operations can have significant social and environmental effects (Parmar et al., 2010). Thus, Stakeholder Theory provides a framework for understanding CSR as an ethical imperative and the opportunity to create sustainable value, not just a strategic tool for enhancing brand reputation or profitability (Hart & Milstein, 2003).

1.3.2 Agency theory and its role in franchising and CSR

Agency theory focuses on conflicts of interest that arise in the principal-agent relationship, in this case between franchisors (principals) and franchisees (agents). The theory examines how governance mechanisms, such as contracts, incentives, and monitoring systems, can help align the goals of both parties, particularly when there is a divergence of interests (Eisenhardt, 1989). In franchising, agency theory is central to understanding the governance challenges involved in ensuring that franchisees adhere to the franchisor's corporate policies, including CSR standards. Hill & Jones (1992) highlight that effective contracts and incentive structures are essential to mitigate agency problems, such as when franchisees prioritize short-term profits over long-term CSR goals.

By applying agency theory, franchisors can design contractual frameworks that specify franchisees' CSR obligations, ensuring that local operations align with the franchisor's overall sustainability goals. Monitoring mechanisms, such as regular audits and performance evaluations, can be used to enforce these agreements, while incentive systems, such as fee reductions or marketing support, can motivate franchisees to actively adopt CSR initiatives (Raha & Hajdini, 2023).

This governance approach is essential to address the autonomy that franchisees often enjoy, which can create challenges in maintaining consistent CSR practices across diverse markets. Agency theory therefore helps franchisees monitor their behavior without stifling their entrepreneurial spirit, ensuring that CSR practices are not only imposed from above but are also adopted by franchisees as part of their business strategy (Hill & Jones, 1992).

1.3.3 Integration of Stakeholder and Agency Theories

As mentioned above, the integration of stakeholder theory and agency theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how franchisors can manage both the governance and relational aspects of their franchise networks, particularly as it relates to implementing CSR in international business. While agency theory focuses on creating mechanisms to control and incentivize franchisees (Eisenhardt, 1989), stakeholder theory expands this perspective by emphasizing the importance of involving a broader range of relevant parties.

In franchising, this integration is relevant to balance control with collaboration. Agency theory ensures that franchisees adhere to corporate CSR guidelines through contracts and monitoring, while stakeholder theory emphasizes the need for franchisees to involve franchisees, local communities, and other stakeholders in the CSR process. This balance allows franchisors to implement CSR policies that are effective and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders, creating a more sustainable and ethical business model (Hill & Jones, 1992; Parmar et al., 2010)

By applying both theories, franchisors can develop governance structures that encourage franchisees to take responsibility for CSR initiatives, while maintaining the consistency and control needed to protect brand reputation. This dual approach enhances trust and cooperation across the franchise network, fostering a more collaborative environment for CSR implementation (Raha & Hajdini, 2023).

1.3.4 Application of the Theories in Franchising

The practical application of these theories in franchising involves creating a governance system that integrates Agency Theory's focus on control with Stakeholder Theory's emphasis on engagement. These theories offer two key perspectives: control and engagement, which are critical for understanding how CSR practices are implemented and managed in franchise networks. By focusing on control (derived from Agency Theory) and engagement (from Stakeholder Theory), the analysis will cover a wide range of relevant aspects. These two categories will guide the examination of literature, ensuring that the analysis captures the full complexity of CSR practices within franchising models.

Franchisors can use Agency Theory to design contracts that clearly outline CSR obligations (Hill & Jones, 1992), while Stakeholder Theory encourages them to involve franchisees in the development of these CSR policies, ensuring that they are relevant and effective at the local level (Parmar et al., 2010).

For example, franchisees, with their in-depth knowledge of local markets, can help tailor CSR initiatives to meet the specific needs and expectations of their communities. Stakeholder engagement would ensure that CSR practices are not only implemented but also resonate with local stakeholders, enhancing the franchise's brand reputation and community impact (Freeman & Mcvea, 2001).

Franchisors can also use Agency Theory to provide franchisees with the tools and incentives necessary to implement CSR effectively. This may include training programs, marketing support, or financial incentives that reward franchisees for meeting CSR targets. By combining these theories, franchisors can create a more cohesive and effective CSR strategy that aligns with both global standards and local conditions (Hill & Jones, 1992).

1.3.5 Application of the Theories in CSR Implementation

Seeing that in the complex domain of franchising, the infusion of CSR practices marks a critical evolution towards sustainable and principled business operations. In the specific context of CSR implementation, the integration of these theories becomes even more crucial. Stakeholder Theory, as detailed by (Parmar et al., 2010), underscores the importance of engaging a diverse array of stakeholders within the strategic management process. This theory posits that CSR initiatives should be deeply rooted within the core business strategies, advocating for a holistic engagement strategy that encompasses all stakeholders impacted by CSR endeavors, ensuring that CSR practices align with both the company's ethical and sustainability goals and the broader interests of stakeholders, a critical element for the ethical foundation and long-term viability of franchising operations (Freeman & Mcvea, 2001).

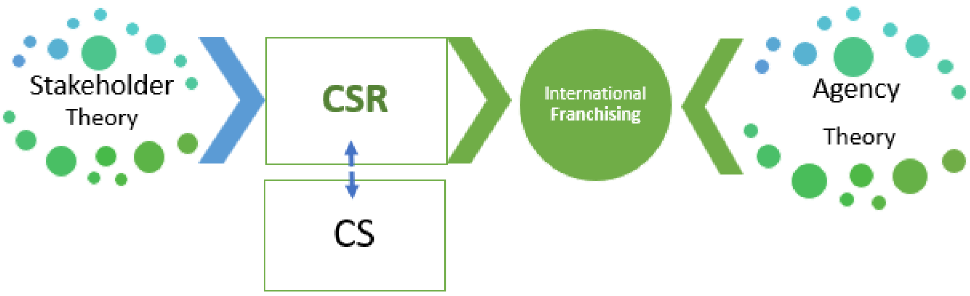
Hart and Milstein’s (2003) framework on Sustainability value emphasizes the importance of incorporating stakeholders’ voices into every aspect of the lifecycle to minimize environmental impacts and improve corporate legitimacy. For franchises, responsible management involves reducing environmental footprints and strengthening customer trust while enhancing brand image. Therefore, the need for stakeholder collaboration to achieve sustainability goals is a challenge and a goal. In franchising, this collaboration is critical for ensuring that CSR practices are not only adopted but also tailored to fit local market conditions. Franchisors must lead the charge by providing overarching CSR strategies, but franchisees, suppliers, and even customers need to be active participants in these initiatives to ensure success (Hart & Milstein, 2003).

The fusing of Agency Theory sheds light on the unique dynamics within franchising systems, particularly concerning CSR. (Raha & Hajdini, 2023) explore the challenges and opportunities presented by the inherent principal-agent relationship in franchising, emphasizing the need for a delicate balance to align franchisors' strategic objectives with franchisees' operational priorities in CSR engagement and implementation.

Achieving this balance often requires contractual frameworks that both mandate and incentivize franchisees towards adopting and championing CSR initiatives, ensuring a cohesive commitment to CSR across the network.

Figure 7

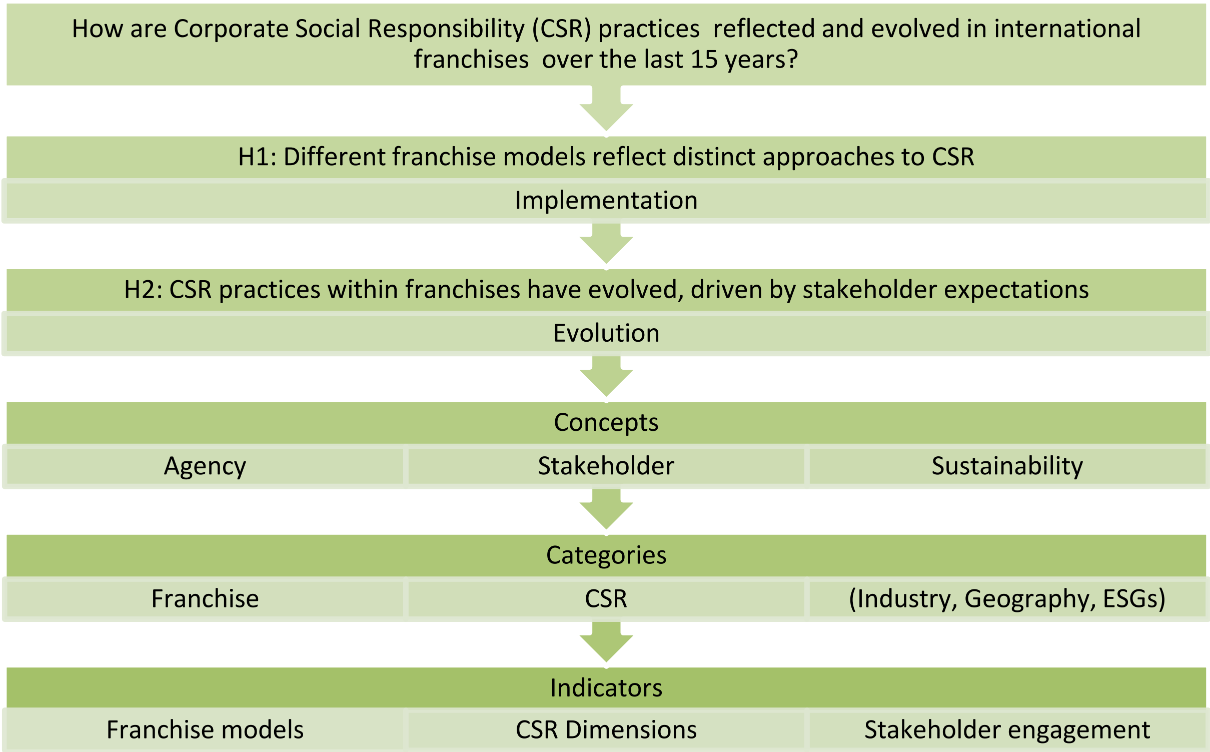
Overview of the theoretical background, adapted from multiple sources mentioned in this chapter.



This collaborative approach ensures that CSR initiatives are locally relevant and globally consistent, providing a framework for franchisors to implement CSR across diverse markets while maintaining alignment with corporate values (Hart & Milstein, 2003; Parmar et al., 2010).

Figure 8

Theoretical Framework for the Analytical Pathway for CSR Practices in International Franchises, adapted from the structure proposed for this thesis and the multiple sources cited in this chapter.



2. Methodology: Literature Review on CSR and Franchising

The theoretical framework of this thesis has explored the concepts of franchising and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as well as the intersection of these two domains within the context of international business. To do so, it has delved into related concepts such as Corporate Sustainability, models and dimensions. Through the perspectives of Stakeholder Theory and Agency Theory, a foundation has been established for understanding the dynamics between the adoption and performance of CSR by franchisors and franchisees. This theoretical exploration emphasized the strategic importance of CSR in franchise models, where the decentralized nature of operations poses both opportunities and challenges for a consistent and effective implementation of CSR. Thanks to these theories, indicators, categories, and other elements that are useful in the examination of the literature can be abstracted.

The methodological chapter will now embark on a **semi-systematic bibliographic review** to synthesize the current state of research on CSR and franchising. Literature reviews, provide a solid foundation for generating new knowledge by integrating findings from multiple empirical studies and identifying gaps in the existing literature (Paul et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019). This approach is particularly suited to exploring interdisciplinary topics such as CSR and franchising, where several frameworks and empirical data intersect. A non-probabilistic sampling approach, specifically purposive sampling, was employed to select articles that provide analytical value to the research. This approach is common in qualitative literature reviews and allows for the selection of studies that explore key topics in CSR and franchise models in depth (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021) .

In the growing International Business research field, systematic literature reviews have great value, yet there are not many reviews published describing how researchers can design and develop classic review articles (Paul & Criado, 2020). In the development of this thesis, the use of a semi-systematic literature review has been determined because, as Snyder (2019) highlights, the importance of literature reviews as a methodology allow to synthesize and organize findings from multiple studies, thus provide a global perspective on a specific topic.

In particular, the semi-systematic review is suitable for broad, multidisciplinary topics that have used various theoretical perspectives, such as the case of this thesis, which examines both theoretical and practical aspects of CSR in the context of franchising. This method has been chosen to map theoretical and practical approaches to CSR in franchising, providing a comprehensive view of how this relationship has been studied in different contexts over the last 15 years. In turn, it is expected to identify gaps in existing literature, that is, areas where knowledge is still limited or contradictory, which will allow establishing an agenda for future research.

The decision regarding the time span of a literature review varies significantly across studies. Covering a minimum of 10 years is essential for ensuring sufficient scope and capturing meaningful trends in a systematic literature (Paul & Criado, 2020). For this study, a 15-year period strikes an ideal balance between comprehensiveness and relevance, allowing for the capture of recent trends in franchising and CSR while maintaining focus on the most pertinent developments in international business.

To carry out this assessment, the more structured approach to literature reviews by Paul et al. (2021), known as **SPAR-4-SLR** (Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews), will be followed. This protocol is useful to ensure that the review is carried out in a systematic, rigorous and transparent manner, guaranteeing that the decisions taken in the review process are well justified and documented. Applying Paul's approach to this thesis will allow, on the one hand, to rigorously justify decisions in the selection of articles, establishing clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as studies published in the last 15 years, which explore the relationship between franchising and CSR.

On the other hand, it will help ensure a critical evaluation of the literature, classifying the studies based on their theoretical, methodological and practical contributions to identify patterns, emerging themes and solid evidence supporting the proposed hypotheses. Furthermore, it is intended to develop a future research agenda, as suggested by Paul, based on the gaps identified, ensuring that this thesis not only synthesizes existing knowledge, but also contributes to advancing the field of study and providing managerial support.

Using **Web of Science (WoS)** for this semi-structured literature review is suitable due to its comprehensive coverage of high-quality, peer-reviewed journals across relevant disciplines, advanced search capabilities, robust citation analysis tools, and stringent inclusion criteria, ensuring reliable and impactful sources. These features support precise and refined searches, aiding in a thorough and credible review of the interplay between CSR and franchising in international business (Clarivate, n.d.). Another criterion for selecting this database is its many possibilities of export options, allowing it to easily export citation data into various formats compatible with reference management tools. This feature is more advanced compared to Google Scholar and often more user-friendly than Scopus, enhancing the efficiency of the literature review process (Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). While Scopus includes more conference papers, its subscription cost can be higher, and its export functionalities are comparable to Web of Science. Google Scholar, while free and broad in coverage, includes non-peer-reviewed content, which can reduce the reliability of the sources, and it lacks efficient export features for managing large-scale academic research.

The research will also offer a **bibliometric overview** worked with **VOSviewer (VOS)** of the research conducted in both fields during this period and, second, investigate how franchise models have influenced CSR practices in international business over time. The bibliometric approach examines the scientific perspective of studies in the field of CSR and franchising to identify common areas and discover possible interrelationships between the two fields. Subsequently, a literature review of relevant CSR and franchising studies will provide an empirical perspective on how CSR practices, franchising structures, and the role of stakeholders have been related.

2.1 General overview of the results

2.1.1 Purpose and Benefits of Bibliometric Analysis

To provide an overview of the research intersecting CSR and franchising over the past 15 years, this thesis employs VOSviewer ("Visualization of Similarities") software. VOSviewer facilitates the visualization of bibliometric data and reveals correlations within the data (*VOSviewer*, n.d.). The software can import data from various sources and formats; for this thesis, the RIS format was utilized. VOSviewer's capability to handle large data sets makes it particularly effective for uncovering patterns and connections in scientific literature, thereby aiding the understanding of complex relationships within research fields. This thesis leverages that functionality to identify common topics under the CSR and Franchising keywords, offering a comprehensive overview of the research areas.

This bibliometric approach provides a valuable overview of relevant areas by analytically identifying overlapping topics. In this thesis, it is used to scope the existing research on CSR and franchising within the specified period, highlighting the primary research areas. This visualization aids in identifying potential areas of impact, observing research trends, and uncovering related topics.

One advantage of bibliometric analysis is its neutrality in evaluating scientific literature, which minimizes researcher bias by objectively examining various aspects of literature within a specific field. Bibliometric methods include citation analysis, co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, co-author analysis, and co-word analysis, with a focus on co-word analysis in this thesis (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

Bibliometrics can be subdivided into two areas: performance analysis and scientific mapping analysis (SMA) (Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). The latter is of particular interest in this thesis, as scientific mapping can evaluate any study with connections within the analyzed corpus. Unlike traditional literature reviews, scientific mapping focuses on broader patterns within the body of work. Thus, bibliometric approaches can encompass a vast scope, covering hundreds or even thousands of studies. Moreover, these methods can visually represent a research field and identify clusters of related areas (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

2.1.2 Data Extraction and Preparation Process

For the bibliometric analysis, the following steps were undertaken to systematically review the literature data on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Franchising, utilizing the Web of Science database. This process involved data extraction, refinement, and visualization using VOSviewer to identify key trends, themes, and relationships within the research domain. The process undertaken was:

- ✓ Accessing the Database: The bibliometric analysis began by accessing the Web of Science database through the university’s portal. This ensured access to a comprehensive collection of academic publications relevant to the research topic. Signing in to the Web of Science platform provided additional options for refining the search and managing the results, which is crucial for conducting detailed and accurate bibliometric analysis.
- ✓ Index date: 15-year span is based on balancing the need to capture both historical developments and current trends in the field.
- ✓ The range is from **2009-01-01 to 2024-05-01.**
- ✓ Query Formulation: Several attempts were made to identify the optimal search configuration to capture a high volume of relevant papers that included the core theoretical topics of the study. While some combinations initially generated many results,

closer examination revealed that many of these papers were not closely related to the research focus, as they did not encompass the core topics in depth. For example, an extensive yielded 2,672 results from the Web of Science Core Collection, with lot of unrelated articles. To address this issue, a decision was made to prioritize precision over volume, accepting a potentially lower number of results but with higher relevance.

The refined query was therefore narrowed down to the most essential search terms:

(

(AB=("Franchis*") OR (TI="Franchis*") OR (AK="Franchis*")) AND (AB=("Corporate Social Responsibility") OR TI=("Corporate Social Responsibility") OR AB=("CSR") OR AB=("Sustainab*") OR AB=("Corporate Social Performance") OR AB=("CSP") OR (TI="CSR") OR (AK="CSR"))

)

This refined search generated **178** results from the Web of Science Core Collection. Although this is a much smaller dataset, the specificity of the terms increases the likelihood that the resulting papers will genuinely address the relationship between franchising, CSR, and the theoretical framework (corporate sustainability, stakeholder and agency theories), aligning closely with the core objectives of this review.

While the number of relevant papers will likely decrease further after screening, this focused approach should result in a more accurate and cohesive body of literature for analysis. Ultimately, this refined search is expected to provide a more realistic and credible state-of-the-art review, enabling a deeper exploration of franchising's influence on CSR and its theoretical underpinnings.

- ✓ Exporting Data: Data was exported in RIS format, which is compatible with reference management software. The record Content included is Full record including author, title, source, abstract, keywords, addresses, cited references, and funding information.

2.1.3 WoS Research Areas and Year of Publication analysis results

To ensure a comprehensive and targeted analysis of the **178 publications**, selecting Web of Science (WoS) Research Areas and Year of Publication is a strategic decision.

The **Research Areas** chart highlights the interdisciplinary nature of franchising, CSR, and management studies, showing the fields that contribute most significantly to these topics. Meanwhile, **Year of Publication** allows us to see trends over the last 15 years, which can indicate periods of increased scholarly interest or shifts in focus, helping contextualize the development of these research areas, according to the results of this platform.

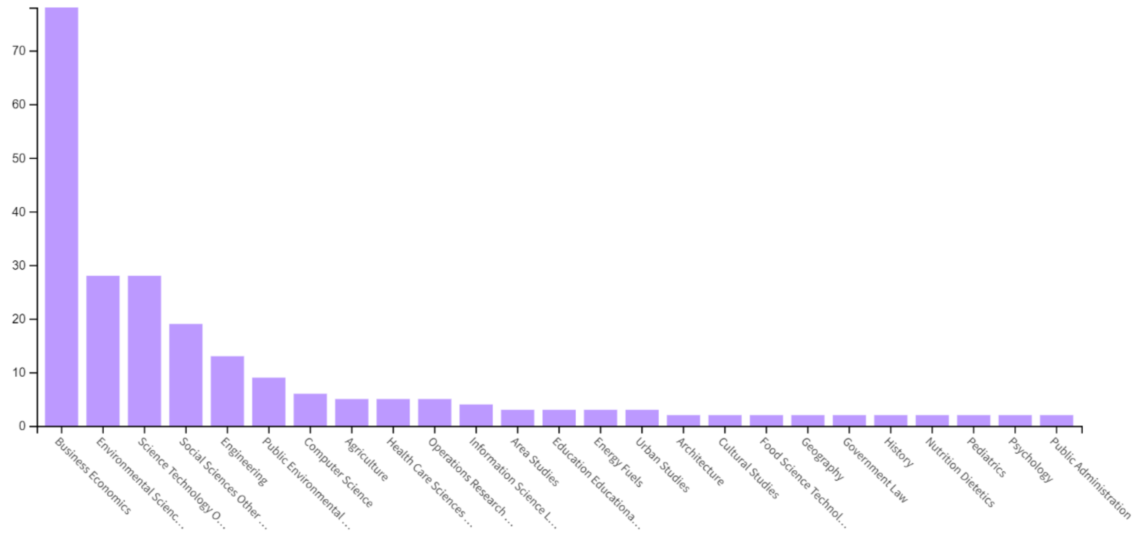
Web of Science (WoS) offers two visualization options for examining dataset categories: a bar chart and a tree map. While both display the main categories. WoS provides the visualization of 5, 10, 15, 20 and 25 results; the possibility of 25 has been chosen to obtain an overview of the largest amount of research areas and 15 since this is the number of years that are relevant to this work. The bar chart is preferable for this analysis as it clearly shows the frequency of publications by category, making it easier to compare the prominence of fields such as environmental sciences, business, and management. Since the goal is to effectively visualize the related literature, the bar chart provides a clearer and more informative view of the relative contributions across fields. WoS also provides with the entries analyzed, in this case 43.

WoS: Research areas

This bar chart shows a distribution of publications across various research fields, indicating the interdisciplinary nature of studies related to franchising, CSR and the related management theories. From there it is possible to see that:

Figure 9

Overview Research Areas in WoS (Clarivate, n.d.)



- The **Business Economics** category is by far the most prominent area, with over 70 publications. This figure is significantly higher than for other fields, indicating that franchising, CSR and sustainability are primarily discussed in the context of business strategies, economic implications and organizational impact. The dominance of this area reflects a business-centric approach to CSR and sustainability, which is likely to focus on how these practices affect franchise performance, financial results, customer loyalty and competitive advantage. The emphasis on Business Economics suggests that CSR in franchising is widely recognized for its strategic importance and is studied to achieve financial and reputational benefits. The paper "Franchising success: Insights from real estate brokerage" (Flint-Hartle & de Bruin, 2011) examines how franchising contributes to business success and competitive advantage and so provides insights into economic aspects and business dynamics, fitting into the trend of business and economics within franchising research. Some papers used in this work apply as examples in this field, as well (Farooq et al., 2020; Halme et al., 2020; Lawrence et al., 2024; Meiseberg & Ehrmann, 2012b; Oueslati et al., 2023).
- Both **Environmental Sciences** and **Science, Technology and Other Topics** are notably represented, each with around 30 publications. This presence highlights the growing focus on sustainability, especially as franchises aim to reduce their environmental

footprint and align with sustainable development goals. This trend indicates that research explores the environmental impact of franchising practices and the role of CSR in mitigating environmental damage, for example through waste reduction, energy efficiency and sustainable sourcing. "Integrating Environmental and Social Sustainability Into Performance Evaluation: A Balanced Scorecard-Based Grey-DANP Approach for the Food Industry" (Duman et al., 2018) is an article that applies a performance evaluation model that incorporates environmental and social sustainability metrics within the food franchise industry.

- **Social Sciences Other Topics** also has a significant presence, suggesting that these fields bring diverse perspectives to the table. Their inclusion suggests a broader societal focus on CSR and sustainability, potentially exploring topics such as consumer behavior, social responsibility and community impact. The article: “The Effect of Franchised Cafes’ Corporate Social Responsibility on Corporate Image and Behavioral Intention” (Cha & Jo, 2019), aligns with the growing interest in the impact of CSR on consumer behavior and brand image, especially within the food and beverage industry. "A qualitative exploration of the franchise establishment process: A case study analysis of Moana Pasifika and Fijian Drua" (Davies & Read, 2023) examines the social and operational challenges faced in establishing sports franchises in new regions, incorporating aspects of social impact and organizational engineering within sports management. This paper links with the next trend, “Engineering", which may focus on technical solutions for sustainable franchising practices, such as environmentally friendly materials, energy-efficient technologies or waste management systems. This reflects an interdisciplinary approach, recognizing that CSR in franchising involves not only ethical business practices but also technical innovations.
- **Public and environmental health**, **Computer science** and **Agriculture** are areas with moderate representation, with around 10-15 publications each. The presence of studies on “Public and Environmental Health” suggests a growing awareness of how franchising impacts public health, especially in industries such as food service, where CSR and sustainability practices directly impact consumer health and safety. “Computer Science” may indicate interest in technological tools for CSR, such as data analytics to track environmental impact or software solutions for sustainable supply chain management. “Agriculture” could be relevant to franchises that focus on sustainable sourcing,

especially food-related franchises that rely on agricultural products. An example is the article “Increasing egg availability through smallholder business models in East Africa and India” (Beesabathuni et al., 2018), which is part of the trend of environmental and social sustainability, especially as it relates to sustainable development through micro-franchise models and cooperative farming.

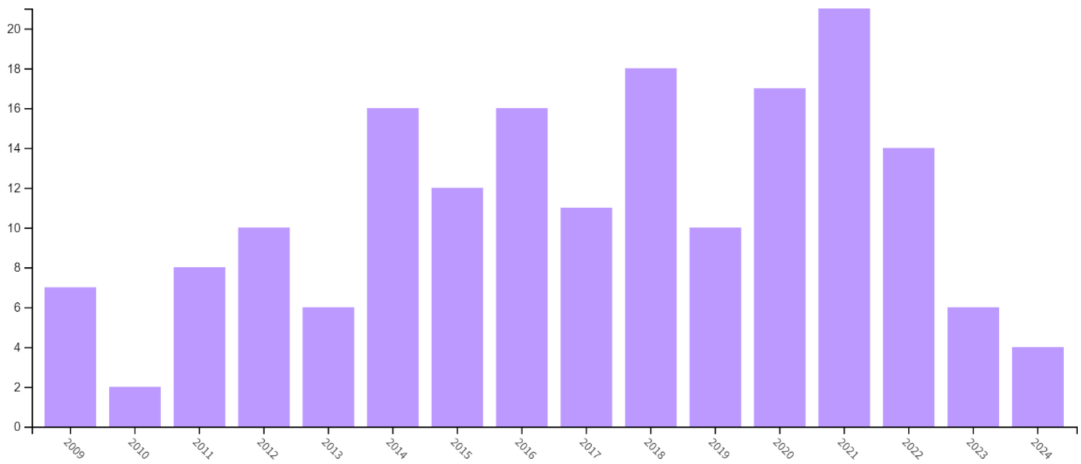
- Underrepresented areas such as **Operations Research**, **Information Science**, **Area Studies**, still provide insight as they can provide specialized perspectives on franchising and CSR. For example, “Operations Research” might explore efficiency improvements within franchise operations for better use of resources, while “Information Science” might focus on managing data related to sustainability. "Area Studies" might consider regional variations in CSR practices and how local contexts influence franchise sustainability efforts. An example of an specialized study is "Deconstructing the Franchise as a Legal Entity: Practice and Research in International Franchise Law" (Buchan, 2014), that discusses legal frameworks and challenges in international franchising, covering regulatory aspects and operational challenges.
- Fields with smaller representation, such as **Energy Fuels**, **Urban Studies**, **Architecture**, and **Health Care Sciences**, indicate emerging interests and suggest that CSR and sustainability in franchising are reaching even more specialized fields. For instance, "Urban Studies" and "Architecture" may explore sustainable design and operations in urban franchises, while "Energy Fuels" could focus on energy efficiency and alternative energy sources for franchise operations. "Health Care Sciences" might look at CSR in health-related franchises or wellness-oriented business models. An example here is "Corporate Social Responsibility in Drug Franchises" (Brooks et al., 2009), which explores the integration of CSR into pharmaceutical franchises, addressing ethical responsibilities, healthcare impacts, and social dimensions.

WoS: Publication years

This timeline suggests that CSR in franchising is a well-established area of research over the past 15 years, and that it continues to evolve, so it can be assumed that there are new studies every year that contribute to a deeper understanding of how franchises manage social and environmental responsibilities.

Figure 10

Overview Publication Years in WoS (Clarivate, n.d.)



The following trends reflect a dynamic field shaped by global trends and societal expectations, with sustained interest in CSR within franchising:

- **Initial growth (2009-2013)**: The number of publications shows a steady increase, with a notable drop in 2010. This period likely reflects the emerging academic interest in CSR and sustainability within the franchise sector. During these years, researchers began to explore how franchises could integrate CSR practices to align with evolving ethical and environmental expectations.
- **Fluctuations with steady peaks (2014-2018)**: Here publication volumes reached a higher baseline, with consistent results each year, peaking in 2015 and 2016. This reflects a sustained focus on CSR and sustainability within franchising research. During these years, CSR-related topics gained traction across industries, driven by consumer demand, regulatory changes, and global sustainability goals. Interest in understanding the role of CSR in franchise business strategy and economic outcomes appears to have driven much of this research.
- **Peak and renewed interest (2020-2021)**: A pronounced peak in publications is seen in 2020, followed by a slightly lower but still high volume in 2021. The peak in 2020 aligns with the COVID-19 pandemic, a period when there was a greater emphasis on CSR and

corporate responsibility. This increase in publications may reflect the role of the pandemic in reinforcing the importance of responsible business practices and prompting research that examined how franchises were adapting to these increased expectations.

- **Recent decline (2022-2024)**: After 2021, there is a notable decline in the number of publications, with 2022 and 2023 showing fewer publications, and a marked drop in 2024. That could indicate a shift in research focus or perhaps stabilization in the field after the intense focus during the pandemic years. This decline could also reflect the potential saturation of CSR topics in franchising or a reallocation of research resources to other emerging priorities in business and management research following the pandemic. Alternatively, it could suggest a period of consolidation as researchers digest and develop findings generated during peak years.

2.1.4 VOSviewer Research Areas and Year of Publication analysis results

After importing the .RIS data into VOS, the Thesaurus must be prepared and the information refined to perform the bibliometric analysis.

Data Preparation in VOSviewer

The merged RIS file (from WoS) was then prepared for analysis in VOSviewer:

- Read Data from Reference Manager Files: RIS format was chosen for data import.
- Type of Analysis and Counting Method: Co-occurrence analysis was selected, with keywords as the unit of analysis and full counting as the method. The fields to include are Title and abstract fields, ignoring structured abstract labels and copyright statements.
- Counting method: the selected one is full, supported by a VOS viewer Thesaurus File, which helps with the data cleaning. This file is essential for standardizing various notations of the same underlying construction to ensure consistency in the analysis. Specifically, all terms related to "franchising" were standardized to "franchise," and all terms related to "Corporate Social Responsibility" were standardized to "CSR". (Please see annex 1.)
- Terms meeting the threshold of the map: the minimum number of occurrences of a term is 5, which is a higher minimum for the dataset of 198 publications, to see the most

prominent themes (the occurrence number can be changed). This setting will likely filter out rate terms and capture central topics across franchising, CSR and related topics with sustainability and management. Within this setting, of 1016 keywords, 39 meet the threshold.

- Number of terms: For each of the 39 thresholds a relevance score is calculated. Based on this, the most relevant terms will be selected. As this research goal is to find trends and relationships, the threshold will be diminished to 25 terms, hoping that the map identifies meaningful clusters and connections without overwhelming the overview, making trends and relationships more discernible, as well as keeping the focus on core concepts in franchising, CSR, and related theories (like Stakeholder and Agency Theory).
- The last filter is the verification of selected terms, which gives the possibility to select terms by relevance and occurrence is open, that allows to avoid unrelated words (like countries, cities, months, or specific names).

Bibliometric view

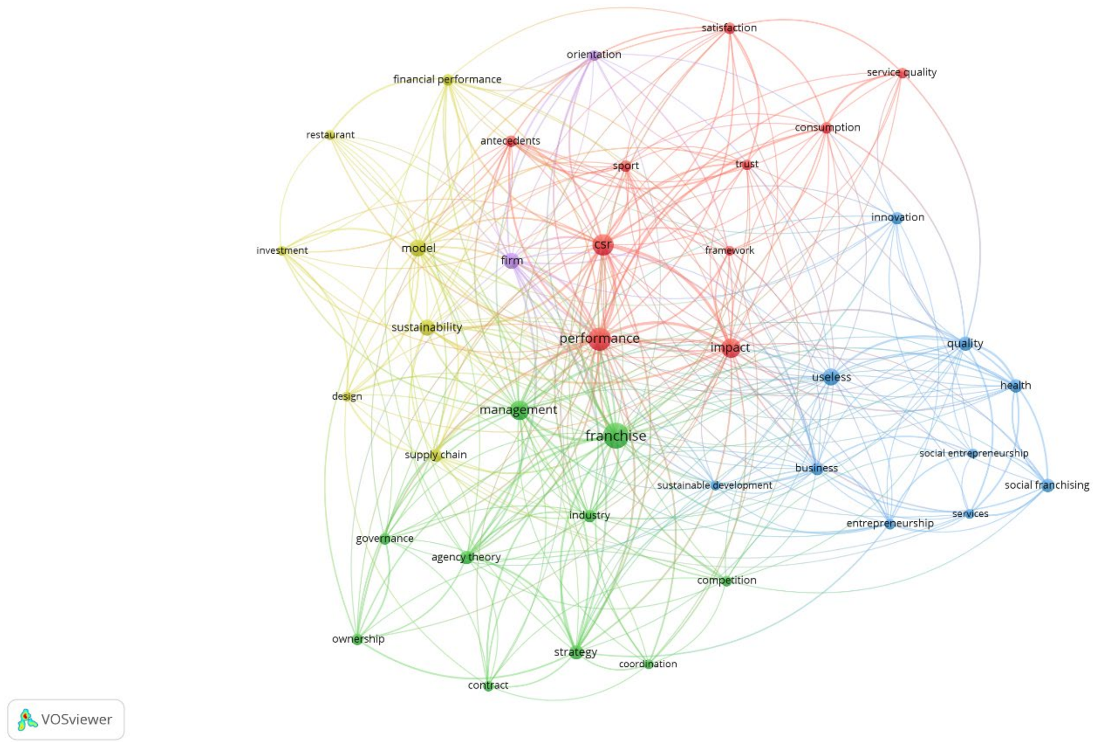
For this analysis, VOSviewer was used to create a visual map based on bibliographic data. A keyword co-occurrence map was generated to visualize relationships between frequently occurring terms. The visualization employed normalization with association strength and a layout with default values (attraction = 2, repulsion = 0). This method ensured that the final network visualization provided a clear and detailed overview of the key themes and relationships within the selected 198 papers, focusing on the most occurring keywords, grouped in 5 clusters.

This approach offered a robust and objective representation of the research landscape on CSR and franchising. (To check a larger version of the image, please see Annex 2).

As explained before, the bibliometric analysis, as shown in Figure 11, offers a visual representation of research topics related to franchising and CSR over the past 15 years, and this graphic shows specifically the general Network Visualization. Each cluster in the network corresponds to a keyword, with the size indicating how frequently the keyword appears. The colors and clustering of the nodes show relationships and thematic groupings among the keywords. Larger nodes and clusters represent dominant research areas, while smaller nodes highlight less studied or emerging topics.

Figure 11

Bibliometric analyze result of the investigations made the last 15 years relating CSR and Franchising, general Network Visualization (*VOSviewer*, n.d.)



The network visualizations produced in VOSviewer represent a complex bibliometric landscape with key terms organized into five distinct clusters. These clusters represent the thematic structure of research connecting franchising to CSR, governance, agency theory, sustainability, and related management concepts. Each cluster is presented below:

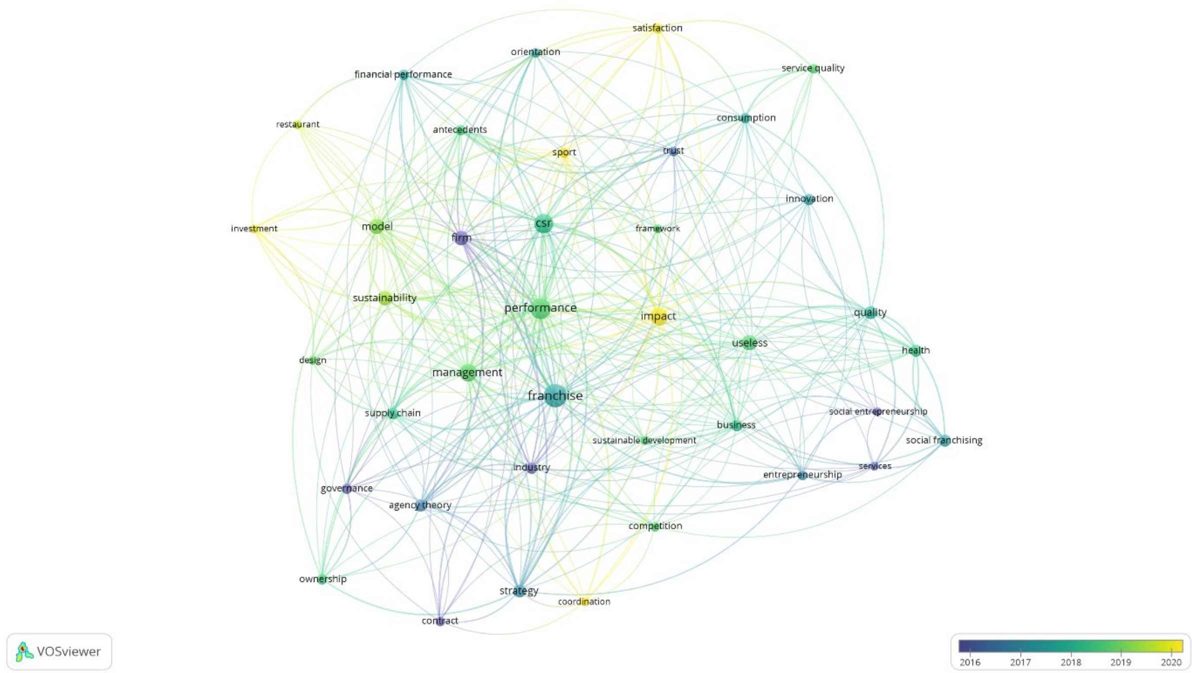
- **Red cluster: Performance & Impact**. The terms “CSR,” “performance,” “impact,” and “trust” are found here. It represents the core of CSR research, highlighting the connection between CSR practices and their performance outcomes. This topic is crucial to understanding how CSR activities within franchising contribute to tangible impacts, such as improving trust among stakeholders and enhancing brand image. A possible investigation trend here indicates a shift towards quantifying the impact of CSR on business metrics, reflecting an interest in demonstrating the value of CSR through improved customer trust, satisfaction and loyalty.

- **Green cluster: Management and strategy**. Key terms in this cluster include “franchise,” “management,” “strategy,” “agency theory,” and “coordination.” This cluster represents the operational and structural aspects of franchising, particularly the strategies and management approaches employed in franchise systems. The presence of agency theory reflects the importance of understanding the dynamics of the franchise relationship, where franchisors and franchisees must balance control and autonomy. One possible research trend here is how franchise structures influence the adoption and consistency of CSR across different locations, showing that centralized or controlled models can lead to more uniform CSR practices, while decentralized models allow for local adaptation.
- **Yellow cluster: Financial performance and investment**. Terms such as “financial performance”, “investment,” and “restaurant” are found here. It suggests a focus on the economic outcomes of CSR and the relationship between financial metrics and CSR investments within franchises. The inclusion of “restaurant” indicates the specific relevance of this topic within food service franchises, where CSR practices can have a direct impact on financial performance. One investigation trend here is to view CSR as a financially beneficial investment rather than a cost, as franchises increasingly adopt CSR to improve financial results and market positioning, particularly in consumer-driven sectors such as food service.
- **Blue cluster: Innovation and Quality**. The words “innovation”, “quality,” and “consumption” appear in this cluster, emphasizing the role of innovation in improving CSR initiatives and the quality of service or product delivery. CSR innovation, such as the adoption of green practices or social franchising, can differentiate franchises in competitive markets. Here is the potential trend of a new vision of CSR as a tool for innovation and competitive advantage. Franchises are using CSR to attract socially conscious consumers by promoting sustainability, health and quality, positioning CSR to create unique value propositions.
- **Purple cluster: Orientation and antecedents**. This smaller cluster includes terms such as “orientation” and “antecedents,” indicating a thematic focus on the fundamental drivers

of CSR in franchise systems, i.e., it could represent the internal and external factors that lead to the establishment of CSR practices, such as corporate values, leadership orientation, or regulatory pressures. This aspect is interesting to understand the motivations behind the adoption of CSR and how franchise systems could align their strategic orientation with CSR objectives, influencing long-term commitments to social responsibility, and reflecting a deeper understanding of why franchises engage in CSR and how they align it with their strategic orientation. (To check a larger version of the image, please see Annex 2).

Figure 12

Bibliometric analyze result of the investigations made the last 15 years relating CSR and Franchising, Overlay Visualization (*VOSviewer*, n.d.)



The overlay visualization illustrates the temporal progression of key terms in franchising and CSR research, allowing a first trends identification. Each term is color-coded by its average year of appearance, with a gradient ranging from dark blue for earlier years to yellow for more recent years, as indicated by the timeline in the bottom right corner (2016–2020).

The colors represent the average publication year of research terms, with darker shades (closer to blue) indicating older studies and lighter shades (closer to yellow) indicating more recent research trends.

- **Previous research themes (from blue to green, 2016-2018)**: Terms such as “agency theory,” “governance,” “ownership,” “contract,” and “management” are found here in darker colors, indicating that structural aspects of franchising have been a key focus in CSR and franchising research since at least 2016. Early research focused on understanding organizational structures and governance mechanisms within franchise systems, on analyzing how these structures affect the adoption and implementation of CSR. The frequent exploration of “agency theory” and “governance” suggests an emphasis on the relationships between franchisors and franchisees, in terms of control, accountability, and CSR compliance.
- **Transition Period Themes (Green, 2017-2019):** “Performance,” “Model,” “Impact,” and “Strategy” fall within this range of greens, representing an intermediate phase—a period when the focus shifted toward evaluating the effectiveness of CSR initiatives within franchise models and their impact on performance metrics.

  Research in this phase expanded to examine tangible outcomes of CSR efforts, such as financial performance, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty. Studies began to focus on how different franchise models influence CSR practices and performance outcomes, linking CSR to economic and strategic benefits for franchises.
- **Recent Research Themes (Yellow, 2019-2020)**: Lighter shades of yellow represent more recent themes. Terms such as “sustainability,” “quality,” “social entrepreneurship,” “health,” and “sustainable development” are particularly visible in these lighter shades.

  Recently, the research trend has increasingly aligned with sustainability and social impact, reflecting a broader shift toward responsible and ethical business practices in franchising. Terms such as “social entrepreneurship” and “health” suggest a trend toward integrating CSR with specific social goals, including environmental sustainability, community health, and well-being. This aligns with the global push toward sustainable development goals (SDGs), indicating that franchising is progressively focusing on CSR strategies that address not only financial goals but also environmental and social imperatives.

The absence of the concept of "stakeholder" as a central term in the groups may be due to the high threshold of incidence set in the analysis. Stakeholder theory, while central to CSR, may not appear frequently enough in franchising-specific studies to meet the threshold. Instead, agency theory predominates because it addresses the unique relational dynamics between franchisors and franchisees, focusing on issues of control, autonomy, and compliance—central themes in franchising research.

2.1.5 Key Insights from the general overview of the WoS and the bibliometric (VOSviewer) analysis

The bibliometric analysis has provided a comprehensive overview of the diverse and dynamic franchising and CSR research landscape (Zupic & Čater, 2015), highlighting both well-established areas and emerging trends. The WoS bar charts have shown the possible trend in the research areas in the last 15 years. Together they have revealed a dynamic field, where the connections of CSR and franchising are not only a topic of growing academic interest but also a multidimensional area of research that integrates economic, environmental and social considerations. This positions CSR as a strategic imperative and a response to external pressures, driven by the unique operational challenges and stakeholder relationships in franchising. The key insights from this general analysis are summarized below:

On the one hand, CSR studies in franchising have been interdisciplinary: research spans multiple fields, predominantly business economics and environmental sciences, and reflects both economic and ecological perspectives on CSR. The research areas and cluster terms demonstrate this. On the other hand, research evolves with global events: peaks in publication activity coincide with times of heightened societal focus on corporate responsibility, likely driven by global events and changing consumer expectations. Furthermore, CSR in franchising often involves stakeholder engagement and governance considerations, which are crucial for effective CSR strategies in franchise networks. Furthermore, agency relationships within franchises also have an impact on CSR activities and are therefore also considered.

The next chapter will delve deeper into the literature, examining the content of selected papers to extract relevant information aligned with the designated categories and their indicators. This detailed review will facilitate the evaluation of results, enabling a comprehensive response to the research question, as well as the validation or refutation of the hypotheses. Through this analysis, the study aims to provide insightful managerial and academic observations, ultimately leading to well-founded conclusions on the role of CSR in franchising networks.

2.2. Finding the connections between CSR and Franchising

2.2.1 Overview of SPAR-4-SLR Steps

In order to effectively analyze the literature, the framework SPAR-4-SLR protocol established by (Paul et al., 2021), a structured approach, is essential. This approach encompasses three key stages and criteria that guide the review process (please see annex).

The first step involves **assembling** literature, which begins with a clear definition of the domain and scope of the review. It is crucial to specify the area of focus and the research questions that will direct the analysis. For instance, this literature review may center on the intersection of franchising and corporate social responsibility (CSR) within the realm of international business. By setting up a well-defined scope, the review can support its relevance and coherence. As mentioned before, Web of Sciences is the main academic source, and the research criteria has been set up:

(

(AB=("Franchis*") OR (TI="Franchis*") OR (AK="Franchis*")) AND (AB=("Corporate Social Responsibility") OR TI=("Corporate Social Responsibility") OR AB=("CSR") OR AB=("Sustainab*") OR AB=("Corporate Social Performance") OR AB=("CSP") OR (TI="CSR") OR (AK="CSR"))

)

To keep the dataset manageable and focused on fields relevant to a thematic analysis, a custom selection was made when exporting records. Administrative fields with minimal relevance to the content of this research were excluded. Those excluded fields are Conf. Info/Sponsors, Accession Number, ISSN, PubMed ID, Authors Identifiers, WoS Editions (print only), Usage Count, Hot Paper, Highly Cited, Page Count, Source Abbrev., IDS Number, Language, Publisher Information. Related columns containing this information were also deleted from the final Excel sheet to further optimize the dataset for analysis.

Once the literature is assembled, the next phase is **arranging** the literature, which involves the purification of the selected articles, to ensure that all included papers met quality standards and were appropriate for this research, by eliminating duplicates, irrelevant studies, or articles that do not meet the established quality threshold. This purification process ensures that only the most relevant and high-quality literature is included in the analysis, thereby enhancing the overall integrity of the review.

As an additional measure, the bibliographic management software **Zotero** (*Zotero | Your Personal Research Assistant*, n.d.) was utilized to cross-check records. Zotero provides notifications for papers identified as potentially problematic, including instances where publications may have been subject to "fake peer review" or other quality concerns. Any records flagged by Zotero as unsuitable were removed from the dataset, further refining the quality and integrity of the research base.

The final step of the data collection process involved filtering the remaining records to identify the most relevant documents for this study. The objective was to retain only those records that directly relate to the research focus on the relationship between franchising, by reading all abstracts to confirm that their topic is franchising, and, from the abstracts and key words, checking that there is a relationship with CSR, as well as with the related theoretical frameworks (stakeholder theory, agency theory and corporate sustainability).

The last step, the **assessment** of literature, is a critical stage in this process. To effectively communicate the synthesized findings, the results will be presented in tables, where the relevant classification of the articles can be observed according to the determined classification. Based on a review of the results, 67 papers were excluded for not being journal articles (i.e., classified as B, C, or S), for lacking relevance to the research topic, or for not being peer-reviewed. This leaves a total of **121** papers in the final selection.

2.2.2 Justification of Categories and Indicators in the Assessment Process

Based on the hypotheses and their variables, arguments from the theoretical framework were sought to determine specific categories and indicators. Similarly, after evaluating various category options (including profitability and governance, sustainability goals, industry, geographical context, autonomy -agency), it was confirmed that the selected categories have a strong theoretical foundation and more possibilities to answer the research question. Based on a comprehensive review using WoS and VOS tools, the final set of indicator categories was established:

Franchise model structure is the main category, which examines how variations in model centralization influence CSR practices. In more centralized models (such as direct franchising), the franchisor has greater control, which can lead to more consistent CSR implementation across locations; in contrast, decentralized models, such as the master or area structure, allow franchisees greater autonomy, which can lead to diverse CSR practices tailored to local contexts (Windsperger & Dant, 2006). This balance between autonomy and oversight is essential to understanding CSR consistency and stakeholder satisfaction.

The **CSR dimensions** (economic, social, environmental, and voluntary) (Dahlsrud, 2008) describe specific practices, implementation plans, consistency, and outcomes. Each dimension addresses different aspects of CSR implementation, contributing to understanding the holistic role of CSR in franchising. For example, the economic and voluntary dimensions reveal how CSR can enhance franchisee engagement through voluntary initiatives, which can vary depending on the structure of the franchise model and stakeholder expectations (Parmar et al., 2010).

Notes:

- Stakeholder Engagement is broader and more descriptive of actual involvement levels, which would give a clearer picture of how franchises interact with their stakeholders in CSR. To avoid redundancy, the Stakeholder dimension within CSR dimensions has been excluded.
- Sustainability remains relevant and is integrated into the search and conceptual framework. However, the specific dimensions of sustainability—Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)—are not included as separate categories in this analysis to maintain clarity and avoid redundancy. This approach ensures that each dimension provides unique, actionable insights without unnecessary overlap. Environmental and Social dimensions are included in CSR Dimensions and Governance is included as a stakeholder.

Stakeholder engagement assesses the depth of stakeholder involvement (Low, Medium, High) in the franchise's CSR activities. According to this theory, the depth of stakeholder involvement provides insight into how franchise models interact with and respond to stakeholder needs, thereby affecting CSR effectiveness (Freeman & Mcvea, 2001; Parmar et al., 2010). A high level of engagement is often linked to better CSR outcomes, as franchisees and stakeholders become more involved in CSR initiatives, increasing alignment with local expectations and franchise-wide values.

Figure 13

Final categories and indicators for assessment, based on the theoretical background discussed in the theoretical background.

Franchise Model	**Direct**
	Master
	Multi-Unit
	Area
	N/A
CSR Dimension	Stakeholder
	Economic
	Social
	Environmental
	Voluntaries
	N/A
Stakeholder Engagement level	Low
	Medium
	High
	N/A

A column for each category is added to the Excel sheet exported from WoS, allowing for the precise classification of relevant indicators in each article. Once this categorization is complete, analysis tables are created for each category and comparisons can be made according to each franchise model, thus providing reporting and results. This structure allows for the development of a narrative that integrates identified themes, patterns and gaps, following to the results and conclusions.

3. Analysis and Results

Once the dataset has been classified into CSR dimensions (e.g. economic, social, environmental), into different franchise models: direct, main, multi-unit, area and N/A, and Stakeholder engagement, **121 articles** remain relevant for analysis. It is imperative to make some clarifications here:

- N/A (not applicable): This category refers to articles related to the category, but not linked to a specific indicator. Examples include studies that analyze general franchise laws or regulatory frameworks, or research focused on franchising at a conceptual or abstract level without specifying a particular model and that have some impact with CSR.
- As mentioned before, to avoid redundancies, sustainability environmental and social (ES) indicators are integrated within the CSR categories; likewise, the sustainability governance (G) is included in the Stakeholder, as it relates specifically to stakeholder engagement. Thus, the Stakeholder category includes the CSR dimension indicator, which is not included in the classification of CSR.
- A single publication may have multiple entries, as a single article may address multiple CSR dimensions or franchise models, resulting in multiple entries in the dataset. In this specific work, only the CSR Dimensions classification has had multiple entries.
- Articles that are not directly related to franchising or CSR have been excluded from the analysis. For example, there were cases where franchising was a proposed solution or part of the context, but there was no close relationship to the topic.

3.1 Looking to sustain Hypothesis 1 (H1)

This section seeks to validate Hypothesis 1 (H1), which proposes that different franchise models reflect distinct approaches to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). By analyzing how CSR dimensions (Economic, Social, Environmental, and their combinations) are represented across various franchise structures—Direct, Master, Multi-Unit, Area, and unclassified (N/A)—the study aims to reveal the influence of franchise model characteristics on the consistency and emphasis of CSR practices. Through frequency analysis, comparisons, and a synthesis of findings, this section highlights the unique ways in which franchise systems integrate CSR within their operational frameworks, offering insights into the structural impact on CSR strategy.

3.1.1 Frequency Analysis

To systematically and objectively assess the relationship between franchise models and their CSR practices, a Frequency Analysis was first performed. To do so, the frequency of CSR dimensions per franchise model was counted. For each franchise model (Direct, Master, Multi-Unit, Area and N/A), the number of times each CSR dimension (Economic, Social, Environmental, etc.) was mentioned was counted, including combinations (e.g. Economic + Environmental) as separate categories. The final table is presented below:

Table 1

Frequency Analysis of Franchise Models and CSR Dimensions.

Franchise Model / CSR Dimension	Direct	Master	Multi-Unit	Area	N/A
Economic	13	3	8	1	5
Economic, Environmental	2	5	1	1	1
Economic, Social	10	0	5	5	2
Environmental	6	1	6	1	0
Environmental, Social	7	0	2	0	2
Environmental, Voluntaries	1	0	0	0	0
Voluntaries	0	1	0	0	0
Social	13	5	6	5	2
N/A	0	0	0	0	1
Total	52	15	28	13	13

3.1.1.1 Comparison across franchise models

In searching for patterns from these results, a check for overall consistency has been conducted and a comparison across franchise models.

Check for overall consistency

- High consistency: If a specific CSR dimension (e.g. Economic) is frequently mentioned and predominates within a model, it reflects a structured and uniform approach to CSR practices.
- Low consistency: If there is significant variation across CSR dimensions (e.g. economic, environmental, social), this suggests a more diverse or decentralized approach.

Comparison across franchise models

Frequency and consistency of the CSR dimensions vary across the models. Observations include:

- The Direct model appears to be relatively homogeneous, while Multi-Unit models present a wider but more even approach to implementation. This perhaps follows logically from the expectation of centralized control with some freedom.
- In contrast, the Master model has some more structure compared to the Area model. Thus, CSR practices remain decentralized and localized.
- The least internal consistency characterizes the Area model: there is a random and fragmented approach to CSR dimensions in this model.
- Both Direct and Multi-Unit models show higher consistency in CSR practices, characterizing, with this feature, a structured and predictable focus on dimensions (for example, Economic, Social, Environmental).
- Both Master and Area models show low consistency in the practice of CSR with great variability in the discussed dimensions.

Table 2

Consistency Levels for Each Franchise Model.

Model	Frequency Highlight	Consistency Level
Direct	Dominated by Economic (13 mentions) and Social (13 mentions) dimensions.	High consistency, as the focus is primarily on a few CSR dimensions (Economic and Social), suggesting a centralized and structured CSR implementation.
	Combined dimensions like Economic, Social (10) and Environmental (6) are also significant.	
	Mixed dimensions like Environmental, Social (7) further highlight a broad approach to CSR but within a limited range of combinations.	
Master	Much lower frequency overall, with Economic (3 mentions) and Social (5 mentions) being the most common dimensions.	Low consistency due to the lower volume of mentions and variation across dimensions, reflecting localized adaptations and a decentralized approach.
	Combinations like Economic, Environmental (2) and standalone Environmental (1) indicate some diversity but limited focus overall.	
Multi-Unit	Strong presence of Economic (8 mentions), Social (6 mentions), and Environmental (6 mentions) dimensions.	High consistency, as the focus is spread across Economic, Social, and Environmental dimensions in a balanced way. This reflects a structured yet somewhat adaptable approach.
	Combination dimensions like Economic, Environmental (5) are well-represented, showing diversity but within a recurring pattern.	
Area	Limited mentions overall, with sporadic focus on Economic (1 mention), Social (2 mentions), and combinations like Environmental + Social (2 mentions).	Low consistency due to limited data and sporadic mentions across dimensions, indicating a decentralized and less structured approach.
N/A	Dominated by Economic (5 mentions) and Social (2 mentions).	Low consistency, as the focus remains primarily on Economic and Social dimensions, despite the broader non-franchise-specific context.
	Few mixed dimensions like Economic, Environmental (1).	

3.1.2 Results H1: Different franchise models reflect distinct approaches to CSR

As explained in the first chapter, decisions concerning CSR issues are made within the corporate entity and are implemented across every other location within the franchise. The implication here is that CSR is more likely to be uniform in nature in such a structure.

In the case of **Direct models**, most papers focus on only a few dimensions: Economic (for example, focus on profitability or compliance) and Social (for instance, community projects). These constantly surface in studies and show that the CSR practices are orderly and predictable, as the studies “Bridging the Operational Efficiency Differences between Franchisors and Franchisees: A Metafrontier Approach” (S. Kim & Choi, 2022), which aligns with the idea of orderly, predictable CSR practices often observed in Direct models; and “Are social franchises contributing to universal access to reproductive health services in low-income countries?” (Ravindran & Fonn, 2011), which highlights the uniform and structured CSR initiatives typical of Direct models.

In the case of **Multi-Unit models**, while consistent, there is a wider range of dimensions for CSR, such as Economic, Social, and Environmental, to indicate some flexibility allowed but within a clear framework. Multi-unit franchises may also adopt CSR policies but allow local management to tailor initiatives to better suit the needs of their community, as reflected in “Corporate social responsibility as a determinant of long-term orientation” (M. Kim et al., 2020), suggesting flexibility in tailoring CSR practices to specific needs, which aligns well with Multi-Unit models.

In more decentralized models, the franchisees tend to operate quite independently. They decide how to approach CSR based on local needs and conditions. The result is a greater divergence of practices, as there is no one standard they feel compelled to adhere to.

While some papers mention Economic dimensions for **Master models**, other works place greater emphasis on either Social or Environmental, thus proving that priorities within the different areas of CSR change according to franchisees or regions. An example is the paper “International Alliance of Green Hotels to Reach Sustainable Competitive Advantages” (Ge et al., 2018), which reflects the decentralized nature of Master models, where franchisees have more autonomy in implementing CSR.

In **Area models**, data is considerably inconsistent, sometimes based on various combinations of CSR dimensions and/or dubious focuses on CSR. This variation is evident in the paper “Improving the Sustainable Competitiveness of Service Quality within Air Cargo

Terminals" (Hu et al., 2018), which illustrates the inconsistent and highly localized nature of CSR practices in air cargo franchises, with variations in service quality and sustainability initiatives.

These observations provide corroborating evidence for hypothesis H1, which states that franchise structure affects CSR practices. By the centralized Models, Direct and Multi-Unit, there is more consistency in how CSR is carried out by these models, as decisions are made at the corporate level and then propagated to every other location. Programs of CSR will be formal, consistent, and orderly.

In contrast, by the decentralized Models, Master, Area, there is less consistent, since decisions on the cases of CSR are independent of each other, done by franchisees or regional operators. With that, there is increased variability to meet local needs and local conditions. Inf few words, while centralized models allow consistency in CSR policies, decentralized models allow for variability in the application of policy and hence result in diverse CSR policies and practices.

3.2. Looking for sustain Hypothesis 2 (H2)

Consistency in CSR practices is important because it directly influences how stakeholders perceive a franchise's commitment to social responsibility. In centralized models (Direct, Multi-Unit), high consistency strengthens the franchise's unified brand identity and builds trust among stakeholders. Conversely, decentralized models (Master, Area) provide flexibility to address local needs but may dilute the franchise's cohesive CSR strategy. Each approach has its own advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, consistency shapes how stakeholders (such as customers, employees, and regulators) perceive a franchise's commitment to social responsibility. Therefore, it is important to examine whether the research clearly reflects the role of stakeholders in driving CSR practices within franchises.

To address this, it is essential to analyze how much research has been conducted on franchises and their CSR practices over time (last 15 years). An expected evolution should highlight how franchises have responded to increased stakeholder expectations and societal pressures. This is the focus of Hypothesis 2 (H2): CSR practices within franchises have evolved over the past 15 years, driven by heightened stakeholder expectations.

3.2.1 Tracking CSR Dimensions in Franchising Over Time

The growing academic interest in corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the franchising field has been illustrated above. Using the WoS and VOSviewer graphs, it was illustrated that publications in this field have grown steadily, peaking between 2020 and 2022.

Key topics such as “sustainability”, “social franchising”, “financial performance” and “governance” were the nodes of a first-time interval, realizing that these investigations largely focused on economic performance and management, while later periods introduced broader topics such as environmental sustainability and social impact. This thematic shift aligns with the idea that CSR practices in franchising have expanded beyond profitability to address social and environmental challenges. Now, in detail, publications have been reviewed for 5-year intervals, and for the current year separately.

First interval (2009–2013): establishes a baseline for CSR practices, with the Social Dimension emerging as the primary focus, receiving 7 mentions. This reflects an early-stage effort to address community needs and employee well-being, highlighting the attention paid by franchising research to social engagement.

Close behind, the Economic Dimension, with 6 mentions, emphasizes priorities such as profitability, operational efficiency, and compliance. Together, the Economic and Social dimensions have 3 mentions, indicating an attempt by franchises to align financial goals with social benefits.

The Environmental Dimension, while less prominent, begins to emerge during this period. It is mentioned once on its own and twice in combination with the Social Dimension, suggesting a growing but nascent interest in sustainability.

Table 3

Track of CSR Dimension over time.

Time Interval / CSR Dimension	2009 - 2013	2014 - 2018	2019 - 2023	2024
Economic	6	11	11	2
Economic, Environmental	0	2	4	0
Economic, Social	3	13	9	2
Environmental	1	4	7	1
Environmental, Social	2	5	4	0
Environmental, Voluntaries	0	0	1	0
Voluntaries	0	1	0	0
Social	7	9	14	1
N/A	0	0	1	0
Total	19	45	51	6

Second interval (2014–2018): marks a significant expansion in CSR practices. The volume of related research more than doubles, reflecting increased academic and industry attention to CSR in franchising. The Economic Dimension sees a notable increase to 11 mentions, reaffirming the continued importance of profitability and operational efficiency.

The Social Dimension, with 9 mentions, remains a key area of focus, slightly trailing the Economic Dimension, which suggests a balanced emphasis on community involvement alongside financial goals. Combined, the Economic and Social dimensions show a significant rise, with 13 mentions, reinforcing the idea that franchises are increasingly aligning financial performance with societal benefits.

The Environmental Dimension experiences significant growth during this period. On its own, it is mentioned 4 times, and in combination with the Social Dimension, it is mentioned 5 times, reflecting increased awareness and integration of sustainability in CSR practices. A new combination, Economic and Environmental, also emerges during this interval, with 2 mentions, signaling an early recognition of financial sustainability.

Additionally, the only instance of CSR research purely focused on voluntary efforts appears in this period, underscoring a broadening scope of CSR activities.

Third interval (2019–2023: the most recent, highlights a clear shift toward Social and Environmental priorities. The Social Dimension leads with 14 mentions, making it the most frequently cited CSR aspect. This reflects a growing prioritization of community- and employee-focused initiatives by franchises.

The Economic Dimension maintains its importance with 11 mentions, and the combination of Economic and Social dimensions, though slightly reduced at 9 mentions, continues to underscore the importance of balancing financial and social goals.

The Environmental Dimension continues its steady rise, with 7 mentions, reflecting increased attention to sustainability. Combined dimensions also illustrate notable activity, as the combination of Economic and Environmental, which doubles compared to the previous period, with 4 mentions, indicating a stronger emphasis on integrating financial and environmental objectives. The combination of Environmental and Social dimensions remains stable, also at 4 mentions, illustrating sustained efforts to connect sustainability with societal impacts.

Although with only one mention, the Volunteers dimension reappears, now combined with Environmental, indicating efforts to demonstrate sustainability leadership. But the limited presence of this category overall suggests that most CSR activities in franchising are driven by stakeholder demands or regulatory requirements rather than discretionary actions.

To present the most recent data possible, the first half of the current year, 2024, has also been included. Since no conclusions can be drawn, it is worth mentioning that the latent dimensions are economic, social, and environmental, projecting a possible pattern like that of the last interval.

The N/A category appears only once, indicating a study focusing on developing a model for sustainable franchisor-franchisee relationships (Jang & Park, 2019). Its minimal appearance reflects the focus of most research on explicitly defined CSR dimensions in franchising rather than tangential discussions.

This analysis highlights how research linking franchising to CSR practices has evolved over the past 15 years. These results show that franchising has moved from a tendency to focus on economic and social objectives to a more diversified and sustainability-driven approach; the trend indicates a concern to align financial improvement with general well-being.

3.2.2 Tracking Stakeholder Engagement Over Time

Stakeholders play a critical role in the evolution of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, particularly in franchising because it highlights the importance of balancing the interests of all stakeholder groups (customers, employees, communities, regulators, investors, and environmental advocates) to achieve sustainable business success (Arian et al., 2023; Freeman & Mcvea, 2001). As social values evolve, stakeholders are putting increasing pressure on franchises to integrate economic, social, and environmental considerations into their business models.

Research suggests that stakeholder expectations drive change in CSR practices through multiple pathways. For example, regulatory bodies require compliance with environmental standards and ethical labor practices, forcing franchises to improve CSR performance (Fernández et al., 2013). Similarly, community demands for local involvement and social impact encourage franchises to adopt initiatives tailored to their specific regions (Tokoro, 2007). Customers also play a vital role, as their increasing preference for ethical and sustainable practices influences franchises to align their strategies with these expectations (Peloza & Shang, 2011).

Franchises increasingly recognize that CSR is not simply a cost, but an investment that improves stakeholder trust and long-term financial performance. For example, companies in consumer-focused industries have shown that higher CSR performance secures stakeholder support, leading to competitive advantage and better market positioning (Arian et al., 2023). This highlights the interdependence between CSR practices and stakeholder engagement, illustrating how franchises evolve to meet economic and social demands (Awa et al., 2024).

Table 4

Track Stakeholder Engagement Level Over Time.

Time Interval / Engagement level	2009 - 2013	2014 - 2018	2019 - 2023	2024
Low	1	3	2	0
Medium	8	18	27	2
High	10	23	22	4
N/A	0	1	0	0
Total	19	45	51	6

Table 4 presents articles from the last 15 years that show the level of commitment of groups by intervals, to understand the relevance that they have had in studies that relate franchises and CSR practices over time.

First interval (2009–2013): has a relatively small total of 19 mentions, highlighting the nascent stage of CSR practices in franchise research. Most mentions are at a High (10 mentions) and Medium (8 mentions) level of engagement, indicating that franchises had already begun engaging significantly with stakeholders, mainly through well-defined economic and social initiatives.

For instance, the study “Corporate Social Responsibility in Drug Franchises" (Brooks et al., 2009) examines the presence of CSR within pharmaceutical franchises, focusing on how strategic elements such as mission, vision, and values align with societal and ethical expectations. In "Sustainable Kerbside Recycling in the Municipal Garbage Contract" (Chowdhury, 2009), the program engages stakeholders like municipal administrators and residents, though the focus is primarily on operational collaboration rather than deeper strategic involvement, indicative of moderate stakeholder interaction.

In contrast, the Low level of engagement is minimal (1 mention) and reflects a narrower scope of stakeholder involvement. For example, in "An Empirical Framework of Financial Characteristics and Outperformance in Troubled Economic Times" (Hua et al., 2013), the primary focus is on financial performance metrics rather than broader CSR strategies, resulting in limited stakeholder engagement.

Second interval (2014–2018): there is a significant expansion of stakeholder engagement, with the number of mentions more than doubling to 45, reflecting increased academic and practical attention to stakeholder engagement in franchise CSR. High engagement mentions rise to 23, showcasing a strong alignment of franchises with stakeholder expectations through strategic CSR practices.

For example, the study "Model for Service Delivery for Developmental Disorders in Low-Income Countries" (Hamdani et al., 2015) demonstrates high engagement by integrating social, technological, and business innovations to establish sustainable services for children with developmental disorders, involving family networks and volunteers under expert supervision. Medium engagement mentions, increasing to 18, indicate a balanced but growing commitment to stakeholders. For example, "Corporate Social Disclosure in the Franchising Sector: Insights from French Franchisors' Websites" (Perrigot et al., 2015) demonstrates medium engagement by examining how franchisors communicate CSR activities through their websites, targeting employees, communities, and consumers. The study highlights an incremental step toward stakeholder inclusion, though it focuses primarily on disclosure rather than deep operational or strategic integration.

Low engagement remains a minor component, with 3 mentions, reflecting more limited CSR efforts or less comprehensive stakeholder interaction, like the study “Thumbs Up, Sales Up? The Contingent Effect of Facebook Likes on Sales Performance in Social Commerce“ (Lee et al., 2015), which emphasis remains on consumer interactions and sales dynamics without a broader focus on community, employee engagement, or other stakeholder groups. The only N/A mention appears in this period, potentially reflecting studies with broader or undefined CSR topics. For instance, “Evaluating Sustainable Competitive Advantage” (Lev, 2017) provides insights into sustaining competitive advantage through strategic assets but lacks any explicit discussion on CSR dimensions or stakeholder roles.

Most recent range (2019–2023): mentions of CSR practices in franchise contexts reached their highest level at 51 mentions, marking the peak of academic and practical interest in stakeholder-driven CSR practices. In this interval, Medium stakeholder engagement dominates with 27 mentions, reflecting the widespread adoption of structured CSR strategies that balance stakeholder needs and organizational goals.

For example, in “Franchisor support and brand value empowerment of micro-franchisees: a Brazilian market perspective” (Melo et al., 2015) the findings highlight that training and support can elevate franchisee perceptions, emphasizing how structured CSR can improve economic and social outcomes for small-scale entrepreneurs in resource-scarce environments. High engagement remains significant, with 22 mentions, indicating a continued prioritization of intensive collaboration with stakeholders. For instance, “Corporate social responsibility as a determinant of long-term orientation” (M. Kim et al., 2020) discuss the influence of CSR initiatives on the long-term orientation of franchisees, showing that trust and satisfaction derived from ethical and economic CSR activities enhance sustained relationships between franchisors and franchisees.

Low engagement decreases to 2 mentions, reflecting minimal focus on limited stakeholder interaction. "Knowledge Heterogenization of the Franchising Literature Applying Transaction Cost Economics" (Tsai et al., 2020) exemplify this category by focusing on knowledge heterogenization without delving deeply into stakeholder engagement or franchise CSR activities.

3.2.3: Results H2: CSR practices within franchises have evolved over the last 15 years, driven by heightened stakeholder expectations.

The table captures the progression of stakeholder engagement levels (Low, Medium, High, and N/A) across four-time intervals: 2009–2013, 2014–2018, 2019–2023, and 2024, providing insight into the evolving role of stakeholders in shaping CSR practices in franchising. In general, the data reflects increasing stakeholder expectations and the corresponding adaptation of franchises to address these demands.

In more detail, the results demonstrate an evolution of CSR practices in franchises where there is an increasing influence of stakeholders in shaping these initiatives. A shift has been seen over time from a primarily economic focus to a broader emphasis on social and environmental dimensions in recent years. This progression highlights how stakeholder expectations regarding sustainability and ethical practices play a role in franchises adopting more inclusive and multidimensional CSR strategies. This trend aligns with the growing prominence of stakeholder governance, which emphasizes balancing economic performance with social and environmental responsibilities to foster trust and create long-term value (Fernández-Guadaño & Sarria-Pedroza, 2018) (Arian et al., 2023).

Following that line, increasing mentions of medium and high levels of stakeholder engagement reflect the growing role of stakeholders in shaping CSR strategies. Stakeholder pressures, including regulatory demands, community expectations, and changing consumer preferences, have catalyzed this transformation. For example, regulatory changes during the 2014-2023 period prompted franchises to adopt stricter environmental and labor standards, fostering the growth of environmental CSR. At the same time, local community demands drove sustained social CSR efforts, while increased consumer awareness of sustainability encouraged the adoption of green and ethical practices (Fernández-Guadaño & Sarria-Pedroza, 2018).

These changes underscore the importance of holistic CSR strategies that address intertwined economic, social, and environmental goals. This evolution, supported by stakeholder-driven change, corroborates the hypothesis that CSR practices in franchising have adapted significantly over the past 15 years to meet increased stakeholder expectations (Arian et al., 2023).

4. Discussion: Unraveling the CSR - Franchising connections from a Literature Review Perspective

This study conducts a comprehensive review of the academic literature to examine the evolution of CSR practices in franchising, emphasizing their alignment with stakeholder expectations. By synthesizing existing research, the study provides valuable insights into how CSR dimensions (economic, social, and environmental) are integrated into franchise operations and highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement in shaping these practices.

The primary objective of this study was to explore how CSR practices in franchising have evolved and to assess the role of stakeholder expectations in driving these changes. Specifically, H1 posited that stakeholders play a central role in influencing CSR practices in franchising, and H2 suggested that these practices have expanded over the past 15 years to include social and environmental dimensions due to increasing stakeholder expectations. These hypotheses were supported by the analysis of existing literature, which revealed distinctive trends and emerging themes.

The results of this study highlight that research on CSR in franchising has grown significantly, reflecting the increasing societal demand for companies to act responsibly. The first studies analyzed date back 15 years (2009-2013) and focused predominantly on economic dimensions such as profitability and compliance. In later periods (2014-2018, 2019-2023), there was an expansion towards social and environmental initiatives, showing the growing importance of sustainability and ethical practices. These findings align with the hypotheses and validate the research questions by demonstrating a trend towards stakeholder demands.

More in detail, on the one hand, it can be stated about the Evolution of CSR practices, that the increasing prevalence of medium and high levels of stakeholder engagement highlights the centrality of stakeholders in driving CSR initiatives. Economic objectives, although initially dominant, have become part of a broader framework that incorporates social equity and environmental sustainability. This evolution is particularly significant in the context of franchising, where achieving uniformity in CSR practices across geographically dispersed units poses unique challenges.

On the other hand, certain stakeholder-driven changes confirm that stakeholders such as customers, employees, communities, and regulators exert significant influence over CSR practices. Customer preferences for sustainable and ethical practices have apparently put environmental CSR on the map in recent years. These trends underscore the importance of stakeholder alignment in shaping franchise operations, as previously justified in this research, and reinforce the assertion that the primary responsibility of businesses is to maximize shareholder value (Friedman, 1970).

However, even if the hypotheses are confirmed, the papers show that these relationships are not always so obvious. There are several challenges that franchises face when implementing CSR, including resource constraints, cultural diversity, and the need for coherence across geographically dispersed units. Opportunities also arise – for example, franchises can leverage their network structure to scale up high-impact CSR initiatives, as shown in case studies highlighting franchisor-franchisee collaborations (Weaven et al., 2014). Furthermore, the adoption of localized CSR strategies can improve franchise adaptability and responsiveness to regional stakeholder needs (Raha & Hajdini, 2023).

External factors, such as cultural differences, regulatory environments, and franchisee characteristics, significantly influence CSR practices. Dahlsrud (2008) highlighted the importance of contextual factors in defining CSR, highlighting the variability of stakeholder priorities across regions. Furthermore, cultural diversity requires tailored approaches to CSR, allowing franchises to align with local expectations while maintaining their global brand identity (Windsperger, 2002). The increasing importance of international market dynamics has also underlined the need for franchises to balance standardization with flexibility, ensuring consistency while taking into account regional nuances.

Regarding the lack of Voluntarism dimension analysis, it is recommendable that the Franchisors should go beyond merely meeting legal CSR requirements by actively contributing to sustainable and socially responsible initiatives. This includes establishing robust mechanisms to track the results of CSR activities, measure their impact, and transparently share these findings with stakeholders. Such transparency fosters trust and encourages collaborative learning. By engaging stakeholders in discussions about successes, shortcomings, and unmet needs, franchisors can identify areas for improvement and refine their CSR strategies. This iterative approach not only enhances the franchise's reputation but also drives meaningful, long-term change by aligning efforts more closely with community and stakeholder priorities.

This literature review addresses a critical gap in CSR research by focusing on the unique dynamics of franchise networks. By highlighting the evolution of CSR in franchising, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how companies can address the complexities of balancing economic, social, and environmental goals.

The findings underscore the strategic importance of CSR to build stakeholder trust, enhance brand loyalty, and ensure long-term sustainability.

They also highlight the transformative potential of franchise networks, where collaboration between franchisors and franchisees can amplify the impact of CSR initiatives. Ultimately, this research provides a foundation for future studies and practical applications, emphasizing the need for holistic CSR strategies that align with stakeholder expectations, adapt to external pressures, and leverage the network structure of the franchise to achieve greater impact.

5. Conclusions from the Literature Review

This study has sought to answer the research question: How are Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices reflected and evolved in international franchises over the past 15 years? The findings demonstrate that CSR practices in franchises are significantly shaped by franchise models and stakeholder expectations, and distinct patterns emerge in their evolution and implementation. The key findings are as follows:

Franchise models determine CSR consistency: Centralized franchise models, such as direct franchising, consistently implement CSR practices across units due to corporate-level control. In contrast, decentralized models such as master and area franchising often show variability in CSR adoption, as franchisees have greater autonomy to adapt practices to local contexts. This variability can be advantageous in addressing local stakeholder needs but can dilute overall brand cohesion.

CSR practices have evolved toward sustainability: Over the past 15 years, CSR practices in franchising have moved from focusing primarily on economic dimensions, such as profitability and operational efficiency, to integrating social and environmental dimensions. This trend reflects a growing global awareness of sustainability and higher societal expectations for ethical business practices. The combined dimensions of CSR (e.g., economic and environmental) have emerged as a key strategy for franchises to balance financial goals with broader societal values.

Stakeholders drive the evolution of CSR: Stakeholder expectations, particularly those of customers, employees, and communities, have been instrumental in shaping the evolution of CSR in franchising. Regulatory changes have forced franchises to adopt stricter environmental and labor standards, while growing consumer awareness has driven more sustainable and ethical practices. Community engagement initiatives have reinforced the importance of social dimensions in CSR.

Franchises face structural and operational challenges in implementing CSR: The study highlights that the complexity of franchise networks poses unique challenges for CSR implementation. Ensuring consistent adoption of CSR initiatives across diverse cultural and regulatory contexts remains a major hurdle. For example, decentralized franchises face challenges in aligning franchisee autonomy with corporate CSR goals, while centralized models may struggle to adapt global strategies to local needs.

Research on CSR in franchising remains limited and fragmented: While there has been an increase in studies on CSR in franchising, research remains fragmented and predominantly focuses on high-income regions. This leaves significant gaps in understanding how CSR practices are implemented and perceived in diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts, particularly in emerging markets.

5.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

In reviewing the articles found, the bibliometric analysis revealed trends in research on CSR and franchising, highlighting an increased focus on environmental and social dimensions over time. Some of the theoretical implications of this research are:

- **Expanding stakeholder theory**: By demonstrating how stakeholders such as customers, employees, and regulators have great influence CSR practices in franchising, the findings align with the stakeholder theory of Freeman et al. (1984) and its later adaptations, which emphasize the dynamic interaction between firms and societal expectations. This means that Managers should implement a dynamic engagement strategy that prioritizes frequent communication with franchisees and local communities. For instance, incorporating periodic feedback loops can help address local sustainability concerns while aligning with corporate CSR goals.
- **Using a specific reference framework for the CSR dimensions framework**: The study supports Dahlsrud's (2008) CSR dimensions framework by illustrating how economic, social and environmental responsibilities have evolved differently within franchise networks, shaped by both franchise models and external factors. In order to create awareness in this point, franchisors must invest in training programs for franchisees, educating them about the importance of CSR and its operational implications. This is especially critical in decentralized models where franchisees have more autonomy in decision-making.
- **Contribution to the impact of franchise models on CSR**: The results provide empirical and conceptual support to theories on structural challenges in franchising (Meiseberg and Ehrmann, 2012; Lawrence et al., 2024), highlighting how centralization fosters CSR coherence, while decentralization allows for contextual flexibility but risks fragmentation.

One aim of this research is to be able to offer practical insights to improve CSR effectiveness and stakeholder engagement. Some of those practical implications are:

- **Centralization vs. Decentralization in CSR implementation**: For centralized franchise models, managers should prioritize the development of universal CSR strategies that maintain brand consistency and allow minor local adaptations. For example, global sustainability goals can be complemented by region-specific community initiatives. For Decentralized models should establish frameworks for franchisees to align their local practices with overall corporate CSR goals, ensuring consistency without stifling autonomy.
- **Integrating stakeholder feedback**: Managers should actively engage with stakeholders to design CSR initiatives that resonate with local priorities. This approach not only improves stakeholder relationships, but also enhances the relevance and impact of CSR, as evidenced by the increasing focus on combined dimensions (e.g., economic + environmental) in recent studies.
- **CSR as a strategic tool:** CSR initiatives should be considered strategic assets to build long-term relationships, enhance brand reputation, and ensure competitive differentiation. For example, investments in environmental sustainability, such as reducing waste or adopting renewable energy, could drive both cost savings and consumer loyalty. In the same sense to create a framework for the CSR, the franchisor can create a digital tracking system to highlight best practices, identify areas for improvement, and ensure consistent reporting.
- **Localized CSR strategies for emerging markets:** The lack of research in low-income regions indicates an untapped area where franchises can leverage CSR to build strong community ties. Managers should invest in locally relevant social initiatives, such as education or healthcare programs, to address the specific needs of these communities.

By addressing these implications, franchises can address structural and contextual challenges, ensuring that CSR practices not only meet societal expectations but also contribute to the long-term success of their networks.

5.2 Gaps and Limitations in Existing Literature

This literature review highlights notable gaps and limitations in the existing corpus of research, particularly at the intersection of CSR, franchising, stakeholder theory, agency theory, and sustainability. These concepts, although well-established and theoretically sound, have been explored little in combination with the context of franchising. Other limitations were:

- Limited integration of core theoretical frameworks: Despite the theoretical prominence of stakeholder and agency theories in business and management studies, few empirical studies specifically apply these frameworks to explore CSR practices in franchising. Given their relevance to understanding franchise relationships and stakeholder dynamics, this gap limits the theoretical depth of current research. It was anticipated that more studies would address these intersections; however, the available literature often focuses on CSR or franchising independently, with limited exploration of their combined implications.
- Focus on core themes due to limited findings: To ensure meaningful insights were obtained, this study focused on primary themes such as CSR dimensions, franchising models, and stakeholder engagement. However, this approach reflects a methodological limitation, as literature yielded a relatively small number of studies linking all the concepts under review. This limitation hampered the ability to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis, narrowing the scope of insights that could be drawn from interthematic connections and expanding findings into potential trends or research topics.
- Scarcity of cross-national and cross-cultural studies: While the study aimed for an international perspective, most of the reviewed articles focused on local contexts. The limited availability of cross-national studies on franchising limited the exploration of global patterns and trends. However, the inclusion of cases in different countries and having studies conducted in different countries maintained the international focus of the study, albeit with reduced depth in cross-cultural analysis.
- Geographic bias: Most studies in the review originated in developed economies, reflecting geographic bias in the literature. This focuses on high-income regions limits understanding of how CSR works in franchising in emerging and developing economies.

These regions often present unique challenges and opportunities, such as resource constraints, informal labor markets, and local stakeholder needs, which remain underrepresented in current research.

5.2.1 Potential for Future Research

Based on the identified gaps and limitations, there are several promising avenues for future research at the intersection of CSR, franchising, stakeholder theory, agency theory, and sustainability. These directions aim to address theoretical and empirical gaps, while broadening the geographic and methodological scope of the field:

- Expanding cross-national and cross-cultural research
- Emerging economies and context-specific studies
- Exploring underrepresented CSR dimensions.
- Exploring from different industries.
- Using other methodologies, such as qualitative case studies.
- Focusing on franchisee perspectives.
- The role of technology in CSR practices
- Impacts on a specific CSR dimension.
- Impacts on a specific franchise type.
- Influence of a specific stakeholder.
- Deepening a similar study focused only on so-called Social Franchises.

Annex

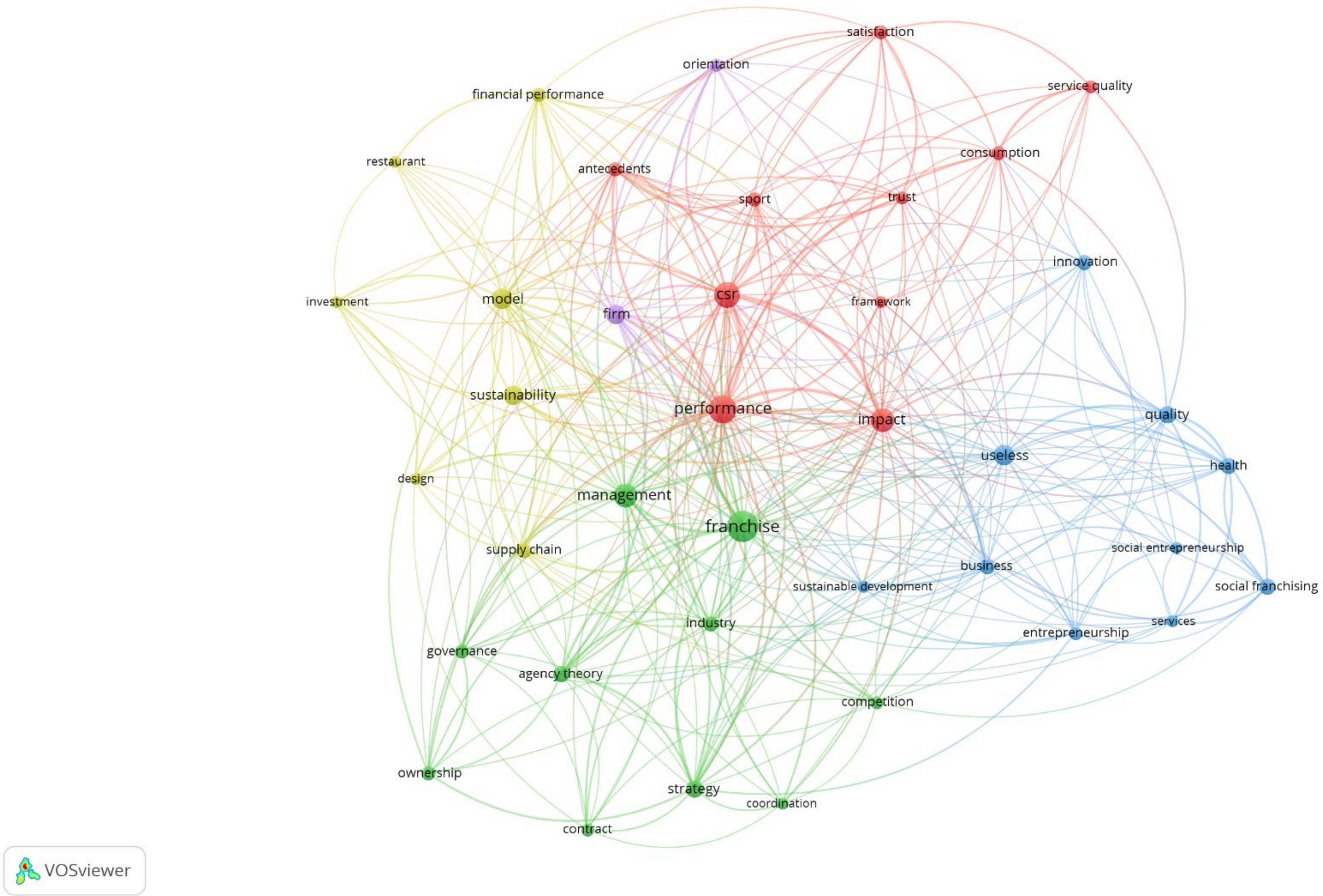
Annex A: Thesaurus

The thesaurus used to streamline the terms in the bibliometric review. The list shows the primary term/label and the replacement term (primary > replacement).

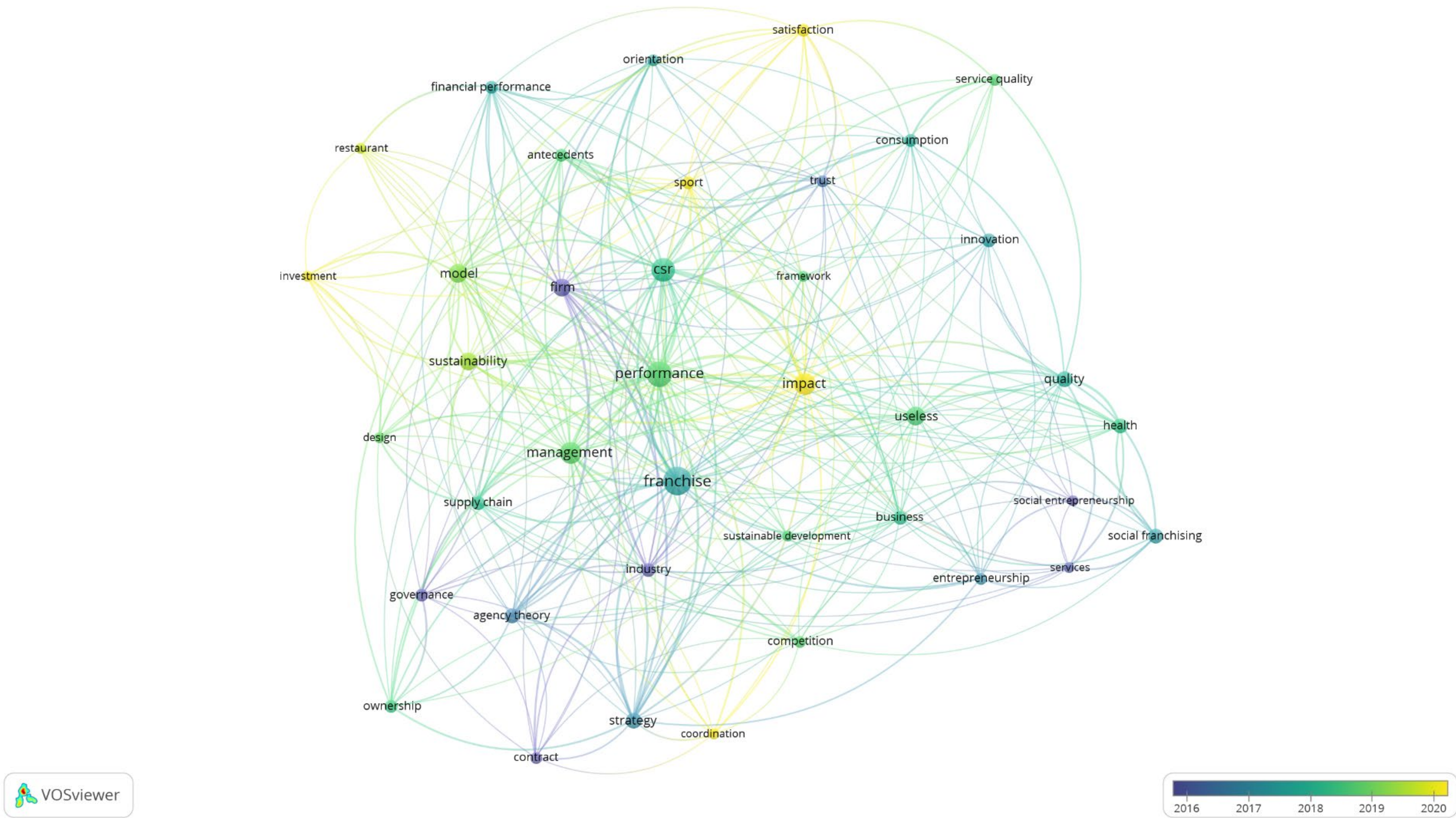
replace by	label
csr	corporate social responsibilities
csr	corporate social responsibility
csr	corporate social-responsibility
csr	corporate social-responsibility
csr	corporate social responsibility (csr)
franchise	franchising
franchisee	franchisees
franchise	franchisee performance
franchise	franchise extension
franchise	franchise network
franchise	franchise relationship
franchise	franchises
franchise	franchise system
franchise	franchise systems
franchise	franchisor
franchise	international franchising
franchise	multi-unit franchising
franchise	voting franchise
franchise	franchise agreement
franchise	franchise bidding
franchise	franchise business
franchise	franchise chains
franchise	franchise channel
franchise	franchise contract
franchise	franchisee satisfaction
franchise	franchisee selection
franchise	franchise fee
franchise	franchise net
franchise	franchise reforms
franchise	franchise value
franchise	franchise values
agency	agency costs
acquisition	acquisitions
branding	brand
branding	brand equity
branding	brand management
branding	brands
branding	brand extensions
branding	brand image
chain	chains
channel	channels
company	companies
consumer	consumers
consumption	consumers
consumption	consumer perceptions
consumption	consumers
consumerism	consumption
consumer behavior	consumer behaviour
contract	contracts
contract	formal contracts
contract	contract duration
costs	cost
costs	cost-effectiveness
decision making	decision-making
decision making	decisions
developing countries	developing-countries
economic impact	economic-impact
economy	economies
economy	economics
entrepreneurship	entrepreneurs
entrepreneurship	entrepreneurial orientation
entrepreneurship	entrepreneur

firm	firms
firm	firm growth
firm	firm perform
firm	firm survival
firm	firm value
firm	firm performance
fdi	foreign direct-investment
fdi	foreign direct investment
hospitality	hospitality industry
hotel	hotels
hotel	hotel industry
investment	investments
model	models
netwotk	networks
organization	organisation
organization	organizations
panel data	panel-data
perspective	perspectives
plural form	plural forms
policy	policies
price	prices
private sector	private-sector
product	products
quality of life	quality-of-life
restaurant	restaurants
restaurant	restaurant chains
restaurant	restaurant industry
retail	retailing
risk	risks
risk	risk-factors
risk	risk-taking
risk	risk factors
risk	risk management
sport	sports
sport	baseball
sport	basketball
sport	basking
strategy	strategies
supply chain	supply chain management
supply chain	supply chain relationships
supply chain	supply chain coordination
system	sistems
transaction cost	transaction costs
transaction cost	transaction-cost-analysis
transaction cost	transaction cost economics
transaction cost	transaction cost theory
film	animation
film	anime
useless	arenas
film	assassin´s creed
association	associations
film	augmented reality
bank	banks
bank	bank competition
bank	banksrupcy
bank	bank stability
film	batman
biomarker	biomarkers
film	blockbuster
film	celebrity
human resource management	human-resource management
intellectual property rights	intellectual property
intellectual property rights	property rights
intellectual property rights	property-rights

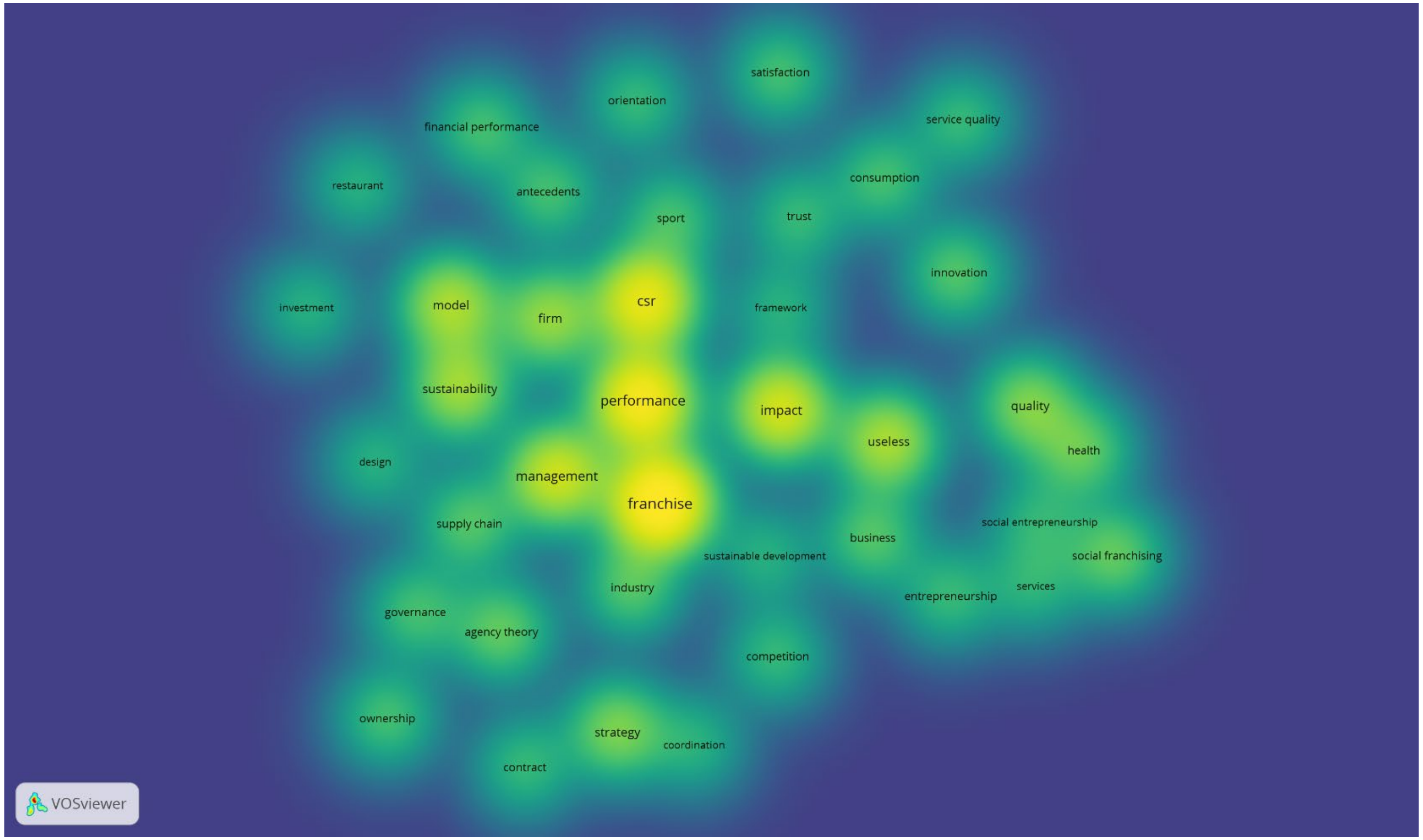
Annex B: Bibliometric -Network



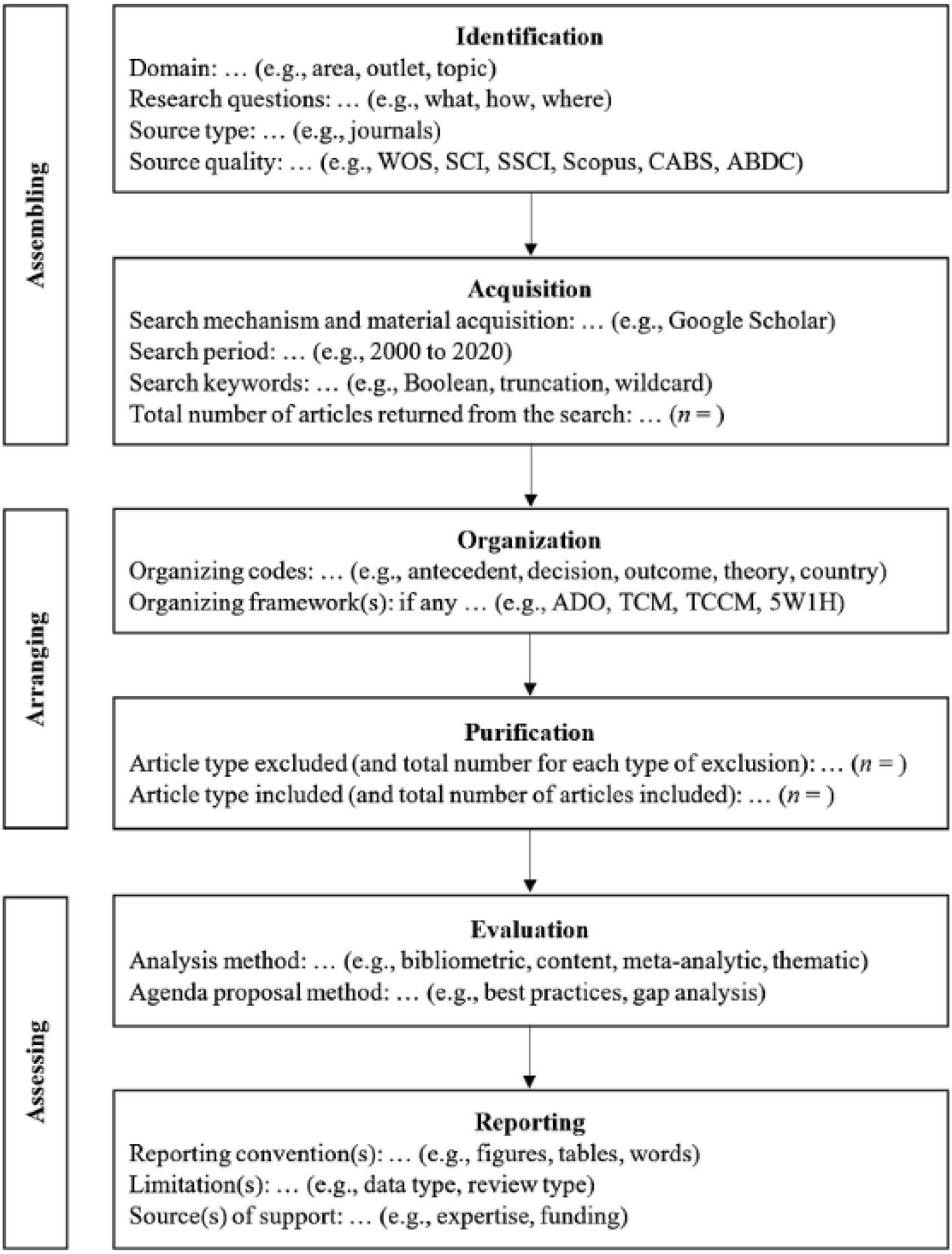
Annex B: Bibliometric -Overlay



Annex B: Bibliometric -Density



Annex C: SPAR-4-SLR PROTOCOL (Paul et al., 2021)



Annex D: Literature Review Results

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Bainbridge, J	'It is a Pokemon world': The Pokemon franchise and the environment	2014	Direct	Environmental	Medium
Bakioglu, BS	Exposing convergence: YouTube, fan labour, and anxiety of cultural production in Lonelygirl15	2018	Direct	Social	Medium
Barkay, T	Employee volunteering: soul, body and CSR	2012	Direct	Social	Medium
Beesabathuni, K; Lingala, S; Kraemer, K	Increasing egg availability through smallholder business models in East Africa and India	2018	Multi-Unit	Economic	High
Bretos, I; Díaz-Foncea, M; Marcuello, C	Cooperatives and internationalization: An analysis of the 300 largest cooperatives in the world	2018	Master	Economic	High
Brooks, N; Frías, AP; Pérez, IE	Corporate Social Responsibility in Drug Franchises	2009	Direct	Social	High
Bruwer, MM; Neethling, L	Fast-food drive-throughs in developing countries A modern convenience perpetuating unsustainable transport decisions?	2022	Direct	Environmental	Medium
Cai, YJ; Chen, Y; Siqin, TN; Choi, TM; Chung, SH	Pay upfront or pay later? Fixed royal payment in sustainable fashion brand franchising	2019	Direct	Economic	High
Calderon-Monge, E; Pastor-Sanz, I; Huerta-Zavala, P	Economic Sustainability in Franchising: A Model to Predict Franchisor Success or Failure	2017	Direct	Economic	Medium

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Cha, JB; Jo, MN	The Effect of the Corporate Social Responsibility of Franchise Coffee Shops on Corporate Image and Behavioral Intention	2019	Direct	Economic	High
Chen, CY; Lin, YH	Persuasion effect of corporate social responsibility initiatives in professional sport franchise: Moderating effect analysis	2020	Master	Social	Medium
Chen, CY; Lin, YH	Comparison Between Various Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives Based on Spectators' Attitudes and Attendance Intention for a Professional Baseball Franchise	2021	Master	Social	High
Chen, CY; Lin, YH	Social Entrepreneurship in Professional Sports: Antecedents and Outcomes from the Consumer Perspective	2021	Master	Economic, Social	High
Choi, S; Lee, S	Revisiting the financial performance - corporate social performance link	2018	Master	Economic	Medium
Chowdhury, M	Sustainable kerbside recycling in the municipal garbage contract	2009	Direct	Environmental	High
Chyzmar, I; Hoblyk, V	E-sports organizations with franchised networks: formalization of technological and economic development based on optimal operation and upgrade of the hardware	2021	Multi-Unit	Economic	High
Collier, KA	A Case Study on Corporate Peace The Coca-Cola Company: Coke Studio Pakistan	2014	Direct	Social	High

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
da Cunha, DT; Hakim, MP; Alves, MM; Vicentini, MS; Wisniewska, MZ	Dark kitchens: Origin, definition, and perspectives of an emerging food sector	2024	Multi-Unit	Economic	Medium
Dada, O; Perrigot, R; Watson, A	Influential factors of pro-environmental behaviors among franchisees in the fast-food sector	2024	Direct	Environmental	High
Darwish, H; Van Dyk, L	Bottom of Pyramid 4.0: Modularising and Assimilating Industrial Revolution Cognition into a 4-Tiered Social Entrepreneurship Upliftment Model for Previously Disconnected Communities	2018	Direct	Social	High
De Castro, LM; Mota, J; Marnoto, S	Toward a relational perspective of franchising chains	2009	Direct	Economic	Medium
Deng, H; Fang, L; Zhang, LY; Yan, XT; Wang, F; Hao, XY; Zheng, PP	A comprehensive content analysis of 104 Chinese electronic cigarette manufacturing enterprise official websites	2023	Multi-Unit	Social	Medium
Dharmawan, NKS; Salain, MSP; Hallewell, B	Emerging Balinese franchised city hotels in legal contexts: toward model provisions of local government regulation and a self-regulation framework	2018	Direct	Economic, Social	High
Duman, GM; Taskaynatan, M; Kongar, E; Rosentrater, KA	Integrating Environmental and Social Sustainability Into Performance Evaluation: A Balanced Scorecard-Based Grey-DANP Approach for the Food Industry	2018	Direct	Environmental, social	High

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Duvall, S; Thurston, S; Weinberger, M; Nuccio, O; Fuchs-Montgomery, N	Scaling up delivery of contraceptive implants in sub-Saharan Africa: operational experiences of Marie Stopes International	2014	Master	Social	High
Erceg, A; Kukec, L	Micro franchising as a tool for increasing self-employment and competitiveness: Croatian examples	2017	Direct	Economic, Social	High
Farooq, Q; Liu, X; Ahmad, S; Fu, PH; Awan, HM; Janet	Comparative Analysis of Entrepreneurship and Franchising: CSR and Voluntarism Perspective	2020	N/A	Economic	Medium
Fernandez-Muiños, M; Money, K; Saraeva, A; Garnelo-Gomez, I; Vazquez-Suarez, L	The ladies are not for turning: exploring how leader gender and industry sector influence the corporate social responsibility practices of franchise firms	2022	Multi-Unit	Social	High
Fernández-Muiños, M; Money, K; Saraeva, A; Garnelo-Gomez, I; Vázquez-Suárez, L	Are the Sins of the Father the Sins of the Sons, but Not the Daughters? Exploring How Leadership Gender and Generation Impact the Corporate Social Responsibility of Franchise Firms	2022	Direct	Social	High
Ferrell, OC; Ferrell, L	Ethics and Social Responsibility in Marketing Channels and Supply Chains: An Overview	2016	Direct	Economic, Social	Medium
Flint-Hartle, S; de Bruin, A	Franchising success: Insights from real estate brokerage	2011	Multi-Unit	Economic	Medium
Fuentes-Bautista, M	Rethinking localism in the broadband era: A participatory community development approach	2014	N/A	Social	High

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Ge, HF; Chen, SL; Chen, YJ	International Alliance of Green Hotels to Reach Sustainable Competitive Advantages	2018	Master	Environmental	Medium
Gebauer, H; Saul, CJ	Business model innovation in the water sector in developing countries	2014	Direct	Economic, Social	High
Grace, D; Weaven, S	An Empirical Analysis of Franchisee Value-in-Use, Investment Risk and Relational Satisfaction	2011	Direct	Economic	Medium
Haemmerli, M; Santos, A; Penn-Kekana, L; Lange, I; Matovu, F; Benova, L; Wong, KLM; Goodman, C	How equitable is social franchising? Case studies of three maternal healthcare franchises in Uganda and India	2018	Direct	Social	High
Hamdani, SU; Minhas, FA; Iqbal, Z; Rahman, A	Model for Service Delivery for Developmental Disorders in Low-Income Countries	2015	Direct	Social	High
Hanson, D	ESG Investing in Graham & Doddsville	2013	N/A	Environmental, Social	Medium
Herring, RJ	Epistemic brokerage in the bio-property narrative: contributions to explaining opposition to transgenic technologies in agriculture	2010	N/A	Environmental, Social	Medium
Higham, LE; Ongeri, W; Asena, K; Thrusfield, MV	Characterising and comparing animal-health services in the Rift Valley, Kenya: an exploratory analysis (part I)	2016	Direct	Economic, social	High

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Hong, E; Ahn, J	Role of Functional Company Characteristics on Food Franchisee Behavior	2023	Direct	Economic	Medium
Hosman, L	Making the transition from pilot to scale: examining sustainability and scalability issues in a public-private telecenter partnership in Sri Lanka	2011	Area	Social	High
Hu, YC; Lee, PC; Chuang, YS; Chiu, YJ	Improving the Sustainable Competitiveness of Service Quality within Air Cargo Terminals	2018	Area	Economic, Environmental	Medium
Hua, N; Xiao, Q; Yost, E	An empirical framework of financial characteristics and outperformance in troubled economic times Evidence from the restaurant industry	2013	Multi-Unit	Economic	Low
Huang, CI; Huang, YF; Do, MH; Nguyen, TLH	Sustainable Competitive Advantage for Multi-Unit Franchising: From the Taiwanese Franchise Market Perspectives	2023	Multi-Unit	Economic	Medium
Huang, ZF; Zheng, PJ; Ma, YQ; Li, X; Xu, WJ; Zhu, WL	A simulation study of the impact of the public-private partnership strategy on the performance of transport infrastructure	2023	Area	Economic, Environmental	High
Hunt, K; Wyke, S; Bunn, C; Donnachie, C; Reid, N; Gray, CM	Scale-Up and Scale-Out of a Gender-Sensitized Weight Management and Healthy Living Program Delivered to Overweight Men via Professional Sports Clubs: The Wider Implementation of Football Fans in Training (FFIT)	2020	Direct	Social	Medium

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Huntington, D; Mundy, G; Hom, NM; Li, QF; Aung, T	Physicians in private practice: reasons for being a social franchise member	2012	Direct	Social	High
Jang, S; Park, K	A sustainable franchisor-franchisee relationship model: Toward the franchise win-win theory	2019	N/A	N/A	High
Jennings, M	The precariousness of the franchise state: Voluntary sector health services and international NGOs in Tanzania, 1960s-mid-1980s	2015	Master	Voluntaries	Medium
Jeon, HJ; Gleiberman, A	Examining the Role of Sustainability and Green Strategies in Channels: Evidence from the Franchise Industry	2017	Multi-Unit	Environmental	Medium
Juusola, K; Rensimer, L	Transnational degree program franchising and the challenge of commercial franchisees	2018	Master	Economic	High
Kamdar, S	The Franchisee Model in Electricity Distribution: A case study of Torrent Power Limited in Bhiwandi, Maharashtra	2015	Area	Economic	Medium
Kim, B; Lee, S	The impact of material and immaterial sustainability on firm performance: The moderating role of franchising strategy	2020	Multi-Unit	Environmental	High
Kim, M; Pennington-Gray, L; Kim, J	Corporate social responsibility as a determinant of long-term orientation	2020	Multi-Unit	Economic, Social	High
Kim, MS; Thapa, B	Relationship of Ethical Leadership, Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Performance	2018	Direct	Economic, Social	High

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Kim, MS; Thapa, B; Holland, S	Drivers of perceived market and eco-performance in the foodservice industry	2018	Direct	Environmental, Social	Medium
Kim, SB; Choi, K	Bridging the Operational Efficiency Differences between Franchisors and Franchisees: A Metafrontier Approach	2022	Direct	Economic	Low
Kistruck, GM; Webb, JW; Sutter, CJ; Ireland, RD	Microfranchising in Base-of-the-Pyramid Markets: Institutional Challenges and Adaptations to the Franchise Model	2011	Direct	Social	Medium
Kubareva, I; Maliarchuk, O; Pohuda, N	Corporate Social Responsibility of Ukrainian tourist enterprises: identity, strategy and performance	2018	Multi-Unit	Economic	High
Labrecque, J; Dulude, B; Charlebois, S	Sustainability and strategic advantages using supply chain-based determinants in pork production	2015	Direct	Environmental	Medium
Lacey, R; Kennett-Hensel, P	How Expectations and Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility Impact NBA Fan Relationships	2016	Area	Social	High
Lanchimba, C; Porras, H; Salazar, Y; Windsperger, J	Franchising and country development: evidence from 49 countries	2024	N/A	Economic	High
Lawrence, B; Massimino, B; Zhang, JJ	Decay and Recovery of CSR Routines in Franchise Organizations	2024	Direct	Economic, Social	Medium
Le Bot, C; Perrigot, R; Déjean, F; Oxibar, B	Corporate Social Responsibility in franchise chains: Specificities, insights from French franchise chains' CSD, and avenues for future research	2022	Direct	Environmental, Social	Medium

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Lee, D; Moon, J; Cho, J; Kang, HG; Jeong, J	From corporate social responsibility to creating shared value with suppliers through mutual firm foundation in the Korean bakery industry: a case study of the SPC Group	2014	Direct	Economic, Social	High
Lee, E; Kim, JH; Rhee, CS	Effects of Marketing Decisions on Brand Equity and Franchise Performance	2021	Direct	Economic	Medium
Lee, K; Lee, B; Oh, W	Thumbs Up, Sales Up? The Contingent Effect of Facebook Likes on Sales Performance in Social Commerce	2015	N/A	Social	Low
Lee, YK; Kim, Y; Lee, KH; Li, DX	The impact of CSR on relationship quality and relationship outcomes: A perspective of service employees	2012	Multi-Unit	Social	High
Lev, B	Evaluating Sustainable Competitive Advantage	2017	N/A	Economic	N/A
Li, SY; Li, ML; Zhou, N	Pricing and coordination in a dual-channel supply chain with a socially responsible manufacturer	2020	Multi-Unit	Social	Medium
Lin, YH	Antecedents and Outcomes of Social Capital: Evidence from a Professional Baseball Franchise	2022	Area	Social	High
Liu, YR; Tian, TT; Hao, XY; Zhang, Q; Yao, CY; Liu, GF	Promotion of Household Waste Utilization in China: Lessons Learnt from Three Case Studies	2021	Multi-Unit	Environmental	Medium
Lyne, I	Bottling Water Differently, and Sustaining the Water Commons? Social Innovation Through Water Service Franchising in Cambodia	2020	Direct	Environmental, Social	High

Authors	**Article Title**	**Publication Year**	**Franchise Model**	**CSR Dimension**	**Stakeholder engagement**
Ma, L; Zhai, YF; Wu, T	Operating Charging Infrastructure in China to Achieve Sustainable Transportation: The Choice between Company-Owned and Franchised Structures	2019	Direct	Economic, environmental	Medium
Massimino, B; Lawrence, B	Supersize me? Franchisee size and voluntary compliance with corporate brand-building initiatives	2019	Multi-Unit	Economic	Medium
Maumbe, B	The rise of South Africa's quick service restaurant industry	2012	Multi-Unit	Economic, Social	High
McKague, K; Wong, J; Siddiquee, N	Social franchising as rural entrepreneurial ecosystem development: The case of Krishi Utsho in Bangladesh	2017	Area	Economic, Social	High
Meiseberg, B; Ehrmann, T	Lost in Translation? The Prevalence and Performance Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility in Franchising	2012	Direct	Economic	High
Melo, PLD; Carneiro-da-Cunha, JA; Telles, R	Franchisor support and brand value empowerment of micro-franchisees: a Brazilian market perspective	2022	Multi-Unit	Economic, Social	Medium
Mrema, GC; Kienzle, J; Mpagalile, J	Current Status and Future Prospects of Agricultural Mechanization in Sub-Saharan Africa [SSA]	2018	N/A	Economic, Environmental	High
Mutumba, A; Ngoma, M; Munene, JC; Ntayi, JM	The entrepreneurial ecosystem quality for sustainable franchising Mediating effects of public-private-partnership (PPP) support in Uganda	2020	Area	Economic, social	High
Nair, A; Weber, T	Borjo coffeehouse: Franchise, Independence, and Starbucks	2017	Direct	Economic	Medium

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Naude, C; Henrico, A; Van Staden, L	Service quality in the fast-food franchise industry in Gauteng	2022	Multi-Unit	Social	High
Oh, D; Yoo, M; Lee, Y	A holistic view of the service experience at coffee franchises: A cross-cultural study	2019	Direct	Social	High
Oueslati, H; Bennaghmouch-Maire, S; Deparis, M; Paquier, MC	Importance and conditions of effectiveness of CSR communications in franchise networks	2023	Multi-Unit	Social	High
Owusu-Kunnih, EO; Boateng, F; Loglo, F	Increasing demand for transnational education in Ghana: A structural equation analysis of the causation	2019	Master	Economic, Social	Medium
Park, DY; Choi, K; Kang, DH	Measuring the Meta Efficiency and Its Determinants on Efficiency in the Korean Coffee Shop Franchise	2020	Multi-Unit	Economic, Environmental	Medium
Paswan, AK; Wittmann, CM	Knowledge management and franchise systems	2009	Direct	Economic, social	High
Patel, SN; Ferrall, IL; Khaingad, B; Kammen, DM	Sustainable and Socially Resilient Minigrid Franchise Model for an Urban Informal Settlement in Kenya	2022	Multi-Unit	Environmental, Social	High
Patil, SR; Gopalakrishnan, L; Sai, VS; Matikanya, R; Rajpal, P	Markets, incentives, and health promotion can improve family planning and maternal health practices: a quasi-experimental evaluation of a tech-enabled social franchising and social marketing platform in India	2024	Direct	Economic, social	High

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Pereira, SK; Kumar, P; Dutt, V; Haldar, K; Penn-Kekana, L; Santos, A; Powell-Jackson, T	Protocol for the evaluation of a social franchising model to improve maternal health in Uttar Pradesh, India	2015	Master	Economic, social	High
Pérez, RS; Salinas, VF	Heritage in the reinvention of Malaga. Instruments, agents and strategies	2017	Area	Economic, social	Medium
Perrigot, R; Gbetchi, KE	Social franchise chains operating in African countries: are their social goals aligned with the 2030 United Nations sustainable development goals?	2023	Direct	Environmental, Social	Medium
Perrigot, R; López-Fernández, B; Basset, G; Herrbach, O	Resale pricing as part of franchisor know-how	2020	Direct	Economic	Medium
Perrigot, R; Oxibar, B; Déjean, F	Corporate Social Disclosure in the Franchising Sector: Insights from French Franchisors' Websites	2015	Direct	Environmental, Social	Medium
Rahatullah, MK; Raeside, R	Determinants of entrepreneurial business relationship success	2015	N/A	Economic, Social	Medium
Ramírez, MDG; Villanueva, CAF	Determining factors in the adoption of corporate social responsibility practices: a sectoral analysis of mexican franchises	2018	Multi-Unit	Economic, Social	Medium
Ravindran, TKS; Fonn, S	Are social franchises contributing to universal access to reproductive health services in low-income countries?	2011	Direct	Social	High

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Rezaei, S; Behnamian, J	Competition in the growth period of partnership supply networks based on multi-joint distribution and virtual alliance: A sustainable approach	2021	Multi-Unit	Environmental	Medium
Rezaei, S; Behnamian, J	Benders decomposition-based particle swarm optimization for competitive supply networks with a sustainable multi-agent platform and virtual alliances	2022	Multi-Unit	Environmental	Medium
Rezaei, S; Behnamian, J	Competitive planning of partnership supply networks focusing on sustainable multi-agent transportation and virtual alliance: A matheuristic approach	2022	Multi-Unit	Environmental	Medium
Ryu, C; Kwon, Y	Elements that affect foreign tourists' satisfaction: a case study in Seoul, Korea	2021	N/A	Economic, Social	Medium
Sahasrabudhe, S; Shaikh, N; Kasat, K	Internationalisation of higher education-Necessity to adapt to new forms of engagement for ensuring sustainability?	2020	Area	Social	Medium
Sebastiani, R; Corsaro, D; Montagnini, F; Caruana, A	Corporate sustainability in action	2014	Direct	Environmental, Social	High
Sidibé, A; Olabisi, LS; Doumbia, H; Touré, K; Niamba, CA	Barriers and enablers of the use of digital technologies for sustainable agricultural development and food security: Learning from cases in Mali	2021	Area	Economic, social	Medium
Skawinska, E; Zalewski, RI	Activities of Food Retail Companies in Poland during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Context of Food Security	2021	Multi-Unit	Economic, Social	High

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Smith, J; t'Hart, L; Leaversuch, F; Walton, A; Jameson, G; Samsa, H; Clarey, M; Millar, L; Burns, S; Pollard, CM	Promoting mental well-being in Western Australia: Act Belong Commit® mental health promotion campaign partners' perspectives	2024	Master	Social	High
Soebbing, BP; Mason, DS; Humphreys, BR	Novelty effects and sports facilities in smaller cities: Evidence from Canadian hockey arenas	2016	N/A	Economic	Low
Suchman, L; Hashim, CV; Adu, J; Mwachandi, R	Seeking care in the context of social health insurance in Kenya and Ghana	2020	Area	Social	High
Szerb, A; Kivleniece, I; Aggarwal, V	Unjani Clinics: meeting the need for scale through social franchising	2021	Master	Social	High
Tan, KSY; Chan, SKL	From Train Station to Night Market: Bangkok's Talad Rod Fai as Urban Liminoid Space	2021	Area	Economic, Social	Medium
Toshmirzaev, D; Ahn, YJ; Kiatkawsin, K; Sutherland, I; Zielinski, S	The effect of corporate social responsibility on trustful relationships, supportive communication intention, and brand loyalty of ethnic halal restaurants	2022	Direct	Environmental, Voluntaries	High
Tsai, FS; Kuo, CC; Lin, JL	Knowledge Heterogenization of the Franchising Literature Applying Transaction Cost Economics	2020	N/A	Economic	Low
Utgård, J	Retail Chains' Corporate Social Responsibility Communication	2018	Multi-Unit	Environmental, Social	Low

Authors	Article Title	Publication Year	Franchise Model	CSR Dimension	Stakeholder engagement
Wright, O; Winzar, H	Franchise system investment disclosure: signaling value to prospective franchisees	2014	Direct	Economic	Medium
Yeung, G; Mok, V	Manufacturing and Distribution Strategies, Distribution Channels, and Transaction Costs: The Case of Parallel Imported Automobiles	2013	Direct	Economic	Medium
Yun, X; Liu, H; Li, Y; Lai, KK	Contract design under asymmetric demand information for sustainable supply chain practices	2023	Direct	Environmental	Medium
Zafeiropoulou, FA; Koufopoulos, D	The influence of the relational marketing paradigm on the governance of the novel channel format named social franchising: an exploratory qualitative analysis of four social franchises from the UK	2014	Master	Economic, Social	High
Zafeiropoulou, FA; Koufopoulos, DN	The Influence of Relational Embeddedness on the Formation and Performance of Social Franchising	2013	Master	Economic, Social	High
Zhao, M; Li, B; Ren, JL; Hao, ZH	Competition equilibrium of ride-sourcing platforms and optimal government subsidies considering customers' green preference under peak carbon dioxide emissions	2023	Direct	Economic, Environmental	Medium

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