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1. Introduction

Business format franchising has grown phenomenally in recent years, particularly amongst hospitality and retail firms seeking international expansion in developed and emerging markets (Altinay et al., 2014a; Lindblom and Tikkanen, 2010). This popularity is explained through the potential benefits franchising offers to hospitality and retail franchisors and franchisees (Brookes and Altinay, 2011). These benefits are realised, in part, through the knowledge transfer (KT) that occurs between these franchise partners. Franchisors provide operational, technological and marketing know-how to franchisees and, in return, franchisees provide knowledge on local market conditions and customer preferences to support innovation and network growth (Weaven et al., 2014). While KT in both directions is therefore important, it is KT from the franchisor to the franchisee that is critical in ensuring brand conformity (Paswan et al., 2014). The success of franchise networks has been attributed to the franchisor's KT capacity (Gorovaia and Windsperger, 2010) and the ability of franchisees' to absorb and apply the knowledge transferred (Minguela-Rata et al., 2010). As such, KT is a fundamental component of hospitality and retail franchising, yet one that remains relatively under-researched (Brookes, 2014; Weaven et al., 2014).

This study aims to contribute to our understanding of KT in franchising by combining institutional and organisational learning theories in order to i) evaluate how KT practices contribute to the development of isomorphism amongst franchisees in a franchise network and ii) analyse how franchisor and franchisee partner characteristics influence KT to achieve isomorphism amongst franchisees. Institutional theorists highlight the relevance of the social dimensions of franchising to achieve isomorphism (Combs et al., 2009); a process whereby organisations in the same industrial field model themselves on one another (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Isomorphism is achieved using power and sanctions (coercive isomorphism);

through copying others perceived as experts (mimetic isomorphism), or through the imposition of laws, rules and standards in the field (normative isomorphism) (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Isomorphism therefore reflects the KT between organisations, which in turn, influences conformity within industrial fields. Franchise researchers applying organisational learning theories also recognise the influence of social relationships on KT effectiveness (Minguela-Rata et al., 2010; Szulanski and Jensen, 2008). We argue therefore that institutional and organisation learning theories may be combined to understand KT in franchising and its impact on achieving isomorphism and conformity within franchise networks.

This study makes three distinct contributions to the franchise literature. Firstly, it provides evidence of how the transfer of explicit knowledge supports the realisation of coercive isomorphism and how the transfer of tacit knowledge supports the realisation of mimetic isomorphism amongst franchisees in a network. Secondly, it identifies the factors that influence the extent to which these types of isomorphism are achieved. In doing so, it highlights the importance of franchisor institutionalisation, a partner characteristic not previously identified in the franchise KT literature, but one which is shown to influence KT antecedents and thus isomorphism. Thirdly, the paper highlights key differences in the KT practices and isomorphism of the hospitality and retail industrial sectors.

The paper begins by examining KT from an organisational learning perspective to identify relevant knowledge and partner characteristics. It then reviews the extant franchise research using institutionalisation theory in order to develop the study's research questions. After presenting the research design, the findings identify how KT practices and partner characteristics influence isomorphism. The conclusions highlight the similarities and

differences between the hospitality and retail sectors and the implications for industry practice.

2. *Franchise Knowledge Transfer (KT)*

In business format franchising, a franchisor 'sells the right to market its products and services using a proven business concept and its brand name to legally independent entrepreneurs, the franchisees' (Cochet and Garg, 2008, p.135). Franchisees therefore buy the right to operate branded units and the operational, technical and marketing knowledge to run those units. The transfer of knowledge to franchisees is therefore critical to ensure that they understand and conform to their franchisor's business model (Gorovaia and Windsperger, 2010). At the outset of the franchise agreement, franchisors are typically the source firm for knowledge and franchisees, the recipients who purposefully receive that knowledge (Foss and Pedersen, 2002). Franchisors must therefore create a blueprint for franchisees (Watson et al., 2005) to operate their units so that brand conformity is protected.

2.1 KT from an organisational learning perspective

Franchise researchers investigating KT from an organisational learning perspective provide empirical evidence of the importance of both knowledge and partner characteristics for effective KT. Knowledge can be characterised as either explicit or tacit. Explicit knowledge is easily codified and transferred (Kalnins and Mayer, 2004). The strong drive for standardisation in hospitality franchising leads to the development and use of explicit operational, technical and marketing knowledge that is transferred through training, standard operating procedures and detailed brand and operating manuals (Paswan & Wittmann, 2009). Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is sticky as it is embedded contextually, organisationally or socially within organisations (Inkpen, 2008). It therefore requires information-rich

transfer mechanisms such as socialisation and communication that can be personalised, use multiple cues (voice, gestures, words), language variety and feedback (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2010). Minguela-Rata et al. (2010) advise from their multi-sector study that explicit and tacit KT mechanisms are complementary and that on-going support services that aid in the transfer of tacit knowledge make it easier for franchisees to apply the explicit knowledge transferred.

A limited number of franchise studies also recognise the importance of franchise partner characteristics to KT. Weaven et al. (2014) argue conceptually that prior experience and organisational distance are particularly important as they influence the development of three KT antecedents; shared identity, absorptive capacity and causal ambiguity. When organisational distance between partners is large, knowledge barriers are created through differences in norms, language and business practices (Altinay and Wang, 2006). These barriers influence the perceived attractiveness of knowledge sources and the learning intent of knowledge recipients (Park, 2011). In a study of hospitality master franchising, Brookes (2014) identifies that these barriers inhibit the development of shared identity, a KT antecedent that reflects the social relationships between franchise partners.

These partner characteristics also influence the absorptive capacity of KT partners; their ability to recognise the value of new information, assimilate it and apply it to commercial ends (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). Prior experience also impacts on causal ambiguity (Beeby and Booth, 2001) or the ability to understand the connections between actions and outputs that are the source of competitive advantage (King, 2007). Brookes (2014) identifies that all three antecedents are relevant to KT between hospitality franchisors and master franchisees and that the evolution of shared identity positively influences both partners'

absorptive capacity. Lindsay et al. (2003) also found that absorptive capacity is strongly influenced by relationships developed across service industry franchise networks.

While these studies highlight the importance of social relationships and contribute to our understanding of franchise KT, they currently fall short of exploring how KT practices influence isomorphism and thus conformity in franchise networks. The following section therefore explores the extant literature on franchising and institutionalisation theory.

2.2 Franchising and institutionalisation theory

Institutional theorists argue its potential to increase our understanding of franchising as it considers the social factors that influence decision making (Barthelemy, 2011; Combs et al., 2009; Doherty et al., 2014). Institutional theory draws explanatory power from these social factors (Granovetter, 1985) and assumes that managers respond to social influences and pressure for conformity (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Social influences are derived from the external institutional environment or internal institutional pressures (Combs et al., 2009), and lead to coercive, mimetic or normative isomorphism. Institutional theory therefore explains why organisations in the same industrial fields become increasingly similar or isomorphic in their organisation structure and strategy (Barthelemy, 2011).

Franchise researchers have applied institutional theory to examine the propensity to franchise and the survival rates of franchisors. Shane and Foo (1999) explored both issues in a study of 1292 new multi-sector US franchisors between 1979 and 1996. The researchers found that the success of new franchise firms depends on economic efficiency and institutional approval in order to give new franchisors legitimacy. Their findings provide evidence that coercive isomorphism is developed through franchisors' efforts to achieve cognitive legitimacy by

taking organisational activities for granted. Normative isomorphism is achieved through socio-political legitimacy and the extent to which legislation dictates accepted rules and standards. For example, legal requirements for new franchisors to produce disclosure circulars and strict termination laws support normative isomorphism. Disclosure circulars provide evidence that franchisors are legitimate and aid franchisee recruitment.

In a subsequent multi-sector US study, Combs et al. (2009) also sought to explore the propensity to franchise and identified that normative and mimetic isomorphism occurred through internal and external social forces. Normative isomorphism was influenced by professional associations within industrial fields and mimetic isomorphism, by managers' degree of uncertainty; the greater the uncertainty, the greater the tendency to mimic competitors. Barthelemy (2011) also identified that French franchisors mimicked competitors' propensity to franchise when they deemed them to be successful. However, he cautions of the dangers of mimicking superficial features and failing to replicate subtle, yet important organisational features.

These studies highlight the applicability of institutional theory to explain *why* franchisors survive and *why* a particular proportion of franchised stores is adopted. They also provide insight into *why* isomorphism occurs and the factors that influence it within industrial sectors. However, they do not offer insight into *how* franchisees imitate franchisors, and thus the applicability of institutional theory within franchise networks. Furthermore these studies have been conducted in countries where franchising has a strong legislative context and normative isomorphism may be easier to realise.

Recognising these limitations, Doherty et al. (2014) applied institutional theory to investigate retail franchise relationships in China, where the institutional framework for franchise partnerships is still evolving. The researchers found evidence of franchisors' efforts to achieve coercive isomorphism and brand conformity through contractual obligations. However, their achievement of this type of isomorphism was undermined by the lack of formal and regulatory mechanisms which made contract enforcement and achieving normative isomorphism difficult. The situation was exacerbated when the franchisor's own infrastructure was not sufficiently developed. The researchers concluded that a regulatory institutional pillar is crucial for the foundation of a franchise relationship.

This brief review of the extant literature reveals that organisational learning and institutional theory combined provide a suitable theoretical lens to understand KT and isomorphism within franchise networks. Developing this understanding is important to achieve conformity and reduce the likelihood of agency problems (Doherty et al., 2014), particularly when normative isomorphism may be difficult to achieve. This study therefore aims to analyse how coercive and mimetic isomorphism are realised through the KT between franchise partners in an environment that lacks a strong regulatory environment. More specifically, the study aims to provide a systematic analysis of how explicit and tacit knowledge are transferred to achieve isomorphism and evaluate how franchise partner characteristics influence this process by addressing the following research questions:

- How are explicit and tacit knowledge transferred from franchisors to franchisees in order to achieve coercive and mimetic isomorphism amongst franchisees in a network?

- How do franchisor and franchisee partner characteristics (prior experience and organisational distance) influence KT antecedents (causal ambiguity, absorptive

capacity and shared identity), the KT process and the realisation of coercive and
mimetic isomorphism amongst franchisees in a network?

3. *Research Design*

A qualitative approach was adopted for this exploratory study in order to develop a deeper
understanding of the KT practices which occurred and the impact of these on isomorphism.
As the study sought to understand the isomorphic outcomes of KT, it focussed on the
experiences of franchisees as the receivers of knowledge, a perspective currently under-
researched (Cumberland and Githens, 2012; Paswan et al., 2014). This approach also
enabled us to better understand how KT practices influenced franchisees' actions and
behaviours (Mason and Duquette, 2008) and thus the impact of KT on isomorphism.

Turkey was deemed an appropriate research context for four reasons. Firstly, franchise
development is being encouraged as a preferred method of growth and banks are increasingly
providing funding for franchise opportunities (Koyuncuoglu and Aktas, 2014). The Turkish
Franchise Association, UFRAD (2014), reports that franchising contributes approximately
US$ 35 million to the national economy. Secondly, the legal definition of franchising
explicitly identifies the transfer of know-how from franchisors to franchisees (The Block
Exemption Communiqué on Vertical Agreements, 2002). Thirdly, there is no specific
legislation covering franchise agreements in Turkish law and therefore no law governing pre-
contractual disclosures, the relationship between franchisors and franchisees, or that thw
franchisor must meet any requirements prior to establishing a franchise (Koyuncuoglu and
Aktas, 2014). Finally, the Supreme Court decreed in 2011 that the franchise agreement could
be concluded orally and without a written contract. As such, this country context enabled us
to address limitations of previous institutionalisation studies (Doherty et al., 2014). Combs et

al. (2009, p. 1283) also assert that 'institutional theory is most relevant when uncertainty is high, relative to economic imperatives'.

Data was collected from a sample of 32 hospitality (food and beverage) and retail franchisees using the purposive and snowball sampling processes recommended by Nyadzayo et al. (2011). These two sectors were chosen specifically as they are both within the service industry domain, but differences within the two sectors have been previously identified (Alexander and Lockwood, 1996; Cochet and Garg, 2008). While both sectors strive for conformity, in the hospitality sector, standardisation is sought for both product and service elements of the franchise concept, whereas within the retail sector, standardisation is mainly focused on the product (Altinay et. al, 2014a). Examining these differences enabled us to better understand how KT practices influenced the realisation of isomorphism. Data was collected from a sample of 16 franchisees in each sector so that data saturation could be achieved (Francis et al., 2010). Data saturation is considered appropriate for exploratory studies of this nature, as the focus here is more on sample adequacy to ensure that no further patterns emerge from the data, rather than sample size (Bowen, 2008; O'Reilly and Parker, 2012).

Demographic data was collected on the franchise network and the franchisees as Table 1 depicts. Franchisees had been operating for between eight months and 19 years, allowing for some longitudinal insight into how KT practices might change over time and be influenced through the development of social relationships (Brookes, 2014). Semi-structured interviews with franchisees explored the franchisor's KT practices prior to, during and post-opening of franchised units; the types of knowledge transferred through particular mechanisms; the franchisees' experiences and perceptions of KT practices; and how they influenced their

actions in relation to achieving brand conformity. This line of questioning enabled us to identify how KT practices influenced isomorphism and the impact of partner characteristics.

The interviews were conducted by a Turkish academic researcher, fluent in Turkish and English. Using a local researcher helped us to gain access to franchisees, as a common background acts as an antecedent to trust development in research access (Okumus et al., 2007). Interviews lasted between one hour and one hour thirty minutes and were audio recorded for accuracy. The interview schedule was developed in English, translated into Turkish and back translated for equivalency purposes (Usunier, 2012). The same process was applied to the transcripts.

Data analysis was undertaken using NVivo software following Corley and Gioia's (2004) recommended staged approach. In the first stage, first-order concepts were generated by grouping concepts into categories using open coding, an analytical procedure of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Next, these first-order concepts were categorised into broader second-order themes using axial coding and introducing the researchers' interpretations (Corley and Gioia, 2004). In the third stage, second-order themes were gathered into a series of aggregate dimensions referring to the original data to check these interpretations. Memos of ideas about the themes and their relationships (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) were kept by the researchers to support this process. Memos were also created for each theme containing a list of all questions to be asked of the data to validate the themes and identify the links between them. They provided a thick description of franchisees' perceptions and enabled the researchers to understand how the KT processes contributed to the development of different types of isomorphism.

Table 1: Research Sample

Franchisee Sector H= Hospitality R= Retail	Franchise Network Origin	Units Turkish Network	Years Franchisor Operational in Turkey	Contract Type	Years Franchisee Operational	Franchisee Previous Experience	KT practices	Franchisee Conformity
H1	Domestic	2	2	Single	2	No	Limited	No
H2	Domestic	40	10	Single	3	No	Limited	No
H3	Domestic	17	3	Single	1	No	Limited	No
H4	International (USA)	147	14	Multi	4	No	Extensive	Yes
H5	Domestic	180	7	Single	1	Yes	Evolving	Yes
H6	Domestic	155	22	Single	.5	No	Evolving	Yes
H7	Domestic	120	4	Single	1.5	No	Limited	No
H8	Domestic	21	11	Single	.4	Yes	Limited	No
H9	Domestic	50	10	Single	1	No	Limited	No
H10	Domestic	100	9	Single	3	Yes	Evolving	Yes
H11	International (USA)	344	21	Single	3	No	Extensive	Yes
H12	Domestic	97	10	Multi	3.5	No	Evolving	Yes
H13	International (USA)	60	31	Single	2	Yes	Extensive	No
H14	Domestic with international units	150	7	Single	1.5	No	Extensive	Yes
H15	International (USA)	15	7	Single	2	No	Extensive	Yes
H16	Domestic	395	12	Single	2	No	Evolving	Yes
R1	Domestic	10	7	Single	4	No	Evolving	Yes
R2	Domestic with international units	137	15	Single	5	Yes	Extensive	Yes
R3	Domestic with international units	800	23	Multi	19	No	Evolving	Yes

R4	International (German)	3	39	Single	11	Yes	Evolving	Yes
R5	International (Italian)	25	1.5	Single	1	Yes	Extensive	Yes
R6	International (French)	1900	19	Single	13	Yes	Evolving	Yes
R7	Domestic	50	5	Single	3	No	Limited	No
R8	Domestic with international units	216	7	Single	6	No	Extensive	Yes
R9	International	14	35	Single	14	No	Limited	No
R10	Domestic	200	2.5	Single	1	No	Limited	No
R11	International	1300	8	Single	8	Yes	Evolving	Yes
R12	International	250	17	Single	11	Yes	Limited	No
R13	Domestic	1650	15	Single	6	Yes	Evolving	Yes
R14	International	60	4	Single	12	No	Extensive	Yes
R15	Domestic	54	3	Single	12	No	Limited	No
R16	Domestic	70	8	Single	11	No	Evolving	Yes

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings on KT and isomorphism before those on the influence of partner characteristics on KT and isomorphism.

4.1 KT and isomorphism

The study reveals that KT practices are important to achieving isomorphism, but the extent to which this was achieved varied across the sample according to whether franchisees belonged to networks with extensive, evolving or limited KT practices. These categories reflect what franchisees described as the franchisor's 'institutionalisation'. On probing, franchisees explained that this term reflects the level of development of the franchisor's infrastructure and the systems and procedures in place to support franchisees, including KT practices.

In networks with extensive KT practices, franchisors were described as 'fully institutionalised' (H11) and franchisees considered themselves 'part of an institutionalised system' (R8). Franchise networks with evolving KT practices, were identified as 'within a transition period to becoming more professional' (H10) and 'still trying complete their institutionalisation' (R3). Franchisees explained that their franchisor had implemented additional KT practices as their networks developed, adding that their franchisor, 'now organises training programs' (R13); 'now pays great importance to training its franchisees' (R16); or that 'training is now obligatory' (H6). Franchisees in networks with limited KT practices reported that their franchisor 'doesn't have a well-established franchise system' (H7) or 'is not yet institutionalised' (R7) as there are 'so many deficits in their organisational structure' (R10).

Table 2 provides an overview of these categories, the network characteristics and the variability in the size, prior and operational experience within Turkey. Table 3 depicts their KT practices according to whether they took place pre-, during or post-opening. The following sections discuss how these practices influenced coercive and mimetic isomorphism.

Table 2: Franchisor Network Characteristics and KT Practices

KT Practices	Industrial Sector	Prior Experience	Units in Turkey	Years Operational in Turkey
Extensive	Hospitality	International	50-344	7-21
	Retail	International	25-216	1.5-15
Evolving	Hospitality	Domestic	97-395	7-16
	Retail	International & domestic	3-1650	8-39
Limited	Hospitality	Domestic	2-50	2-11
	Retail	International & domestic	14-250	5-35

4.1.1 KT and coercive isomorphism

Achieving coercive isomorphism was dependent on three factors; the explicit knowledge transferred to franchisees, the franchisors use of centralised control procedures and strictly enforced contractual agreements. Hospitality and retail franchisees in networks with extensive KT practices underwent an induction process and extensive training before opening their unit. Training systematically covered the transfer of operational, technical, customer care, sales and marketing knowledge. Recruitment and selection and financial management knowledge was also transferred. Hospitality franchisees in this category advised that they 'learned everything you need to know to run a unit (H15)' and that the training 'was well-structured and well-run' (H14). Furthermore contract signature was dependent on passing an examination and demonstrating that they would be able to apply the knowledge transferred. In both sectors, training was supported by coding explicit knowledge into supplementary brand and/or operating manuals which were made available in hard copy and online for subsequent reference; findings consistent with previous research (Doherty, 2007; Paswan &

Wittmann, 2009).   Franchisees in the hospitality sector were also provided with standardised menus and recipes.

Franchisees who belonged to networks with evolving KT practices received less training prior to opening and it was not always compulsory. Operational training was the most prevalent for hospitality franchisees, and for retail franchisees, the focus was on the transfer of product knowledge. This explicit knowledge was also codified and provided in product catalogues, which for retail franchisees tended to be in hard copy only. Retail franchisees in this category described their experiences as 'not really helpful in establishing your business' (R2) as the franchisor 'simply introduced products and explained how they are produced' (R7). They suggested that their franchisors purposively selected franchisees that had prior experience in the industrial sector or in running their own business in order to grow their networks quickly (R11, R13). In both sectors, franchisees reported the implementation of more pre-opening training as their network grew in size, with additional training on customer care, complaint handling and merchandising. One retail franchisor introduced a 'brand college' offering 'certificated' courses (R6), although these were not assessed. While pre-opening and on-going training was delivered by franchisor representatives in both sectors, retail franchisors frequently used external consultants for its delivery.

In networks with limited KT, hospitality franchisees had pre-opening meetings with franchisor representatives about the brand and its history (H2, H7, H8) and minimal (1-2 days) operational training, usually in another franchised unit. In contrast, retail franchisees had limited meetings which focussed on product knowledge, reporting, 'you can't call it training but we had meetings where they taught us the products available at the time' (R15). These franchisees identified that they 'trained [themselves] on how the store should be run' (R7) and that franchisors 'did not really check if we were capable of running our unit' (R9). Additionally, any training at opening was by third-party

Table 3: KT Practices

Network KT Practices	Extensive[1]	Evolving	Limited
Pre-opening	• Induction (history, mission & goals) • Structured training programmes (1 or 2 week duration) • Delivered by 'experienced' franchisor staff • Most focus on operational knowledge • Other KT on technical, customer care, HR, sales & marketing & financial management • Examination to assess KT effectiveness (hospitality) • Supplementary written material provided or available online	• Training not always compulsory • Introduction of more formalised training over time • Focus on operational training (hospitality) • Focus on product knowledge (retail) • Operational & product training by franchisor representatives (hospitality) • Training delivered by external consultants (retail) • Supporting documentation usually in print format (retail)	• Limited to meetings with franchisor • Focus on brand and franchisor history (hospitality) • Minimal operational training by other franchisees (hospitality) • Focus on product knowledge (retail) • Company folders provided with franchisor history & structure & product details
During Opening	• Experienced personnel work onsite with franchisee (1 week to 1 month)	• Onsite support by experienced staff (e.g. regional coordinator)(1 to 2 weeks)	• Limited to technical training onsite by 3rd – party suppliers (retail) • Supervisory visit by franchisor (hospitality)
Post-opening	• Regular meetings to introduce new products • Regular seminars for 'sharing problems' &'finding solutions' • Developmental seminars (e.g. business skill development; sales & marketing) • Franchisor available & accessible for communication • Online platform for sharing problems & best practice • Frequent franchisee socialisation	• Variable KT practices • Annual meetings common for dissemination by franchisor; considered repetitive • Special topic sessions by external consultants • Certificates given for attendance but KT not assessed • Franchisor-franchisee communication infrequent & subject to delay • Online platforms used for franchisor dissemination • Communication to share best practice between franchisees without franchisor presence (retail)	• Extremely limited or non-existent KT practices • Focus on new products (retail) • Feasibility of additional training questioned • Communication with franchisor online, predominantly for dissemination • Limited communication between franchisees

[1] The categories labelled as extensive, evolving and limited are used as relative terms. As the study was conducted in a country without a strong legislative context for franchising, they may not be comparable with KT practices in other countries where training and other KT practices may be far more extensive.

suppliers to the franchisor. Franchisees in both sectors were also provided with the same explicit product knowledge in hard-copy product manuals.

Across the entire sample, these explicit KT practices were supplemented by a number of centralised control mechanisms for supply and distribution, pricing, site location and shop 'fit'. One hospitality franchisee explained that,

'They have a specific design format that needs to be followed in all branches. You have no right even to suggest alternations or modifications to their store design. You need to accept whatever they put in the store and where they put it.' (H6)

Similarly, a retail franchisee advised that,

'They do the shop fitting. They have standards that each store needs to comply with. The store is organised and designed according to their instructions.' (R5)

In retail networks, franchisors also used online proprietal sales and distributions systems to enhance control.

Franchisees were also subject to quality audit inspections, undertaken regularly and anonymously by third-party organisations in networks with extensive and evolving KT, but on a limited and irregular basis by franchisor representatives in networks with limited KT. These control mechanisms were reinforced by the threat of punitive action for any contract breach. Franchisees who belonged to networks where KT practices were extensive or evolving, reported having 'strict contracts' (H15) with 'tough terms for disobedience' (R11) or 'severe penalty clauses' (R2) so 'you have to obey the rules and procedures' (H11). Hospitality franchisees appeared more willing to accept these conditions as a 'norm' of franchising as Table 4 depicts. These comments reflect hospitality franchisees' perceptions of their franchisor's willingness to use power to achieve cognitive legitimacy and coercive isomorphism, a finding that echoes that of Shane and Foo (1999).

In networks with limited KT, franchisees reported that their franchisor 'had no control mechanisms' (H2), did not 'control the branches' (H7) or was willing to 'ignore deceptive applications practiced by different franchisees (R15). Others explained that 'as long as we pay our royalty fees, I don't think

Table 4: Hospitality Franchisee Perceptions about Franchise Contracts

Franchisor Origin	KT Practices	Indicative Quote
Domestic	Limited	'No changes are allowed in the contract.' 'The most important is the protection of the trademark. The products must be standard.' (H1)
Domestic	Limited	'Franchisors arrange the contract in a way to protect themselves because they feel that they have more power. The contract is standard, clauses are one-sided.'(H3)
International	Extensive	'If I was keen on doing this business, I had no choice but to sign the contract. You don't have the chance of objecting. The contract has to be this way. 'If there is something you don't like, they reply okay, so don't sign it'.(H4)
Domestic	Evolving	'The franchisor has the power. They said if we wanted to work with them, we should agree on the clauses.'(H5)
Domestic	Evolving	'You don't have the chance of making negotiations. They will do what they want.' There are severe clauses but we didn't demand any changes'.(H6)
Domestic	Limited	'I have accepted from the beginning that I have to obey the clauses in the contract.'(H7)
Domestic	Limited	'They said we can't make changes, you should accept it like it is. The contract is one-sided.'(H8)
Domestic	Evolving	'Because these contracts are one-sided, they protect the franchisor. If you are determined to do this business, you have to sign the contract. You have to accept their conditions. If you're not satisfied with the conditions, you don't have to work with [them].'(H10)
International	Extensive	'You can't negotiate. Their attitude about negotiation is clear and certain. Their terms are to protect their value.'(H11)
Domestic	Evolving	'They said that we can't make any changes, you should accept it like this. If you are afraid that the terms are risky, then don't sign it. 'The contracts are one-sided.'(H12)
International	Extensive	'Contracts must be accepted as is. Contracts are generally not in favour of the franchisees; you don't have a chance of interfering in the clauses of the contract. I am aware of this fact so I didn't even attempt to interfere.'(H13)
International	Extensive	'All the terms are of benefit to them [the franchisor]. With a little mistake they have the right to termination. They rent the premises so they can give your business to another person.'(H15)
Domestic	Evolving	'The franchisor always protects his own rights and he is more powerful.'(H16)

they can throw us out of the network' (R10) and 'they wouldn't come here and impose penalties because our existence helps them grow further (R15)'. These franchisors were less likely to achieve coercive isomorphism, a finding consistent with that of Doherty et al. (2014) who found a negative impact on isomorphism when the franchisor's infrastructure was under-developed. This study suggests that KT practices and control mechanisms are a key element of that infrastructure, and the lack of pre-opening KT, particularly in relation to brand or operating standards might serve to exacerbate the difficulty in enforcing standards. As such, it suggests that a poorly developed

infrastructure and lack of institutionalisation could undermine internal pressures for coercive isomorphism. While previous research identifies the relevance of internal pressures to normative and mimetic isomorphism across industrial fields (Combs et al, 2009), this study provides evidence that internal pressures are relevant to coercive isomorphism within networks, at least in countries without strong legislative frameworks.

4.1.2 KT and mimetic isomorphism

Tacit knowledge was important to the realisation of mimetic isomorphism and onsite opening support was the main mechanism used to transfer tacit knowledge in networks with extensive and evolving KT practices. Franchisees in both sectors perceived the value of this support and not being 'left alone at the early stages (R1) as it was 'very comforting because you never know if you are really fully prepared' (H14). A hospitality franchisee explained that,

> 'The franchisor tells us in more detail how to do things and actually this is what makes our cooperation work. There will be times when we are unable to understand and more questions and communication are needed.' (H6).

Retail franchisees concurred suggesting that,

> 'You need someone to help you understand and to answer questions especially if there are issues you cannot solve on your own. That is why having an experienced manager for a couple of weeks is crucial.' (R14)

These findings support Minguela-Rata et al.'s (2010) argument that explicit and tacit KT mechanisms are complementary and ongoing support services make it easier for franchisees to apply the knowledge transferred. This on-site support provided opportunity for frequent personal communication between the franchisor and franchisee, an information-rich mechanism deemed suitable for the transfer of tacit knowledge (Gorovaia and Windsperger, 2010).

Tacit knowledge was also transferred in networks with extensive and evolving KT through ongoing training and development opportunities. Franchisees in both industrial sectors reported meetings and/or seminars for KT purposes between one and four times a year covering a wide range of topics including customer relations, quality control, problem solving, sales and marketing. Franchisees considered these meetings 'more useful when franchisees share problems and you can draw lessons for your own business' (R3) and when 'you share knowledge and share complaints' (H6). They reported that this format was the 'best platform to share common problems' (R7) and 'solve issues together' (H14) and that 'through these meetings the franchisor learns a lot too' (R4). These information-rich mechanisms enabled franchisees to copy or mimic each other and/or the franchisor. However, retail franchisees in networks with evolving KT practices questioned the value of seminars delivered by external consultants. They complained that they 'don't think they are really useful' (R16) or 'they would prefer that the franchisor delivered the training' (R13), thereby questioning their attractiveness as a knowledge source (Park, 2011).

Mystery shopper reports from the quality audits were also distributed through these networks to transfer tacit knowledge. As one retail franchisee commented,

> 'The best thing about these evaluations is that head office sends us feedback, not
>
> only about how we perform, but throughout the network….. what are the common
>
> mistakes and service failures; what are the best practices?' (R1)

In networks with extensive KT, franchisees who adhered to brand standards and procedures were rewarded with eligibility for the franchisor's 'train-the-trainer' programmes. These franchisees qualified to train new franchisees by demonstrating that they could precisely follow or mimic the franchisor's training guidelines. The impact of this practice was summed up accordingly:

'Franchisees find me trustworthy as I can understand their questions better. They see the sincerity in my approach and they appreciate what I share with them.' (R8)

As a result, new franchisees were reportedly more inclined to mimic franchisee train-the-trainers, deeming them to be attractive knowledge sources and increasing their absorptive capacity; a finding consistent with previous research (Brookes, 2014).

In addition, franchisee 'train-the-trainers', were rewarded through a better relationship with the franchisor. Franchisees explained that, 'you become a unit that the company would not like to lose' (H15) and this, in turn, helped franchisees 'to increase the chances of getting another store' (H14) or to being given 'priority' (R2) over new franchisees. Previous research (Barthelemy, 2011; Comb et al., 2009) identified that internal pressures (degrees of uncertainty) influence mimetic isomorphism across industrial fields. This study suggests that franchisors also use internal pressures such as incentives to achieve mimetic isomorphism within franchise networks.

4.2 The influence of partner characteristics

The study reveals that both prior experience and organisational distance are influenced by a third partner characteristic, franchisor institutionalisation, and this, in turn, influences isomorphism as discussed below.

4.2.1 Prior experience of franchisors and franchisees

In networks with extensive KT, franchisors in both sectors had international franchise experience, but their size and operational experience in Turkey varied considerably as Table 2 depicts. However, as their KT practices included tacit knowledge transfer through onsite support, franchisees were better able to understand the cause and effects of their actions on customer behavior and sales, and thus their causal ambiguity increased, as previous research

identified (Brookes, 2014). The information-rich mechanisms also enabled franchise partners to develop relationships and a shared sense of identity. Hospitality franchisees reported that their franchisor 'pays close attention to establishing good relations' (H6); they 'have good relationships with headquarters' (H13) and 'the relationship we have with the franchisor is very warm' (H14). Similarly, retail franchisees commented that, their franchisor 'really cares about the franchisees' (R6); they have 'established good relations' (R13) and they 'consider ourselves as members of a club' (R8). These findings are consistent with previous research which identifies the importance of social relationships to effective KT (Lindsay et al., 2003). As a result, franchisees advised that they followed the franchisor's rules and guidelines, explaining that they 'appreciate that this is how it should be to make sure that the system works effectively' (H15). This study therefore provides evidence that causal ambiguity and shared identity support mimetic isomorphism.

In networks with evolving or limited KT practices, Table 2 reveals greater differences between hospitality and retail franchisors in their international and operational experience and network size. As such, the influence of franchisor prior experience on isomorphism is difficult to ascertain. However, in limited networks, hospitality franchisees complained that their franchisor 'does not know what they have to do' (H3); 'is an amateur' (H7) or 'does not have enough knowledge and experience about the food sector' (H8). Retail franchisees also reported that, 'you have to teach yourself what you want to know' (R9); or 'mostly you try to learn this job by yourself' (R15). In both sectors, franchisees reported adopting practices outside of their contractual obligations including 'changing menus' (H9), 'altering recipes'(H3), 'outsourcing training from third-party suppliers' (H2), not 'following procedures'(R10) or not 'adhering to required pricing' (R15). These activities were undertaken despite recognising the 'importance of maintaining brand standards' (R15) and for hospitality franchisees, despite accepting strict contractual conditions as the norm (Table

4). The study therefore suggests that the franchisor's institutionalisation may be more relevant to isomorphism than the prior experience of franchisors.

Franchisees in both sectors reported joining a network because of their lack of prior industrial or business experience, a finding consistent previous research (Altinay et al., 2014b). Hospitality franchisees explained that 'since we don't know anything about the restaurant business, we became a franchisee' (H4) and that 'by becoming a franchisee I aimed to benefit from the experience of the franchisor' (H9), because 'the most important thing is learning' (H12). Similarly, retail franchisees reported that, 'I never had a business on my own before and didn't know what to do and how to do it' (R9) and 'this is my first business so I wanted to learn' (R15). These franchisees therefore deemed franchisors to be a credible source of knowledge, a factor previously identified to increase absorptive capacity and KT (Brookes, 2014). Furthermore they advised that, 'the protection of the trademark is important and the products must be standardised' (H1) so that 'everything works smoothly and properly' (R1). This partner characteristic therefore helped to ensure franchisees accepted and adhered to the terms of the franchise contract and thus helped in the realisation of coercive isomorphism but only in networks with extensive or evolving KT practices.

In these networks, franchisees with previous experience reported that they were more concerned about whether the franchise agreement was 'financially viable' (H5) and they would be 'making enough money to pay their franchise fees' (R7), rather than the knowledge gained from the franchisor. Nonetheless they maintained conformity, commenting that 'if you want to do business, you have to obey their rules' (H10) and 'follow their guidelines' (R11). While previous research highlights the relevance of prior experience of both partners to effective KT (Weaven et al., 2014), this study suggests that franchisor institutionalisation, and the extent to which KT practices are developed as part of that institutionalisation, may be

a more relevant partner characteristic than prior experience when it comes to achieving isomorphism.

4.2.2 Organisational distance

Organisational distance was also shown to influence KT between franchisors and franchisees, as well as between franchisees, but for different reasons and in different ways. The preceding section identifies the close relationships between franchise partners in networks with extensive KT. Communication was open and frequent and franchisors were 'always ready to help franchisees with any problems they might have' (H14). Franchisors were 'quick at answering questions and offering support when you need it' (H13). Retail franchisees explained that this was because they are 'part of an institutionalised system that self-regulates' (R8), with 'well-established standards set and clearly communicated' (R14). As such, franchisors were deemed to have 'a work mentality which is more compatible with our work mentality' (H4), indicating perceptions of close organisational distance between franchise partners.

In networks with evolving and limited KT, organisational distance was perceived somewhat differently in hospitality and retail sectors. In evolving networks, hospitality franchisees recognized that their franchisor was 'not fully institutionalised, but making great progress' (H6) or 'not fully institutionalised but doing well compared to other firms' (H5). These franchisees therefore were prepared to operate accordingly to preserve brand conformity. However, in networks with limited KT, hospitality franchisees described franchisors as 'unprofessional' (H2), with 'incompetent staff' (H8) and they were less likely to conform as previously described, particularly if franchisors did not enforce contracts. These findings suggest that franchisors' 'institutionalisation' can impact on perceptions of organisational distance and the realisation of both coercive and mimetic isomorphism.

In retail networks, the use of external consultants appears to have enhanced perceptions of organisational distance. Franchisees complained that these external experts 'don't really know how our business is operated' (R9) and therefore offered 'outsiders' perspectives on selected topics not really related to our business' (R13). Others argued that 'as they don't know the challenges faced by franchisees, they often lack the knowledge to give a proper answer to questions' (R10). These perceptions of organisational distance had a negative impact on franchisees' causal ambiguity, as these consultants could not explain the cause and effect of different actions. Franchisees reported that 'they know more than the people working in head office' (R10), describing them as 'amateurs' (R15). Accordingly, franchisor's lost their credibility as a 'knowledge source' (George et al., 2001) and franchisees' absorptive capacity was reduced. The lack of time spent with franchisors also impacted negatively on the development of shared identity, particularly as franchisees reported that they stopped attending seminars delivered by external consultants. These retail franchisees did endeavour to meet up with other franchisees in their locality on a more informal basis, but without the franchisor, in order to learn from each other and share best practice. One retail franchisee explained that 'these are not official meetings; we meet on our own to get together to talk about business' (R10). While these practices served to increase mimetic isomorphism between local franchisees, it was achieved without the direction of the franchisor and with potentially longer-term negative implications for brand conformity. Previous research identifies the influence of internal pressures on mimetic isomorphism across industrial fields (Combs et al., 2009). This study identifies that internal pressures amongst franchisees might drive mimetic isomorphism within networks in the absence of franchisors' willingness or ability to do so.

Table 5 summarises the factors that influence the realisation of coercive and mimetic isomorphism and depict the institutionalisation of franchisor networks.

Table 5: Franchisor Institutionalisation and Factors that Influence Isomorphism

Coercive Isomorphism	
KT Practices	Extensive transfer of explicit knowledge pre-opening (brand, operational, technical and functional knowledge)
	Examination to assess KT effectiveness
Internal Pressures	Centralised monitoring and control procedures
	Franchisor's willingness to use the power in the contract
	Franchisees' perception of franchisor's contractual power and acceptance of this as a norm
Partner Characteristics	Franchisees' lack of prior experience; increases franchisee absorptive capacity
Mimetic Isomorphism	
KT Practices	Tacit KT through on-site support during opening by experienced franchisor representative; enhances franchisee causal ambiguity
	Tacit KT using information-rich mechanisms post-opening; enhances franchisee causal ambiguity
	Extensive and diverse KT opportunities post-opening by experienced franchisor representative; enhances franchisee causal ambiguity
	Opportunities for franchisee input, problem solving and sharing during post-opening KT; increases causal ambiguity and shared identity
	E-platforms for sharing best practice
Internal Pressures	Franchisee incentives to become 'train the trainers'
	Franchisee incentives to become multi-unit franchisees
Social Influences	Relational development between franchisors and franchisees; increases shared identity
Partner Characteristics	Perceived close organisational distance between franchisor and franchisee; increases shared identity

5. Conclusions and Implications

This study provides empirical evidence that the transfer of explicit knowledge underpins the realisation of coercive isomorphism and the transfer of tacit knowledge supports mimetic isomorphism. However, the extent of coercive isomorphism achieved is dependent on the degree to which franchisors transfer explicit knowledge, develop strong systems for monitoring and control, and are willing to enforce contractual stipulations. The extent of mimetic isomorphism depends on the type and extent of opening and on-going KT to transfer tacit knowledge and systems for incentivising franchisees. As such, the study identifies that the franchisor's institutionalisation, or the degree to which a strong and supportive infrastructure is developed, is a partner characteristic relevant to isomorphism within

franchise networks. The study therefore contributes to the franchise literature through the identification of this 'additional' partner characteristic and its impact on both prior experience and organisational distance between franchise partners. Furthermore, the study identifies how this characteristic and the KT practices implemented impact on the three KT antecedents of absorptive capacity, causal ambiguity and shared identity, and thus on the isomorphism achieved. The study also revealed the role of internal pressures and social influences in achieving isomorphism in franchise networks, at least in environments without a strong regulatory context.

The study also reveals some key differences in KT and isomorphism in the hospitality and retail sectors. In hospitality networks, franchisees were more likely to receive operational training and be assessed on whether they could apply the KT prior to contract signature. In addition, hospitality franchisees more readily accepted the franchisor's contractual terms as a 'norm' of franchising, and as long as they perceived franchisors were making progress towards institutionalisation, they conformed to the franchisor's brand standards and operating procedures. In contrast, retail franchisors were less likely to include operational training or assessment prior to opening, assess any certificated courses introduced, and more likely to use external consultants to deliver KT. The use of external consultants increased franchisees' perceptions of organisational distance which, in turn, reduced franchisees' absorptive capacity, causal ambiguity and the extent to which a shared identity was developed and mimetic isomorphism realised. Although this practice enhanced franchisees' sharing best practice and mimetic isomorphism between franchisees in the same locality, franchisors had no control over this process, which may have unforeseen long-term consequences for conformity across the network.

These findings should be considered within the limitations of the study. The small sample size from each sector and a single-country research context serve to limit the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the study captured only the perspectives of franchisees, as the knowledge receivers, and the influence of KT on their behaviour and thus isomorphism. Further research in different country contexts should examine both franchisor and franchisee perspectives in order to provide a more detailed picture of KT and isomorphism. Future research should also examine the role of national associations in developing normative isomorphism in countries without a strong legislative context. Investigations of the impact of franchisors' prior experience on isomorphism are also warranted, something this study did not fully identify.

As one of the first studies to examine KT and isomorphism within franchise networks, it does yield some implications for industry practitioners. In particular it highlights the importance of the transfer of explicit knowledge pre-opening and the willingness to enforce contractual obligations to achieve coercive isomorphism, and opening and ongoing support to transfer tacit knowledge to achieve mimetic isomorphism and brand conformity. Franchisors, even if in the early stages of institutionalisation, need to recognise the importance of their KT practices on franchisees' absorptive capacity and causal ambiguity and in particular, the potentially negative impact of using external consultants for KT purposes. The study also demonstrates how incentives can be used to create internal pressure for mimetic isomorphism. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of building relationships with franchisees, even within newly developing networks to achieve mimetic isomorphism.

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