Understanding Technology Adoption Practices Among Malaysian Home-Grown Food and Beverage Franchisors to Foster Business Growth

(Memahami Amalan Penerimaan Teknologi Dalam Kalangan Francaisor Makanan dan Minuman Malaysia untuk Memupuk Pertumbuhan Perniagaan)

Nurul Ashykin Abd Aziz
(Faculty of Industrial Management, Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah)
Mohd Hizam Hanafiah
(Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia)
Puteri Fadzline Muhamad Tamyez
(Faculty of Industrial Management, Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah)
Mohamad Rohieszan Ramdan
(Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris)
Nur Nabila Huda Sabaran
(Faculty of Industrial Management, Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah)

ABSTRACT

Recently, franchising has emerged as a prominent avenue for business expansion, attracting numerous entrepreneurs in local and international markets. While the prevalence of franchise businesses continues to rise, some businesses struggle to achieve growth due to their failure to leverage technology effectively, thereby failing to distinguish themselves from competitors. To remain competitive, franchisors must embrace technology in franchise operations. However, existing literature predominantly focuses on technology utilisation within SMEs, with limited insights into its application within the franchise sector. More importantly, studies on technology adoption practices within the Malaysian franchise industry remain insufficient for business growth. Understanding Malaysian franchisors' technology adoption guide strategies for competitive market edge and sustained growth. The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring the technology adoption practices of Malaysian franchisors through qualitative analysis of six franchisor companies. Data collected through focus group discussion and analysed using thematic analysis revealed four key themes: Product Management, Training and Support, Business Communication, and Performance Monitoring. A new conceptual model for technology adoption in Malaysian franchising is proposed, contributing fresh insights to the field. These findings can inform policymakers, agencies, and franchise investors, enhancing strategies and programs to boost the franchise sector in Malaysia.

Keywords: Franchising; franchisor; technology adoption; best practices; business growth

ABSTRAK

Baru-baru ini, francais telah muncul sebagai saluran utama untuk pengembangan perniagaan yang boleh menarik ramai usahawan di pasaran tempatan dan antarabangsa. Walaupun kelaziman perniagaan francais terus meningkat, sesetengah perniagaan masih berjuang untuk mencapai pertumbuhan kerana ketidakupayaan mereka untuk memanfaatkan teknologi secara berkesan, sekali gus gagal membezakan diri mereka daripada pesaing. Untuk kekal berdaya saing, francaisor mesti menerima teknologi dalam operasi francais. Walau bagaimanapun, kesusasteraan sedia ada kebanyakannya tertumpu kepada penggunaan teknologi dalam PKS, dengan pandangan terhad tentang aplikasinya dalam sektor francais. Tambahan pula, kajian mengenai amalan penggunaan teknologi dalam industri francais Malaysia masih tidak mencukupi untuk memupuk pertumbuhan perniagaan. Memahami penggunaan teknologi oleh francaisor di Malaysia boleh memberi panduan tentang strategi untuk mencapai kelebihan daya saing dalam pasaran dan pertumbuhan yang mampan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi jurang pengetahuan ini dengan menerokai amalan penggunaan teknologi oleh francaisor di Malaysia melalui analisis kualitatif terhadap enam syarikat francais. Data yang dikumpul melalui perbincangan kumpulan fokus dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik mendedahkan empat tema utama: pengurusan produk, latihan dan sokongan, komunikasi perniagaan, dan pemantauan prestasi. Model konsep baru untuk penggunaan teknologi dalam francais di Malaysia dicadangkan untuk memberikan perspektif baharu dalam bidang ini. Penemuan ini boleh memberikan maklumat kepada penggubal dasar, agensi, dan pelabur francais, serta menambah baik strategi dan program untuk mengukuhkan sektor francais di Malaysia.

Kata kunci: Francais; francaisor; penggunaan teknologi; amalan terbaik; pertumbuhan perniagaan

INTRODUCTION

Franchising has become a robust and efficient business model worldwide, allowing entrepreneurs to own businesses and allowing existing brands to grow. Franchising encompasses a wide variety of businesses and locations, including fast food chains, such as McDonald's (Hanafiah 2019; Jell-Ojobor et al. 2022). The franchise model provides a mutually beneficial partnership, where the franchisor leverages the financial resources, specialized knowledge, and ambitious spirit of the franchisee, while the franchisee enjoys the advantages of a solid business model, brand reputation, and ongoing assistance (Bretas et al. 2021; Muthukrishnan et al. 2022). Alon et al. (2020) explained that franchising plays an important role in the contemporary corporate environment by promoting economic growth worldwide, generating employment opportunities, and facilitating cultural exchange.

The Asia franchise industry is characterized by rapid growth, cultural adjustment, and diverse market prospects. Asia's growing middle class and entrepreneurial culture have made it an attractive market for both local and international franchisors aiming to access its vast consumer population (Hussain & Grunhagen 2020). Franchising provides businesses, whether well-known international brands or local start-ups, with an effective method of expanding their operations (Hsu et al. 2017; Nijmeijer et al. 2014). Furthermore, the use of technology and innovation has stimulated the development of new franchise models such as food delivery, e-commerce, and digital services (Abd Aziz et al. 2023; Hanafiah & Abd Aziz 2023; Sabaran et al. 2023). The appeal of franchising in Asia stems from its potential for expansion, financial gain, and cross-cultural interaction, despite the obstacles presented by the region's cultural differences and regulatory intricacies. This makes it an attractive field for potential franchisors and franchisees (Abd Aziz et al. 2019; Gladilina et al. 2019).

Franchising is a company strategy that requires a methodical and contemporary approach to its business system for sustained growth (Abd Aziz et al. 2021). This can be applied through technology, in line with the development of the digital revolution (Susan & Novianti 2019). The development of technology and the widespread use of systems assist to distribute goods and services more systematically and widely in the franchise business. However, most franchise brands are unable to fully expand their business due to constraints in accepting technology and high costs. Therefore, the franchisor must consider the implementation of the digital franchise into a cooperative relationship with the franchisee (Erceg et al. 2021).

There are several studies conducted regarding the acceptance of technology in business (e.g. Bach et al. 2016; Gangwar 2020). However, there is a lack of specific research on franchise-based businesses in exploring the acceptance of technology for growth. Gladilina et al. (2019) claimed that franchising not only provides advantages to the franchisor as a brand owner, but also to the franchisee as a partner. Digital transformation and technology are important for the growth of both parties.

Research on technology in franchising is very limited and the existing research is generally about technology in business but does not specifically focus on franchising (Wong et al. 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to further explore technology acceptance factors to improve efficiency, leadership, and operations. Park and Park (2020) further recommended an investigation of factors for technology acceptance in other fields. The use of technology is very helpful for daily operations and contributes to the organisation's growth. Additionaly, Nurqamarani et al. (2021) stated that further exploration is necessary towards technology acceptance, particularly for businesses. It is pertinet to clarify the use of technology in business and further expand the acceptance factors by using different methodological approaches. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and best practices of local Malaysian franchisors in adopting technology for business growth, guided by the following overarching research question:

"What are the practices of Malaysian home-grown franchisors in adopting technology for their business growth?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE GROWTH OF THE FRANCHISE INDUSTRY

In recent decades, franchising has been a business distribution platform that has experienced significant growth worldwide (Grewal et al. 2011; Inoue et al. 2014). Baena (2015) described that franchising is a business that offers numerous benefits when compared to chain ownership. Furthermore, franchising is important to promote economic development through job creation, foster entrepreneurial growth, and improve living conditions (Shumba et al. 2017). Hence, franchising is a commercial and social model that has a huge impact on the economy and society. It not only contributes to job creation, and economic modernisation but also to the growth of franchise entrepreneurs (Bretas & Alon 2021; Naatu & Alon 2019). Undeniably, franchise firms have a direct influence on revenue, employment, and even expansion into foreign markets (Elango 2019; Jell-Ojobor et al. 2022; Naatu & Alon 2019).

Asia companies recognise the increasing effectiveness of franchise models as a way to expand their presence internationally (Abd Aziz et al. 2022; Abd Aziz et al. 2023). The franchise business in Malaysia is witnessing robust growth. The Malaysian government has prioritised the expansion of the franchise industry, intending to achieve a contribution of 9.4% to the country's GDP by 2020 (Malaysian Franchise Association 2018). As reported by the Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development, the sales value of the franchise business recorded an upward trend for the year 2020 until 2022 where it recorded RM14.6 billion in 2020, RM30 billion in 2021 and RM36 billion in 2022 (Amri 2024). More importantly, Malaysia is expected to become a leading franchise hub in the Southeast Asia region (Tyre & Han 2013). The Malaysian government has initiated efforts to promote a globally competitive franchise industry, with a particular focus on supporting local entrepreneurs (Abd Aziz et al. 2022; Abd Aziz et al. 2021).

Franchising is often considered the most efficient and widely adopted method for business expansion and advancement, as claimed by Abdul Ghani et al. (2022). Franchisees will have the opportunity to use the brand, business model and operations under the franchisor's name (Chaudey & Fadairo 2010). As a result, both parties are interdependent and must work together to foster growth. Nevertheless, franchisors must prioritise the well-being of their franchisees to maintain a high level of brand performance and maintain productivity (Kim & Seoki 2020). According to Madanoglu et al. (2019), franchisors prioritize expansion planning strategies to improve their business performance. Franchisors are affected by factors of economic growth and instability, which in turn affect their ability to expand to markets around the world (Madanoglu et al. 2017). Due to the many advantages it offers, franchising has become a popular method for companies to develop and enter markets around the world. This trend has gained momentum in recent decades, as evidenced by the increasing popularity of international franchising (Abd Aziz et al. 2022; Dant et al. 2011).

RESOURCE SCARCITY THEORY

Hoover (2009) highlighted that the main motivation to implement a franchise system is to earn quickly on the resources and develop an efficient distribution network. This occurs when the company is in the early stages of growth and needs to overcome financial and management constraints. However, as the company matures, the possibility of engaging in franchising decreases. Additionally, limitations on available funds hinder the firm's capacity to sustain growth while leveraging its current competitive advantages. Therefore, the desire to franchise is driven by limitations in resources (Castrogiovanni et al. 2006). Lafontaine and Kaufmann (1994) argued that franchisees bring both managerial and financial resources, giving franchising an advantage over selling firm shares. When a firm's shares are sold to others, it results in a loss of strategic control. Since investors (franchisees) become partners in the business, they have the power to influence the actions of the company. Additionally, franchisors use the franchise system due to the lack of access to financial resources. With the franchise system, the franchisor is given easy access to these resources, with the expectation of their expansion.

TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION IN BUSINESS

Technology adoption in business entails incorporating new technical solutions to improve operational efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness. The process begins with firms gaining awareness of emerging technologies and assessing their potential advantages and drawbacks (Trivedi et al. 2024). Crucial determinants impacting the adoption of technology in business include the perceived usefulness of the technology, the ease with which it may be implemented, its cost-effectiveness, and the organization's willingness to embrace change (Trivedi et al. 2024; Venkatesh 2000). Tali et al. (2021) explained that early adopters of technology often achieve a substantial competitive advantage by utilizing innovations to optimize operations, reduce expenses, and enhance customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, technology adoption has a transformative impact on business, leading to significant enhancements in multiple operational areas. Businesses that successfully incorporate emerging technology can generate additional sources of income, streamline supply chains, and improve the quality and variety of their products and services (Wang et al. 2022). Nevertheless, achieving successful adoption of technology necessitates addressing numerous obstacles, namely, staff proficiency in digital skills and minimizing the possibility of job displacement. Through the strategic adoption and integration of new technologies, organizations can enhance their existing operations and establish a foundation for long-term growth and innovation (Cascio & Montealegre 2016; Li 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

QUALITATIVE APPROACH

This study used a qualitative approach. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), the fundamental goal of qualitative research design is to understand how individuals interpret their experiences, construct their realities, and assign meaning to those experiences.

SAMPLING

This study used purposive sampling to determine the selection of respondents. Purposive sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to carefully select and collect data from informative cases and limited resources (Patton 2015). This involves the process of identifying and selecting individuals or groups who have extensive knowledge or expertise in a particular topic of interest (Creswell & Clark Plano 2011). Sampling aims to facilitate the collection of qualitative responses by researchers, thus resulting in more accurate research findings and enhanced understanding (Gill 2020; Palinkas et al. 2013; Shaheen 2019). The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (i) the franchisor must be officially registered with the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Cost of Living; (ii) the franchisor has been in operation for at least five years; and (iii) the franchisor must own and utilise at least one form of technology, such as applications, systems, or machines.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection for this study was executed through focus group discussions (FGD). Van Eeuwijk and Angehrn (2017) define FGD as a qualitative research method involving the selection of a specific group to engage in an in-depth discussion on a particular theme, facilitated by a moderator. A total of three sessions were implemented and each session was allocated for 60 minutes. As highlighted by Hennink et al. (2019), saturation can be influenced by various parameters including the study's purpose, type of code, group stratification, type of saturation, and degree of saturation depending on the study. Studies can achieve 80% saturation with two to three sessions. Furthermore, a minimum of two sessions is required to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue, particularly to capture the nuances of the conceptual code (Greenbaum 2000; Hennink et al. 2019). The data were recorded and subsequently analysed thematically.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study employed thematic analysis using Atlas.ti version 24 software to analyse the data. This software helped the researcher prepare, organise, and code the data (Friese 2019) as it has a comprehensive online support guideline to assist the user (Othman 2019). Meanwhile, thematic analysis is a method that allows researchers to identify and organize relevant themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006). As claimed by Labra et al. (2019), thematic analysis offers flexibility, but a rigorous approach to subjective experience is ideal for research in social work as a method of promoting social justice and combating inequality.

Six levels were included in the thematic analysis. The first stage was to transcribe the audio recordings of the FGD that had been done as part of the research. Next, the researchers continued to read the transcript to find the most relevant interest in the participant's testimony about the phenomenon under study. The researchers utilised the information determined as relevant in the first phase to develop the initial code at the degree of analysis available. Initially, researchers began collecting data pieces based on imagined equations or patterns, which was referred to as initial code (Braun & Clarke 2014, 2019). Following that, the theme or category is data elements or word sequences that can serve as a synoptic and exact depiction of the sign described by the person interviewed to a phenomenon under investigation. As such, the theme is made up of coded data that has been gathered together based on equations or patterns (Creswell & Poth 2018; Creswell 2007).

A full description of the phenomena explored in the fourth phase necessitates a careful evaluation of the themes found in the third step. Although the fourth stage is recognized as separate and following the third stage, in practice, the researcher is already experienced with thematic analysis. The fifth phase involves a comprehensive review of the theme in the first stage. The thematic matrix must be extensively re-analyzed to determine the hierarchical connection's validity and validate that the terms presented at both levels correspond to the meaning suggested by the code (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2014). It is essential to double-check the name provided to the theme so that there is no question regarding their honesty. The second stage is interpretative and consists of defining ideas, concepts, and subthemes in the sixth phase of deep analysis. Presentations and conversations that differ from one another are presented in the sixth phase (Labra et al. 2019).

This study has involved six Malaysian home-grown franchisors representing franchise companies and the following is their profile (refer to Table 1):

TABLE 1. Profile of participants

Participant	Year of Establishment	Category of Business
P1	2019	Fast Casual
P2	2014	Fine Dining
P3	2014	Fast Casual
P4	1981	Fast Food Chain
P5	2017	Fast Casual
P6	1999	Fine Dining

This study has developed four (4) themes that explain technology adoption practices among Malaysian home-grown food and beverage franchisors to foster business growth: (i) Product Management; (ii) Training and Support; (iii) Business Communication; and (iv) Performance Monitoring. The following is the illustration of the analysis, generated from Atlas.ti software version 24 (see Figure 1):
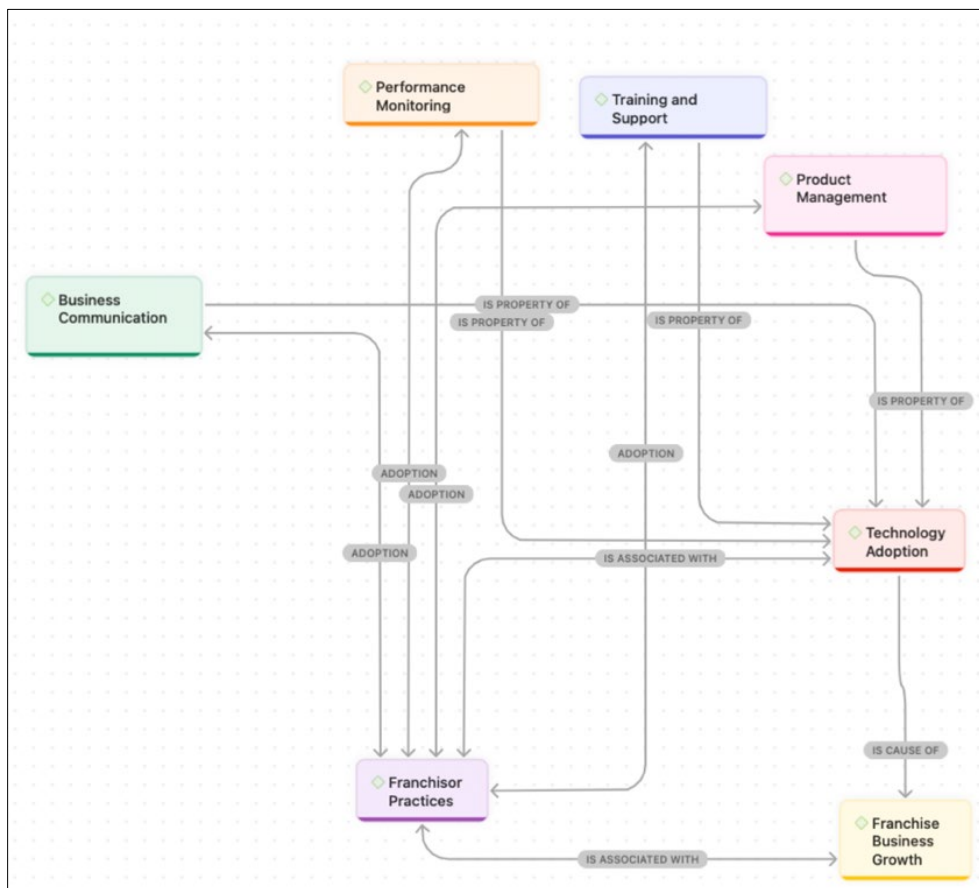
FIGURE 1. Findings through a network generated from ATLAS.ti, Version 24

Next, the following is the distribution of themes that have been analysed for this study (refer to Table 2):

TABLE 2. Distribution of themes

Themes	Participants					
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Product Management	/		/	/	/	/
Training and Support		/	/	/	/	/
Business Communication		/	/	/		/
Performance Monitoring	/		/	/	/	

Here are the findings for the themes that have been discovered from the data analysis in this study:

THEME 1: PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

The use of technology is significantly changing the food and beverage business, especially for Malaysians by improving the procedures involved in product development. Advanced food processing equipment, such as high-tech machinery, allows careful regulation of ingredient proportions and cooking temperatures, guaranteeing uniformity and excellence in each batch produced. This is aligned with these quotes:

"Technology is like an invisible friend in the kitchen; it helps franchisors make the process of making food more efficient... When machines do the work for us, accuracy and regularity are the most important things. This ensures that every dish you serve meets the brand's quality standards ..."- P1.

"With smart machines and automated workflows, these technological advances allow us to spend less time doing manual work and more time planning how to grow our business…"- P5.

In addition, the incorporation of smart kitchen technology allows Malaysian franchisors to further enhance and streamline their operations. By using smart appliances and interconnected systems, individuals can remotely monitor and control several aspects of the cooking procedure. This capability facilitates the effective allocation of resources and minimizes waste. Smart ovens, equipped with sensors, can optimize energy efficiency, and reduce food loss by adjusting cooking time and temperature using real-time data.

" By using high-tech tools to prepare food, we can easily grow the business and meet the needs of a growing customer base while keeping an eye on quality and product stability". -P4

The advent of smart kitchens marks the highest point of technological advancement in the food and beverage industry, providing Malaysian franchisors with unparalleled levels of automation and precision. Franchisors can achieve consistent flavour profiles and presentations across multiple outlets by using smart kitchens programmed with complex recipes, regardless of changes in human skill levels. This robotic system is highly adept in high-volume settings, increasing production capacity while maintaining quality standards. This positions Malaysian franchisors that focus on the domestic market for long-term growth and competitiveness in the ever-changing food and beverage industry. This is in line with these quotes:

"Using a smart kitchen robotic system changes the way franchisees manage food, making it more efficient and accurate than ever before... by using technology, we can streamline our business and ensure all our franchisees provide the same level of quality and service. This makes customers more happy and more loyal to our brand..."P3.

"Adding smart kitchen robotics is not only a way for franchisors to be innovative... it makes it easier to track inventory, reduce food waste and increase production... the technology helps us grow our business and stay ahead of the curve in the competitive food industry."-P6.

THEME 2: TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Technology is essential in enabling Malaysian franchisors to effectively strategize and provide training and support to their franchisees, thereby promoting business expansion. Digital platforms and software solutions allow franchisors to create extensive online training modules. These modules can consist of standard operating procedures, operational manuals, interactive systems, and virtual simulations, which guarantee uniform and standardized training at franchise locations whether in the local market or the international market. By technology, franchisors can optimize the onboarding process for new franchisees, thereby reducing the time and resources required for face-to-face training sessions. This is aligned with these quotes:

"Technology… from interactive systems to virtual simulations, it ensures all franchisees are doing their best and brings together physical gap with ease no matter where the franchisee is located... …"-P1.

"In the fast-paced world of franchising, technology is key to consistent training and support... by using standard operating procedures and an interactive platform, we as franchisors provide a network of franchisees with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed, no matter where they are…"-P2.

" Technology ensures that franchise networks work well together, driven by a shared dedication to quality, whether in the local or international market"-P4.

Furthermore, communication solutions such as video conferencing and messaging applications enable ongoing support and guidance for franchisees. Franchisors can offer instant advice, resolve complaints, and exchange best practices with their network of franchisees, regardless of geographic limitations, through virtual meetings. Instant connectivity facilitates a sense of camaraderie among franchise owners and encourages collaboration, ultimately increasing the effectiveness of the entire franchise network.

"Advancements in technology have enabled franchisors to assist and guide franchisees remotely, using tools such as video conferencing and messaging apps to facilitate contact" -P5.

Moreover, the use of data analytics and performance tracking tools empowers franchisors to actively monitor key metrics and look for areas for improvement. Franchisors can tailor training programs and support activities for franchisees and capitalize on new market trends by examining sales data, customer feedback, and operational efficiency. The use of data enables franchisors to make informed choices, optimize resource allocation, and foster sustainable business expansion for themselves and their franchisees. Technology acts as a catalyst for innovation and efficiency, enabling local Malaysian franchisors to thrive in a highly competitive market environment.

"As a franchisor, we take advantage of opportunities, use resources wisely, and promote long-term growth for ourselves and our franchisees with the help of data-driven technology..."-P3.

"In an era of data-driven decision making, technology empowers franchisors to navigate complexity, optimize resources, and foster growth, ensuring a sustainable future for us and our franchisees..."P5

"Technology serves as the foundation for innovation and efficiency ... empowering us as Malaysian franchisors to not only survive but thrive in intense competition, driving towards success in a dynamic market."-P6.

THEME 3: BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Technology is essential in improving communication among franchisors, franchisees, and Malaysian customers, thus promoting effective business operations and customer satisfaction. An important factor is the integration of a sophisticated ordering system, which optimizes the process for both franchisees and customers. Franchisors and franchisees can easily use mobile applications or internet platforms to efficiently order goods, monitor deliveries, and effectively manage real-time stock levels. This not only reduces administrative tasks but also ensures prompt restocking of items, ultimately improving customer service by minimizing the occurrence of out-of-stock and delays in product availability. This is based on these quotes:

"The accessibility of mobile applications and the internet allows us as franchisors to easily coordinate tasks such as placing orders, overseeing deliveries and even communicating with our franchisees... real-time stock management ensures that items are replenished quickly, which improves customer service and relationships with franchisees"-P2.

"When franchisors and franchisees combine mobile apps and internet platforms, they change the way inventory is managed, making it more efficient and responsive..."-P3.

In addition, technology facilitates the creation of resilient customer feedback systems, allowing franchisors to gather important insights into consumer preferences, problems, and ideas. Franchisors can efficiently collect and evaluate customer feedback by using automated surveys, online reviews, or feedback forms that are seamlessly connected to digital platforms. This data enables them to make informed decisions about product offerings, service enhancements, and marketing initiatives, ultimately increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, franchisors can use a centralized feedback database to detect patterns across multiple sites and use focused strategies to solve common problems or take advantage of developing prospects.

"Technology connects franchisors and customers, allowing them to make informed choices and build stronger relationships...our business will improve products and services using data insights... ...this makes customers happier and more loyal to our franchise business "-P4.

The digital platform not only enables communication between the franchisor and the franchisee but also serves as a means for ongoing engagement and collaboration. Franchisors can use video conferencing facilities and internet forums to set up monthly or quarterly meetings with franchisees, regardless of their geographic location. These technology gatherings offer opportunities to exchange best practices, distribute important updates or training materials, and foster good engagement with the franchisees. In addition, digital platforms make it easier

for franchisors to deliver customised marketing and promotional messages to customers, regardless of whether they are in the local or international market. Franchisors can optimize customer engagement and sales by using data analysis and targeted advertising methods to tailor their marketing strategies based on specific demographics, geographic regions, or purchasing behaviours.

"Technology is the key that franchisors use to build networks that work well together... ... through virtual gatherings, franchisors harness the power of connectivity to share best practices, disseminate important updates and empower franchisees with training materials, foster culture collaboration, and engagement"-P5.

"Technology is changing the relationship between franchisors and franchisees by breaking geographical barriers... ... through online platforms, we easily provide meetings where useful information, important updates and a lot of training materials can be shared to our franchisees... ..."-P6.

THEME 4: PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Technology advancement plays an important role in enabling Malaysian franchisors to oversee the success of their franchise system efficiently. By using sophisticated software and digital technology, Malaysian franchisors can easily monitor the monthly and annual performance measures of their franchisees. Technology plays an important role in enabling the creation of detailed daily sales statistics. Franchisors can enter their daily sales data using an integrated point-of-sale system and cloud-based software solution, which offers instant insight into each store's operations. Also, they can use this feature to recognize patterns, spot potential problems, and make informed choices to improve operational effectiveness. This is based on these quotes:

"Through cloud-based software and an integrated point-of-sale system, we [franchisor] have unparalleled access to our franchisee network's daily sales data... with real-time information, franchisors, and franchisees can run their business accurately, making strategies work more efficiently and encouraging growth in each of their franchise outlets... ..."-P1

"In the fast-paced world of franchising, technology is the key to success because it gives franchisors an easy way to obtain and review daily sales data... with a cloud-based and integrated point-of-sale system, franchisors can get instant insights that help them make good decisions for growth their franchise system"-P3.

On the other hand, technology empowers Malaysian franchisors to optimize the monitoring process through unifying data collection and analysis. With powerful franchise management tools, franchisors can easily collect data on a variety of performance metrics including annual revenue, user traffic, inventory turnover and customer satisfaction levels. The platform can customise dashboards and reporting features, allowing franchisors to quickly access key information and analyse specific KPIs as needed. A centralized approach not only increases efficiency but also promotes transparency and accountability in the franchise network.

"Technology drives the franchise business, facilitating the monitoring process by systematically combining data collection and analysis... we can obtain information on key performance indicators such as annual revenue, user traffic, inventory turnover, and customer satisfaction through technological management tools such as monitoring systems ... ..."-P4.

Furthermore, technology enables easy communication and reporting between franchisees and franchisors, regardless of whether they operate in local or international markets. Franchisees can easily send their performance reports and financial statements to the franchisor using digital communication channels such as email, instant messaging apps and web portals. Additionally, certain sophisticated systems have automated reporting functions, where data is automatically aggregated and sent to the franchisor on a predetermined schedule. This not only reduces time consumption but also ensures accuracy and uniformity in reporting.

"Technology reduces the gap between franchisee and franchisor relationships, where it fosters seamless communication and reporting"-P5.

"Technology improves the relationship between franchisees and franchisors by removing geographical barriers we can use technology such as email, messaging apps and systems that facilitate business performance monitoring... ..."-P3.

DISCUSSION

By adopting advanced technology, franchisors can increase business growth through simplified operations, and efficient business management. Based on the findings of the present study, understanding practices through technology adoption among Malaysian home-grown franchisors is very important in helping them to continue to remain competitive and continue to grow in today's highly competitive market. In today's franchising industry, implementation of technology is crucial to optimise operations and improving production, particularly in product preparation (Sabaran et al. 2023). Moreover, franchise businesses encounter difficulties in upholding uniformity and excellence in their products or services while accommodating the varied preferences of consumers across different locations (Lee Bodey et al. 2011, 2013). Thus, implementing technological solutions provides these organisations with a competitive advantage by optimising multiple areas of product preparation, such as inventory management, recipe standardisation, and staff training as claimed by (Perifanis & Kitsios 2023).

Advanced inventory management systems play a crucial role in helping franchise firms effectively manage product preparation with the use of technology (Benson-emenike et al. 2024). These systems employ automation and data analytics to oversee stock levels, monitor ingredient consumption, and forecast demand patterns. Franchisors may effectively oversee supplies, minimise waste, and guarantee prompt restocking by utilising real-time inventory status information, hence preventing both stockouts and overstocking situations, as highlighted by (Mweshi & Mweshi, 2022). This not only boosts operational efficiency but also leads to cost savings and improves customer happiness by ensuring product availability (Rane et al. 2023). Therefore, this study suggests:

P1: The more utilisation of technology in franchise operations, the greater the possibility of effective product management leading to business growth.

Franchisors are leveraging enhanced training and support technologies, such as e-training, and virtual simulations to ensure franchisees are well-equipped and supported in real-time, enhancing operational efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness for business growth. Rocha et al. (2023) explained that the implementation of technology is crucial in improving the efficiency and efficacy of training and business support in the franchise market. By utilising digital tools and platforms, franchise businesses may optimise their training operations, guaranteeing uniformity and expandability across numerous locations. Franchise owners can utilise online training modules, virtual reality simulations, and interactive e-learning platforms to provide consistent training materials to their staff, regardless of geographical limitations. This not only diminishes the duration and expenses linked to conventional face-to-face training sessions but also enables immediate updates and modifications to training materials, guaranteeing that personnel possess the most up-to-date information and skills. (Holuša et al. 2023; Rocha et al. 2023).

Moreover, Ajer and Hustad (2015) claimed that the implementation of the technology enables enhanced business assistance for franchise operations by granting access to a diverse range of management tools and analytics platforms. These solutions empower franchise owners to oversee crucial performance metrics, monitor sales statistics, and scrutinise consumer comments in real-time, facilitating well-informed decision-making and strategic planning. (Stefanović & Stanković 2014). Additionally, cloud-based software solutions consolidate data management and communication channels, promoting collaboration and transparency between franchisors and franchisees. Through the utilisation of technology, franchise businesses may optimise operational efficiency, enhance customer happiness, and stimulate overall business expansion. (Bello et al. 2021; Kanaan et al. 2019). Thus, this study recommends:

P2: The more training and support are aligned with the technology to manage the franchise system, the greater the possibility of the business growth.

Franchisors use technology to improve productivity, and business communication and provide franchisors with insights into market trends and customer behaviour, enabling them to make data-driven decisions and better support their franchisees, ultimately driving business growth. Previous study by Sabaran et al. (2023) explored the use of technology in managing business communication in franchise systems have revealed many significant advantages for franchisors. An important benefit emphasised is greater efficiency and effectiveness in distributing information throughout the franchise network. Franchisors can optimize the communication process by using technology solutions including cloud-based platforms, intranet systems and communication applications. This ensures that important updates, training materials and operating rules are delivered quickly to franchisees (Mirza et al. 2017). Improved information flow not only enables consistent branding and adherence to operational standards but also fosters a sense of togetherness and cooperation among franchisees, ultimately strengthening the overall performance of the franchise system (Abd Aziz et al. 2023; Ramdan et al. 2022).

Furthermore, Abd Latif et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of using technology to enable immediate monitoring and tracking of performance in business networks. By using integrated software solutions and data

analysis tools, franchisors can gain useful insights into different aspects of franchise operations, such as sales performance, inventory management and customer feedback. The use of data allows franchisors to effectively determine areas in need of improvement, implement focused tactics and immediately offer the necessary assistance to franchisees (Abd Aziz et al. 2022; Abd Aziz et al. 2021). In addition, the use of technology-based monitoring facilitates enhanced compliance management, guaranteeing that franchisees adhere strictly to brand standards and operating regulations (Nyadzayo et al. 2014, 2017). Hence, this study proposes:

P3: The higher the use of technology in franchise business communication, the higher the possibility of achieving rapid business growth.

Advancement in performance monitoring technology, including analytics enable the franchisors to analyze data in real-time, streamline processes, make decisions and improve business growth and operational efficiency. The use of technology has become an important tool for franchisors aiming to effectively monitor the performance of their franchisees in various locations (Bui 2022; Khoo et al. 2023; Mahmuddin et al. 2022). In the modern business environment, when franchisees operate across large geographic territories, technology enables real-time data collection, analysis, and information sharing as described by Hanafiah and Abd Aziz (2023). This allows franchisors to effectively monitor and manage their franchise network. By using specialised software platforms and digital solutions, franchisors can effectively monitor various elements of franchisee operations, such as sales data, inventory control, customer feedback and compliance with brand standards (Hanafiah et al. 2022). A high level of transparency allows franchisors to detect patterns, accurately identify areas that need improvement, and immediately offer assistance and guidance to franchisees, thereby improving the overall performance and profitability of the franchise system (Abdul Ghani et al. 2021).

To boost growth, franchisors are using advanced performance monitoring systems. They may identify patterns, inefficiencies, and opportunities for improvement in franchisee operations using data analytics and real-time reporting. Additionally, the use of technology promotes enhanced collaboration and communication between franchisors and franchisees, overcoming geographic and temporal barriers (Abd Aziz et al. 2022; Alharbi 2014). Cloud-based platforms and mobile applications allow franchisors to easily share information and best practices, making it efficient to distribute updates, training materials and operating standards (Hashem et al. 2015). Implementing this proactive monitoring strategy not only ensures the protection of brand consistency and customer satisfaction but also fosters a culture of responsibility and continuous improvement among franchisees (Bradlow et al. 2017; Kumari et al. 2016). As claimed by Vachkova et al. (2023), incorporating technology into franchise operations is essential for franchisors aiming to effectively manage various locations and achieve long-term success in a highly competitive industry. Thus, this study recommends:

P4: Technology adoption for franchise performance monitoring is positively associated with business growth among franchisors.

Figure 2 illustrates the emerging model of technology use practices among Malaysian home-grown food and beverage franchisors, aiming to foster business growth, guided by Resource Scarcity Theory. This theory outlines the limited resource challenges faced by firms, which require resource optimization for effective operations. The use of technology is presented as an important factor that bridges the gap between limited resources and their efficient use. Findings obtained from this study explain the practices implemented in the daily operations of franchise businesses where the use of technology covers training and support, business communication, performance monitoring and product management. These practices work together towards the objective of driving business growth goals, highlighting a structured approach to leveraging technology to optimize scarce resources and improve business performance.
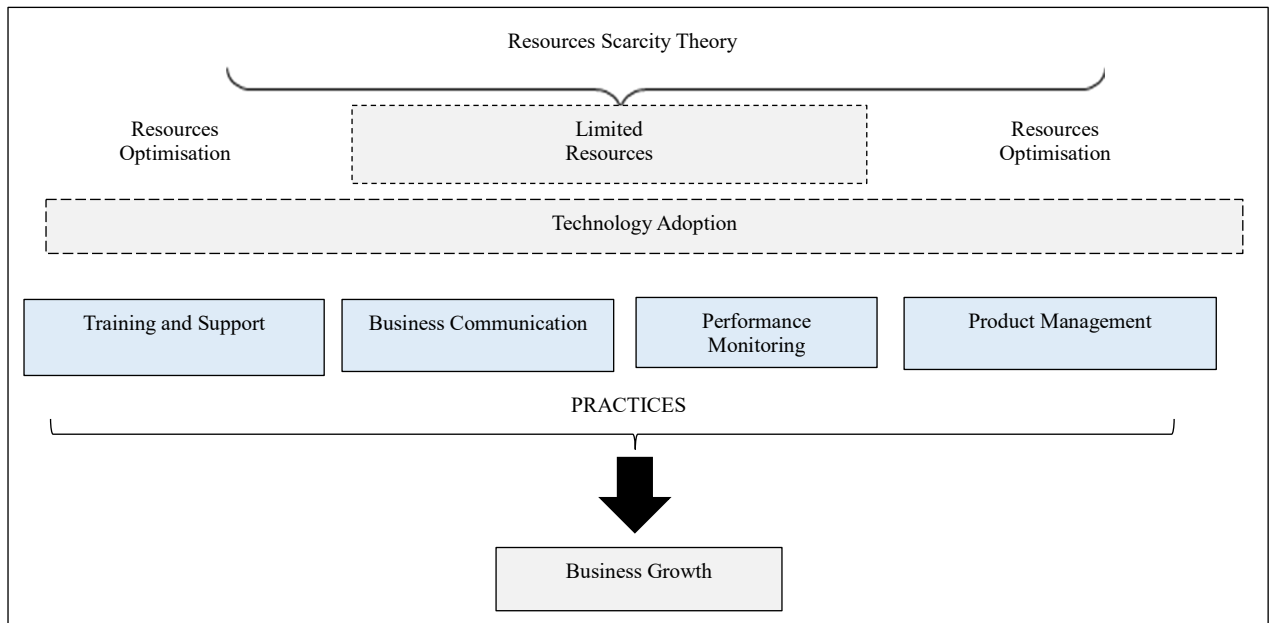
FIGURE 2. Final emerging model of technology adoption practices among Malaysian home-grown food and beverage franchisors to foster business growth

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Studies on the practical use of technology among Malaysian home-grown food and beverage franchisors contribute significantly to the theoretical and management aspects. This research used a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the adoption of technology in the Malaysian franchise market. This methodology enables a detailed understanding of the difficulties and advantages faced by Malaysian franchisors, revealing insights into their decision-making procedures and the elements that impact their use of technology. This study applied Resource Scarcity Theory to develop a robust model in exploring the practice of technology adoption among franchisors in Malaysia. Findings from this study have enriched this theory from the aspects of franchising and technology. By illustrating how limited resources affect strategic decisions, the Resource Scarcity Theory improves the understanding of technology adoption practices among franchise companies. This theory argues that firms must prioritise efficiency and innovation for effective management. From this point of view, this study explores how Malaysian franchisors leverage their limited resources to adopt new technologies, optimise operations, and gain a competitive advantage. This study is further enriched by emphasising the role of technology as a key resource in driving the management of business operations in a more planned manner, leading to business development. Additionally, it contributes to the development of more effective strategies and initiatives.

In addition, the development of important themes such as (i) Product Management; (ii) Training and Support; (iii) Business Communication; and (iv) Performance Monitoring from this study brings major importance to management practices in the Malaysian franchise market. These themes emphasize important areas where franchisors should focus their efforts to properly use technology for business growth. Understanding the importance of product management in aligning technical solutions with consumer desires helps increase competitive advantage. Investing in a comprehensive training and support system can help streamline the use of technology and improve operational efficiency. This study enhances current theory and offers practical advice for policymakers, franchisors, and government agencies aiming to strengthen Malaysian franchise businesses. These findings are a useful resource for developing policies and strategies to promote technological innovation and sustainable growth in the Malaysian franchise sector.

CONCLUSION AND DIRECTION OF FUTURE RESEARCH

In summary, adopting technology to foster business growth in the franchise sector requires thoughtful evaluation and implementation of various important strategies. Product management is an important component that ensures the alignment of offerings with market demand and franchisor capabilities. To harness the full potential of new tools and systems, franchisors need to provide franchisees with adequate training and support mechanisms, considering the continuous evolution of technology. Effective and streamlined business communication channels are essential to distribute information, promote collaboration, and ensure consistency across the franchise network.

The implementation of reliable performance monitoring tools empowers franchisors to effectively monitor franchisees' progress, spot areas that need improvement, and make informed decisions based on data to optimize business operations. Although this study offers useful insights, more extensive investigation and experimentation of the formulated ideas are needed. Using other surveys or experimental approaches can provide deeper insight into the effectiveness of this strategy and its influence on business expansion within a franchise context. Future studies should expand the investigation to include different types of industries in the franchise sector. This will allow researchers to identify industry-specific barriers and prospects related to technology implementation for business growth. Moreover, future studies can test the propositions developed in this study to gain a more complex understanding of the relationship between technology and business growth. Finally, these findings provide valuable insights to Malaysian franchisors to increase their leverage, enhance their competition, and grow efficiently. This study also emphasizes the need for policymakers and government agencies to implement initiatives that encourage innovation and support mechanisms tailored to the specific needs of the Malaysian franchise industry, stimulating growth and increasing competitiveness in the market.

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Nurul Ashykin Abd Aziz (Corresponding Author)
Faculty of Industrial Management
Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al- Sultan Abdullah
Lebuh Persiaran Tun Khalil Yaakob
26300 Kuantan Pahang, MALAYSIA.
E-Mail: ashykin@umpsa.edu.my

Mohd Hizam Hanafiah
Faculty of Economics and Management
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA.
E-Mail: mhhh@ukm.edu.my

Puteri Fadzline Muhamad Tamyez
Faculty of Industrial Management
Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al- Sultan Abdullah
Lebuh Persiaran Tun Khalil Yaakob
26300 Kuantan Pahang, MALAYSIA.
E-Mail: fadzline@umpsa.edu.my

Mohamad Rohieszan Ramdan
Faculty of Management and Economics
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, MALAYSIA.
E-Mail: rohieszan@fpe.upsi.edu.my

Nur Nabila Huda Sabaran
Faculty of Industrial Management
Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al- Sultan Abdullah
Lebuh Persiaran Tun Khalil Yaakob
26300, Kuantan Pahang, MALAYSIA.
E-Mail: mpk23001@student.umpsa.edu.my