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**Knowledge-based View in the Franchising Research
Literature**

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Abstract. This study was conducted to understand the state of research on applications of Knowledge-based View in franchise systems. First, we used SALS (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, and Analysis), a simple systematic data search method, to obtain 61 sample papers. Second, the citations of authors and publications were analyzed using the bibliometric method to understand the authors and the publications that had the most impact as well as the trend of current studies in the field of knowledge-based theory application in franchise systems. The results showed that the journals that had the most publications on the topic were Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice and Journal of Business Research; the most cited author was S.A. Shane, who had an average rate of 1.016 citations per article, and the most cited study was a paper published by Darr, Argote, & Epple (1995), which was cited by 18 of the 61 sample papers (18/61, 29.51%). Third, we categorized the topic of knowledge-based theory application in franchise systems into six categories, i.e., knowledge transfer, knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge application, organizational learning, and knowledge exchange, to provide references for future studies.

Keywords. Knowledge-based view, Franchising, Bibliometrics.

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1. Introduction

A franchise system refers to a commercial relationship formed by two or more independent parties via contracts (Yang, 2015), and they mainly take two forms, i.e., product sales and entrepreneur franchising (Yang, 2015), involving three important factors, i.e., franchisors, franchisees, and the franchise system (Paswan, D'Souza, & Rajamma, 2014). Of these, a franchise system is a business network connected through the co-operation between a franchisor and franchisees via contracts (Baucus, Baucus, & Human, 1996) to maximize profits through the benefits of an economy of scale and regional operations (Chiou & Droge, 2015), with the equitable distribution of common interests (Michael, 1996) and brands, products, and service systems being shared between the franchisor and franchisees (Chiou & Droge, 2015).

Since the winter special issue of the Strategic Management Journal published the knowledge-based theory in 1996, knowledge resource-based management has increasingly attracted academic attentions. Currently, it has become an important and well-known manufacturer management theory (Serenko & Bontis, 2004; Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006). Knowledge can be regarded as the most important resources of manufacturers, and it creates value, exhibiting various properties such

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as transferability, the capacity for aggregation, appropriability, specialization in knowledge acquisition, and the knowledge requirements of production. Knowledge resources can be divided into tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. Because tacit knowledge is an intangible resource and it is thus difficult to popularize, the question of how to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge to facilitate knowledge transfer has been an important issue for businesses (Spender & Grant, 1996; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Tsoukas, 1996; Serenko & Bontis, 2004; Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006).

From the perspective of knowledge-based theory, the franchisor provides a business model and support services (franchisor knowledge base) in exchange for capital, labor/resource management, entrepreneurship, and knowledge of the local market from franchisees to mutually support the symbiosis and the value co-creation in the franchise system (Paswan, D'Souza & Rajamma, 2014). The franchise system emphasizes the importance of learning and the franchisor's ability, and if knowledge creation and knowledge transfer can successfully be transferred to franchisees, then excellent performance will be achieved (El Akremi, Perrigot, & Piot-Lepetit, 2015). Franchisees' innovation can be shared in the franchise system, which will more effectively improve knowledge transfer within the system (Gillis, Combs, & Ketchen, 2014). The tacitness of exclusive knowledge affects the franchisor's choice of knowledge transfer policy (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013). Knowledge sharing can help the franchisor ensure that franchisees understand the business model of the franchise system and the effective development of business (Paswan, D'Souza & Rajamma, 2014). Organizational learning allows an organization to be more adaptive to the environment (Hoy, 2008). However, if speculative behaviors concur, then franchisees may become competitors through the knowledge acquired from organizational learning (Chen & Dimou, 2005), and the franchisor must also face the challenge proposed by the dynamic process of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through knowledge creation (Lindblom, & Tikkanen, 2010).

In summary, we believe that it is very important to use knowledge-based theory to explain the phenomena that occur in franchise systems and to know which manner franchisors should use to smoothly transfer their knowledge base to franchisees and what obstacles they will encounter, how to achieve mutual benefiting from, sharing of, and symbiosis in resources brought about by franchisees in the franchise system, and what level of development has been achieved by existing studies. However, a systematic review of the literature on applications of knowledge-based theory in franchise systems is lacking. In this study, we employ the SALSA (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, and Analysis) systematic literature search method to browse journals in the fields of management and business archived in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) database from 1996 to 2015; 61 sample articles were obtained, and bibliometric analyses on the citations of the authors and publications were performed to summarize the results and discussions of the articles to provide references for future studies.

2. Literature review

2.1. Franchise system

A franchise system is an important organizational form for entrepreneurs who engage in retail and service businesses to create wealth (Croonen, Grünhagen, & Wollan, 2016). Providing standardized products or services in specific areas is key to the success of a franchise chain (Watson, *et al.*, 2016). Franchise systems provide entrepreneurial opportunities (Combs, *et al.*, 2011). Franchisees have many entrepreneurial qualities (Watson, *et al.*, 2016), which can be called the cooperative entrepreneur system (Gassenheimer, Baucus, & Baucus, 1996). In a franchise system, members use shared brand resources, share responsibilities, and safeguard interests (Badrinarayanan, Suh, & Kim, 2016). Franchisees choose to join a franchise system from their entrepreneurial desires; there exists a positive correlation between the entrepreneurial franchising choice and the performance of

the franchise system, and the entrepreneurial values of the franchisor and the franchisees are typically consistent (Watson, *et al.*, 2016). When franchisees have a strong identity relationship with the franchise brand, they may perform well above contractual requirements with more active business practices to add value to the brand (Badrinarayanan, Suh, & Kim, 2016). Standardization in the franchise system helps the franchisor reduce opportunism in franchisees, ensuring contract compliance and brand protection (Watson, *et al.*, 2016).

2.2. Knowledge-based theory

Knowledge-based theory was originated from resource-based theory (Spender & Grant, 1996). Since the proposal of the division published in the winter special issue of the Strategic Management Journal in 1996, knowledge-based management has attracted increasingly more academic attention. Currently, it has become an important and well-known manufacturer management theory (Serenko & Bontis, 2004; Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006). Because of the explosion of knowledge and information, greater emphasis is placed on knowledge work and the identification of information and knowledge of business management, which can be regarded as the main source of economic returns (Spender & Grant, 1996). Knowledge resources are a holistic integration, and their true connotation cannot be understood by individually collecting knowledge; however, the essence of knowledge is scattered, and therefore, knowledge integration is important (Appleyard, 1996). Knowledge-based theory regards knowledge resources as important internal resources of a firm (Grant, 1996), and it divides knowledge resources into tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge, with the former being intangible resources and the latter being texts, images, etc. The creation and development of knowledge resources are achieved through the interaction between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. The question of how to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge to facilitate knowledge transfer is an important topic for enterprises (Spender & Grant, 1996; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Tsoukas, 1996; Serenko & Bontis, 2004; Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006).

2.3. Franchising and knowledge-based theory

This study is based on papers published by Alavi & Leidner (2001), Argote, McEvily, & Reagans (2003a), Argote, McEvily, & Reagans (2003b), and Nonaka & Peltokorpi (2006), in addition to our collated materials, to divide the topic of knowledge base theory application in franchise systems into six categories, i.e., knowledge transfer, knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge application, organizational learning, and knowledge exchange, to attempt to understand the influence of knowledge-based theory on franchise systems through these concepts, as described in the following sections.

2.3.1. Knowledge transfer and franchising

Knowledge transfer refers to a complex process (Alavi & Leidner, 2001) that converts individuals' tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and, further, into the common knowledge shared by a group. The knowledge transfer from a franchisor to franchisees in a franchise system is important, and it is also key to its success (Contractor & Kundu, 1998). Once there are difficulties in knowledge transfer, these will have a negative impact on a franchise system (Minguela-Rata, López-Sánchez, & Rodríguez-Benavides, 2010). According to knowledge-based theory, the tacitness of exclusive knowledge affects the strategies that a franchisor chooses to execute knowledge transfer (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013). Trust also affects the franchisor's knowledge transfer strategies (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013; Okoroafor, 2014). Communication and knowledge transfer help develop a good dynamic relationship between a franchisor and franchisees (Altinay, *et al.*, 2014). Providing standardized products or services can reduce difficulties in knowledge transfer (Watson, *et al.*, 2016). From the knowledge-based theory perspective, the tacitness of exclusive knowledge affects the strategies that the franchisor chooses to execute knowledge transfer (Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013). A service

franchise system has more intangible assets than a product franchise system and requires a higher level of knowledge transfer and monitoring capabilities (Okoroafor, 2014). When franchisees' innovations can be shared within the franchise system, the knowledge transfer within the network can be more effectively improved (Gillis, Combs, & Ketchen, 2014). The knowledge transfer costs of international franchise systems are higher, and the staffs in developed countries have a higher learning ability, which can reduce knowledge transfer costs (Contractor, & Kundu, 1998).

2.3.2. Knowledge creation and franchising

Organizational knowledge creation refers to establishing new knowledge or replacing the existing knowledge with new knowledge based on the tacit and explicit knowledge within the organization; it begins with individuals and can be regarded as an experience of individuals' cognition, which is then transferred from the individual level to the team and organizational levels through interactions (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Knowledge creation and management within the franchise system help the franchisor convert franchisees' tacit knowledge (e.g., creative ideas) into explicit knowledge and make it available to other franchisees (Lindblom, & Tikkanen, 2010). The ability of an enterprise lies in creating, re-allocating, and utilizing resources to obtain higher performance and outperform its competitors (El Akremi, Perrigot, & Piot-Lepetit, 2015). A franchise system emphasizes the importance of learning and the franchisor's ability so that knowledge creation and knowledge can be successfully transferred to franchisees to achieve outstanding performances (El Akremi, Perrigot, & Piot-Lepetit, 2015). The franchisor must face challenges caused by the dynamic process in which tacit knowledge is converted into explicit knowledge by knowledge creation (Lindblom, & Tikkanen, 2010).

2.3.3. Knowledge sharing and franchising

Knowledge sharing refers to the interactive mode in corporate networks that allows the transfer, reorganization, or creation of exclusive assets (Altinay, *et al.*, 2014). The trust and promotion of knowledge sharing within an enterprise can enhance standardization and resource innovation and thus increase its competitive advantages (Gillis & Combs, 2009). The enterprise's tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge are always in the ongoing process of knowledge sharing (Sheng & Hartono, 2015). Knowledge sharing can help the franchisor ensure that franchisees understand the business model of the franchise system and effectively develop businesses (Paswan, D'Souza, & Rajamma, 2014).

2.3.4. Knowledge application and franchising

One of the important arguments of knowledge-based theory is that the enterprise's competitive advantage lies in the application of knowledge rather than in the knowledge itself, and the procedures of knowledge application are meant to integrate knowledge in the routine tasks of the organization (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Franchise system services can also be regarded as applications of knowledge and expertise (Jean Jeon, Dant, & Gleiberman, 2014). By revising the rules and routine tasks of the automation organization, the rate of knowledge integration and knowledge application can be improved (Alavi & Leidner, 2001).

2.3.5. Organizational Learning and franchising

Organizational learning provides the environment that allows cooperative partners to obtain knowledge together (Hoy, 2008). The networking relations between the franchisor and franchisees within the franchise system offer opportunities for knowledge transfer and learning (Phan, Butler, & Lee, 1996). The reciprocal learning between the two organizations makes their relationship stronger (Enz, 2008). From the perspective of franchisees, they will have more in-depth understanding of the content of contracts over time, and after organizational learning, by relying on the power of negotiations, they can re-organize the contracts so that the contracts are more in line with mutual interests (Hoy, 2008). Franchisees learn on the job and accumulate knowledge, which in turn extends to the entire franchise system through the franchisor and influences more franchisees

through organizational learning (Phan, Butler, & Lee, 1996). Innovation and learning make operational processes better and the products and services of the brand more powerful, gaining more competitive advantages (Enz, 2008). Organizational learning originates from the recognition of the experience curve, and over time, franchisees will become more sophisticated in utilizing resources and technologies (Hoy, 2008) and learn from each other (Enz, 2008), and the learning will make the organization more adaptive to the environment (Hoy, 2008). In case of speculative behaviors, franchisees may become competitors through the knowledge obtained via organizational learning (Chen & Dimou, 2005).

2.3.6. Knowledge Exchange and franchising

Knowledge exchange in the franchise network involves three factors: the franchisor, franchisees, and the franchise system, of which the franchisor provides a business model and support services (franchisor knowledge base) in exchange for franchisees' capital, human/management resources, entrepreneurship, and knowledge of the local market to mutually support the symbiosis and co-create value (Paswan, D'Souza, & Rajamma, 2014).

3. Methodology

To understand the relevant literature on franchising and knowledge-based theory, in this study, based on SALSA, a systematic data search and analysis method described by Grant & Booth (2009) and Szutowski & Ratajczak (2014), sample articles were searched and analyzed by first determining the databases and searching topics. The main databases included EBSCO Business Source Complete (EBSCO-BSC), ProQuest Center, Science Direct Online (SDOL), and Web of Science (SCI and SSCI), and the searching topics were "franchis*" and "knowledge". The search area was journals in the fields of business and management in the SSCI. Across-search was conducted in the four databases noted above to obtain the sample papers required for this study, and ultimately, 61 sample papers were obtained.

3.1. Distribution of the sample papers by journal

Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample papers by journal. From the 61 sample papers, the distribution of papers by journals was generated (Table 1). Based on the editorial policies of the journals, the journals were divided into the following categories: general management coverage (GM), international management (IM), strategic management (SM), marketing management (MM), innovation (INOV), hospitality management (HM), service management (SER), and entrepreneurship (ENP). The search results on the relevant literature in the fields of management and business in the SSCI are shown in Table 1. There were 35 journals that published franchising and knowledge-based theory-related papers, of which "Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice" and "Journal of Business Research" each had five articles that were selected as sample papers in this study, accounting for 8.20% (5/61) of all sample papers; "Journal of Business Venturing" and "Journal of Small Business Management" each had four sample papers, accounting for 6.56% (4/61) of all sample papers; and "European Journal of Marketing" and "Journal of Services Marketing" each had three sample papers, accounting for 4.92% (3/61) of all sample papers.

The above results show that the journals that published more sample papers were primarily those in the fields of entrepreneurship, commercial research, marketing research, small business management, etc. This finding suggests that these journals may be more interested in franchising and knowledge-based theory-related articles, and Table 1 shows that these topics were distributed in various types of journals, exhibiting the potential for future development and providing references for future studies as well.

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Table 1. *Main journals that published the sample papers on franchising and knowledge-based theory and the number of sample papers in each journal*

Serial	Discipline	Journal title	No. of papers	Percentage
1	ENP	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	5	8.20%
2	GM	Journal of Business Research	5	8.20%
3	ENP; INOV	Journal of Business Venturing	4	6.56%
4	GM	Journal of Small Business Management	4	6.56%
5	MM	European Journal of Marketing	3	4.92%
6	SER; MM	Journal of Services Marketing	3	4.92%
7	GM	Management Decision	2	3.28%
8	GM	Management science	2	3.28%
9	GM	Organization Science	2	3.28%
10	SER	Service Business	2	3.28%
11	GM	Small Business Economics	2	3.28%
12	SM	Strategic Management Journal	2	3.28%
13	SER	The Service Industries Journal	2	3.28%
14	GM	Total Quality Management & Business Excellence	2	3.28%
15	GM	African Journal of Business Management	1	1.64%
16	GM	British Journal of Management	1	1.64%
17	GM	Business Horizons	1	1.64%
18	HM	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	1	1.64%
19	HM	Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly	1	1.64%
20	MM	Industrial Marketing Management	1	1.64%
21	IM; ENP	International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal	1	1.64%
22	IM; MM	International Journal of Advertising	1	1.64%
23	HM	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1	1.64%
24	IM; GM	International Journal of Management Reviews	1	1.64%
25	IM; SER	International Journal of Service Industry Management	1	1.64%
26	IM; INOV	International Journal of Technology Management	1	1.64%
27	IM; GM	International Small Business Journal	1	1.64%
28	GM	Journal of Business Economics and Management	1	1.64%
29	IM; GM	Journal of international business studies	1	1.64%
30	GM	Journal of Management	1	1.64%
31	GM	Journal of Management Studies	1	1.64%
32	MM	Journal of Retailing	1	1.64%
33	INOV	Knowledge Management Research & Practice	1	1.64%
34	MM	Marketing Science	1	1.64%
35	NPO	Research Policy	1	1.64%
Sum			61	100.00%

Note: Categories are based on the general division of scientific areas in management; GM: general management coverage; IM: international management; SM: strategic management; MM: marketing management; NPO: non-profit management; INOV: innovation; HM: hospitality management; SER: service management; ENP: entrepreneurship. The editorial policies of the journals were reviewed.

3.2. The sample papers by publication year

In this study, the time range of the literature search was set at 1996-2015, mainly because knowledge-based theory has gradually attracted academic attention since the winter special issue of the Strategic Management Journal published the paper in 1996. The distribution of the sample papers by publication year is shown in Figure 1. In 2014, the number of published papers was 9, accounting for 14.75% (9/61) of the sample papers; in 2015 and 2011, the number was 7, accounting for 11.48% (7/61) of the sample papers; and in 2008 and 2012, the number was 5, accounting for 8.20% (5/61) of the sample papers. It was found that, since 1996, publications related to the application of knowledge-based theory in franchising have begun to gradually emerge and peaked at 9 in 2014. Although the number of the publications did not show a stable growth, in recent years, it has still exhibited a slowly increasing trend.

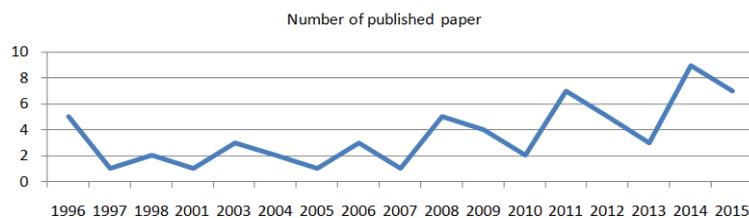


Figure 1. *Frequency of relevant publications by year*

3.3. Citation analysis

Table 2 shows the list of the top 10 most cited authors. In this study, using the bibliometric method, the authors of the references of the sample papers were used as the subject to investigate which scholar had the most important impact on the field (Nerur, Rasheed, & Natarajan, 2008). It was found that S.A. Shane was the most cited author, with an average of 1.016 citations, J.G. Combs was the second most cited author, with an average of 0.951 citations, and F. Lafontaine was the third most cited author, with an average of 0.869 citations. These three authors were the top three most frequently cited in the references of the sample papers, suggesting that they have contributed the most to this subject and have exerted the greatest impact.

Table 2. Combined analysis on the most cited scholars

Rank	Name	# cited	Citations /sampled article	Background Affiliation	Expertise
1	Shane, S.A.	62	1.016	Case Western Reserve University	Foundations of entrepreneurship
2	Combs, J.G.	58	0.951	University of Alabama	Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice
3	Lafontaine, F.	53	0.869	University of Michigan	Industrial organization, Industrial economics
4	Dant, R.P.	51	0.836	University of Oklahoma	Inter-organizational governance and relationships
5	Kaufmann, P.J.	44	0.721	Boston University	Marketing, Franchising
6	Michael, S.C.	33	0.541	University of Illinois	Technology management, New venture creation and Strategy.
7	Bradach, J.L.	28	0.459	Co-Founder, Managing Partner, and Trustee; The Bridgespan Group, Inc.	Franchise organizations
8	Williamson, O.E.	26	0.426	School of Law, University of California, Berkeley	Transaction cost economics
9	Barney, J.A.	24	0.393	Simon School, University of Rochester	Corporate governance, Economics of organization
10	Argote, L.	23	0.377	Carnegie Mellon University	Organizational Learning, Knowledge Transfer, Group Processes and Performance
10	Nonaka, I.	23	0.377	Harvard Business School	Knowledge-based Strategy, Japan IXP, and Microeconomics of Competitiveness

Data source: Google Scholar Citations and various sources, including biographical books, official web sites of universities, and journals. The adoption year is based on the publication year of the influential articles; the calculation is on a first-author basis.

Table 3 lists the top 18 most cited articles. In this study, we adopted the bibliometric method to analyze the references of the 61 sample papers to examine the state of the field (Ramos-Rodríguez, & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004). The most cited paper was that published by Darr, Argote, & Epple (1995), which was cited by 18 sample papers (18/61, 29.51%), and the second most cited papers were those by Bradach (1997), Combs, Michael, & Castrogiovanni (2001), Kaufmann & Eroglu (1999), and Lafontaine (1992), which were each cited by 15 sample papers (15/61, 24.59%). The above results indicate that the papers that have been the most cited did not show much difference, suggesting that, currently, in the references, there have continued to be various topics that have attracted attention from authors. The top 18 papers by citation accounted for 5.65% of the total papers that were referenced (229/4053).

Table 3. Publications with high citations

Source	Year	Title	# of Citation	Citations/per sample art.
MS	1995	Darr, Argote, and Epple-1995- <i>Management Science</i> , 41(11), 1750-1762	18	29.51%
ASQ	1997	Bradach-1997- <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> , 42, 276-303	15	24.59%
JOM	2004	Combs, Michael, and Castrogiovanni-2004- <i>Journal of Management</i> , 30, 907-931	15	24.59%
JBV	1999	Kaufmann and Eroglu-1999- <i>Journal of Business Venturing</i> , 14, 69-85	15	24.59%
RJE	1992	Lafontaine-1992- <i>The Rand Journal of Economics</i> , 263-283	15	24.59%
SMJ	1988	Norton-1988- <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 9(5), 105-114	14	22.95%
SMJ	2001	Sorenson and Sørensen-2001- <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 22(6/7), 713-724	14	22.95%
JOM	1991	Barney-1991- <i>Journal of Management</i> , 17, 99-120	13	21.31%
JFE	1987	Brickley and Dark-1987- <i>Journal of Financial Economics</i> , 18, 401-420	13	21.31%
AMJ	1996	Shane-1996- <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 39(1), 216-234	13	21.31%
JOM	2003	Combs and Ketchen-2003- <i>Journal of Management</i> , 29, 443-465	12	19.67%
JOR	2003	Dant and Kaufmann-2003- <i>Journal of Retailing</i> , 79, 63-75	11	18.03%
JBR	1996	Gassenheimer, Baucus, and Baucus-1996- <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 36(1), 67-79	11	18.03%
SEJ	1976	Caves and Murphy-1976- <i>Southern Economic Journal</i> , 42, 572-586	10	16.39%
Book	1995	Love-1995-McDonald's: Behind the Arches-Bantam-New York	10	16.39%
ASQ	1990	Cohen and Levinthal-1990- <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> , 35(1), 128-152	10	16.39%
AMR	1998	Dyer and Singh-1998- <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 23(3), 660-679	10	16.39%
SMJ	2003	Knott-2003- <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 24, 929-943	10	16.39%

Notes: Citations/per sample article (n = 61). Only the top 18 were listed (229/4053).

3.4. Categorization of the sample papers

Table 4 shows the categories of the sample papers. In this study, according to Alavi & Leidner (2001), Argote, McEvily, & Reagans (2003a), and Argote, McEvily, & Reagans (2003b) and based on the content of the articles, 61 sample papers that were related to the development and application of knowledge-based theory in franchise systems were collated and ultimately categorized into six categories: knowledge transfer (Contractor & Kundu, 1998; Minguela-Rata, López-Sánchez, & Rodríguez-Benavides, 2010; Gorovaia & Windsperger, 2013), knowledge creation (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Lindblom, & Tikkanen, 2010; El Akremi, Perrigot, & Piot-Lepetit, 2015), knowledge sharing (Altinay, et al., 2014; Gillis & Combs, 2009; Sheng & Hartono, 2015), knowledge application (Jean Jeon, et al., 2014; Alavi & Leidner, 2001), organizational learning (Hoy, 2008; Enz, 2008; Chen & Dimou, 2005), and knowledge exchange (Paswan, D'Souza, & Rajamma, 2014). Because some sample papers simultaneously addressed two to three topics, the final tally exceeded 61 (Table 2). Table 2 shows that, regarding the development and application of knowledge-based theory in franchise systems, the number of articles about “knowledge transfer” was the highest, accounting for 28.57%, the number of articles about “knowledge creation” was the second highest, accounting for 23.38%, and the number of articles about “knowledge sharing” was the third highest, accounting for 20.78%.

Table 4. Academic content of the sampled articles

Specific Topics	Representative selected (Author-Year-Title-Source)	#	Percentage
knowledge transfer	Seawright, Smith, Mitchell, and McClendon, 2013, Exploring Entrepreneurial Cognition in Franchisees: A Knowledge-Structure Approach, <i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i> , 37(2), 201-227	22	28.57%
knowledge creation	Lindblom and Tikkanen, 2010, Knowledge creation and business format franchising, <i>Management Decision</i> , 48(2), 179-188	18	23.38%
knowledge sharing	Okoroafor, 2014, The barriers to tacit knowledge sharing in franchise organizations, <i>Knowledge Management Research & Practice</i> , 12(1), 97-102	16	20.78%
knowledge application	Weaven, Grace, Dant, and Brown, 2014, Value creation through knowledge management in franchising: a multi-level conceptual framework, <i>Journal of Services Marketing</i> , 28(1), 97-104	10	12.99%
Organizational learning	Hoy, 2008, Organizational learning at the marketing/ entrepreneurship interface, <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> , 46(1), 152-158	8	10.39%
knowledge exchange	Paswan, D'Souza, and Rajamma, 2014, Value co-creation through knowledge exchange in franchising, <i>Journal of Services Marketing</i> , 28(2), 116-125	3	3.90%
sum		77	100%

4. The findings

This study was conducted to understand knowledge-based theory application in franchise systems; the relevant publications that were published in the fields of

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management and business in the SSCI during the 1996-2015 period were searched, and the scholars, articles, and research topics that had the most impact on the field were analyzed using the bibliometric method. The following conclusions are drawn:

1. In terms of the publication journal, "Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice" and "Journal of Business Research" published the most articles in the field, accounting for 8.20% of the sample papers, "Journal of Business Venturing" and "Journal of Small Business Management" published the second most articles in the field, accounting for 6.56% of the sample papers, and "European Journal of Marketing" and "Journal of Services Marketing" published the third most articles in the field, accounting for 4.92% of the sample papers. The journals that published the most sample papers were about entrepreneurship, business research, marketing research, small business management, etc. These topics were distributed in a variety of journals, showing the potential for future development and providing references for future studies.

2. In terms of the number of publications on knowledge-based theory application in franchise systems during the 1996-2015 period, nine papers were published in 2014, accounting for 14.75% (9/61) of the sample papers, and in recent years, the number has been slowly increasing.

3. Using the authors listed in the references of the sample papers as the subject and the bibliometric method, we found that S.A. Shane was the most cited author, with an average of 1.016 citations, J.G. Combs was the second most cited author, with an average of 0.591 citations, and F. Lafontaine was the third most cited author, with an average of 0.869 citations. Darr, Argote, & Epple (1995) had the most citations, at 29.51%, and Bradach (1997), Combs, Michael, & Castrogiovanni (2001), Kaufmann & Eroglu (1999), and Lafontaine (1992) had the second most citations, at 24.59%. The articles that had the most citations were similar to each other, suggesting that there continue to be many different topics in the current literature that attract attention from researchers.

4. In this study, according to Alavi & Leidner (2001), Argote, McEvily, & Reagans (2003a), and Argote, McEvily, & Reagans (2003b) and based on the content of the sample papers, six categories were generated: knowledge transfer, knowledge, knowledge sharing, knowledge application, organizational learning, and knowledge exchange. The results show that, regarding the development and application of knowledge-based theory in franchise systems, the number of articles about "knowledge transfer" was the highest, accounting for 28.57%, the number of articles about "knowledge creation" was the second highest, accounting for 23.38%, and the number of articles about "knowledge sharing" was the third highest, accounting for 20.78%.

5. Conclusions

In this study, 61 sample papers were obtained by using the SALSAs systematic data search method, based on which the citations of authors and papers were analyzed using the bibliometric method to investigate the scholars and publications that have had the most impact on the field of knowledge-based theory application in franchise systems. The topic of knowledge-based theory in franchise systems was further divided into six categories, i.e., knowledge transfer, knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge application, organizational learning, and knowledge exchange, to provide references for future studies.

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