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FRANCHISEE BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES: NAVIGATING EXTERNAL SHOCK IN MALAYSIA'S FRANCHISING ECOSYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Franchise sector has significant contribution to local and global economic growth and development, yet franchisees' long-term viability remains uncertain in times of global crisis. The current investigation examines the impact of market orientation, franchisor assistance, and government support on franchisee survival ability in Malaysia. Data was collected from 198 Malaysian franchisees using the survey approach. The analysis was carried out using structural equation modelling. The results demonstrated that market orientation ($\beta=0.283$, $p<0.001$), franchisor support ($\beta=0.169$, $p<0.001$), and government support ($\beta=0.302$, $p<0.001$), have significant positive impact on franchisee survival ability, indicating small to medium effect size FR ($f^2=0.022$), GS ($f^2=0.073$) and MO ($f^2=0.17$). This study emphasized the importance of survival strategy, strategic networks and external alliances in times of global crisis, demonstrating their contribution to a resilient franchisee ecosystem. These findings fill gaps in the existing literature on sustainable franchising and provide feasible recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to improve franchisee resilience and continuity. This research establishes a solid foundation for fostering continuity of franchisee in the face of economic and environmental uncertainty.

Keywords: Franchise Ecosystem; Franchisor Support, Government Support, Market Orientation Strategy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Business ecosystem plays a critical role in nurturing business survivability, innovation, enabling the establishment of new enterprises, and driving global and regional economic growth and development. Researchers are increasingly recognizing the significance of the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the micro, macro, and community levels. The business ecosystem plays a significant role in fostering business survival, growth and development through innovation and entrepreneurship (Zhang et al., 2024), institutional intervention (Poon et al., 2023), and business networks (Ribeiro et al., 2024).

Franchise business is the most successful global business model, with more than 4000 brands involving many industries and services in Asian countries, with more than 500,000 franchise outlets. This demonstrates its importance in the regional franchising ecosystem (Franchising Asia, 2023). In Malaysia, franchises is a popular way to start a business for aspiring new entrepreneurs and is widely adopted as a business expansion strategy. According to the data from the Malaysian Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (KPDN) in MFA (2023), there are 1,197 franchises registered in Malaysia, and 713 are homegrown. It is Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contributor (Suhaidi, 2022), and is Malaysia's third engine of economic recovery (David, 2021) with RM30 billion contribution to GDP in 2022 (Ministry of Domestic Trade and Costs of Living, KPDN, 2022). Therefore, it is essential to investigate the franchisee ecosystem to sustain their business operation in any environmental condition, especially during uncertain times.

The franchise business concept became popular in the 1990s and was widely adopted by Malaysians as a sustainable business model and business expansion. It quickly achieved business success, and it has been the safest method of doing business in the country since then. According to Othman et al. (2025) and Halim et al. (2024), the Malaysian government has aggressively promoted and supported the franchise business, making Malaysia Asia's fastest-emerging franchise marketplace. The adoption of franchise as a form of business continues to expand, but at a slower rate (Nik Hazimah et al., 2022). The situation is made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, with an increase of franchise business terminations from 2.8 percent in the year 2019 to 4.8 percent in 2021 and 4.7 percent in 2022. Consequently, franchise GDP contribution recorded a decrease of 5.7% and franchise output decreased at a rate of 14.9 percent and franchise performance reduced to 80 percent (KPDN, 2019 & 2022). Despite the concern about poor performance and the impact of the pandemic crises, very few empirical studies have been conducted on business survival practices in Malaysia (Che Omar, Ishak & Jusoh, 2020), especially among franchisee businesses (Othman et al., 2025).

Although franchising is regarded as a successful business model, its impact on franchisee survival rates remains uncertain (Dada, 2021). Research indicated that franchise businesses do not always have a clear survival advantage over independent businesses, with high failure rates reported, particularly among new franchises (Lafontaine, Zapletal, & Zhang, 2019). According to a report, approximately 75% of new franchise systems fail within twelve years (Shane & Foo, 1999). Franchisees in Malaysia face significant survival issues due to poor management and operational inefficiencies, which have caused many outlets to close within a few years (Wong, 2021). Despite the concern about survival issues of franchisees, only a few empirical studies have been conducted on franchise continuity in Malaysia (Che Omar, Ishak & Jusoh, 2020), and little is known from the perspective of the franchisee business resilience in Malaysia (Othman et al., 2024). Consequently, the external construct of business survival has been found to be a loose concept and understanding (Duchek, 2020), and the impact of the government's role in the franchise sector is still unexplored (Assefa, 2021).

In addition, VUCA environment, which are Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) and recently, the BANI world (Brittleness, Anxiety, Nonlinearity, and Incomprehensibility), indicating that

there is still a great deal of misunderstanding regarding the policies, procedures, and strategies that franchises must employ to sustain their business operations. Due to this, how franchisee could survive the global economic shock? Investigating how franchisees managed to survive during this time can offer a significant contribution and valuable insights for future franchise sustainability (Salunkhe, Rajan & Kumar, 2021). Considering that, this present study examines the impact of franchise support system, franchisor and government support, and strategic capability, market orientation on franchisee survivability during the current global crisis. The study's finding is significant to future researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to improve franchisee ecosystem for sustainable franchising in Malaysia.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability is commonly based on economic growth, preservation of the environment, and social equality. This study focuses on the economic pillars of franchisee sustainability, which are designed to secure the firm's long-term survival through franchise collaborative networks' efficiency, operational efficiency, and wealth generation. Franchise continuity can be defined by interdependence and a positive relationship between the franchisor and the franchisee through strategic decisions, networking, and managerial efficiency in aligning their practices with long-term goals and core values, ensuring the franchise model does not only thrive but also contributes positively to society equity and the environmental sustainability (Halim et al., 2024). To achieve the level of sustainability, franchisees should be able to sustain the business during critical situations, which is dependent on five key elements namely shareholders' returns, employees' progress and learning, corporate adequacy and effectiveness, customers' fulfilment, and commitment to society (Saharum et al., 2017). Thus, effective stakeholder integration and business network support should be developed and applied at all times to sustain franchisees' businesses.

Franchisee resilience is increasingly recognized as the foundation of sustainability, especially in an uncertain environment. In order to examine the franchisee's ability to survive crises, the factors contributing to franchisee performance should first be identified. Franchisee survival is the basis of franchising business growth and sustainability. The ability of businesses to grow and advance through internal resources, external support, and strategic capability is the only way to ensure their survival in an increasingly complicated and uncertain business environment of the twenty-first century. Business ability to survive is related to the business capacity which effectively uses organizational resources, capability and the support system the firms receive to deal with the difficulties in surviving (Yang & Yu, 2022). There are seven literature contexts discovered in the franchisee survival ability such as; marketing, managerial capability, value proposition, franchisor and franchisee relationship, franchise resources, entrepreneurship and others (Othman et al., 2023). Thus, franchisee resilience not only depends on the resource but is also significantly influenced by the institutional support strategy and capabilities performed within the organization (Wang et al., 2025).

Marketing has consistently emerged as a critical enabler of business resilience and survival. Better marketing practices lead to enhanced adaptability and crisis navigation (Moi & Cabiddu, 2022). While in franchise survival literature has confirmed that marketing strategy has a significant impact on franchising resilience (Ghantous & Christodoulides, 2020). Previous research validates that even if small businesses are resource-constrained, MO, which focuses on enhancing consumer satisfaction activities, gives significant assistance to enhance their ability to survive crises (Beliaeva et al., 2020). MO researchers widely agree that market-oriented firms achieve greater efficiency and performance (Sahi et al., 2020) and that MO is essential for business survival, especially during economic crises (Bui, 2021). The literature consistently shows that adopting MO leads to better outcomes and strengthens a company's ability to navigate challenging market conditions (Othman et al, 2023). During a crisis, MO has been identified to significantly contribute to a firm's performance and recovery (Bui et al., 2022) and business survival (Bokhari et al., 2022).

Despite that, businesses also maintain long-term competitiveness from external pressure through external support (Najib et al., 2021). Mutumba et al. (2020) asserted that the quality of the entrepreneurial ecosystem among franchisees is affected due to a lack of infrastructure, policy support, and networking opportunities that negatively impact the performance of franchisees. The sector also lacks appropriate and effective cooperation and coordination between the public and private sectors, leading to a lack of support systems for franchisees and hence affecting their sustainability and growth (Mishra et al., 2025). Moreover, franchisees often have inadequate access to various critical resources necessary for survival and sustainability during uncertain times, such as funding, advice, expertise, and leadership, among other areas of support (Halim et al., 2024). Yet, previous studies found that government support has a positive influence on a company's survival, e.g., during financial and economic crises, political instability, regulation, and other external environmental elements (Adam & Alarifí, 2021; Hernández et al., 2020; Salunkhe et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, as a franchising business, the franchisee and franchisor are bound by a business-to-business relationship where both must portray a good affiliation to remain in business and gain sustainable outcomes (Lee & Choi, 2023). While Othman et al. (2023) mentioned that franchisors in the franchising system offer franchisees at least two vital resources that aid in their survival, such as brand orientation, value proposition, and other marketing management. Besides that, to maintain profitability and sustain the operation, the franchise needs to integrate franchise stakeholders to build sustainable networking to gain access to resources and knowledge sharing for better business resilience capability. In addition, during a crisis, franchisor support franchisees with their leadership, governance, and knowledge, and the assistance given helped franchisees to survive the crisis (Bui et al., 2021). Besides that, a franchise is a long-term business arrangement between two parties where the franchising relationship is the 'duty of good faith' between the franchisor and franchisee (Terry & Di Lernia, 2009). According to Kremez et al. (2022) and Sanfeliu and Puig (2018), the integrity, leadership, and support of the franchisor are essential components for a successful mutual relationships, collaboration, and communication with the franchisee. Maximizing franchisee satisfaction in the franchising system is critical to increasing franchisee intention to remain in the system (Adeiza et al., 2017). Therefore, franchisor support maintains the franchise network, ensuring franchisee satisfaction, which leads to greater retention and continuity of the system (Halim et al., 2024).

An essential subject in the strategic viewpoint is researching the survival and development of small businesses and identifying the variables that can impact the organization's performance. Survival was first discussed by Bates (1995, 1998), who examined the survival rate and pattern that described the start-up franchise survival compared to independent businesses in terms of financial indicators. Later, Shane & Foo (1999) found a contradiction in Bates (1995) findings where the new franchisee has a better probability of surviving if it gains better business support. According to literature, franchise survival outcomes were the result of managerial talent (Kosová & Lafontaine, 2010), monitoring or governance capability (Antia et al., 2017), management experience (Bates, 1998), knowledge management (Hshieh et al., 2020), strategic management business and know-how (Perrigot et al., 2020). Maintaining strong ties to the government to gain assistance (Abd Aziz et al., 2019) and franchisor support (Antia et al., 2017). Despite the growing body of literature, franchise sustainability remains a contested topic. The validity of survival and failure rate data released by franchisors in the database has also drawn criticism from franchise scholars (Bates 1998; Shane & Foo, 1999; Lafontaine & Shaw, 1998).

Therefore, the resilience of the franchise business system is still a debatable subject among academics and practitioners, and there is limited empirical research done on the perspective of franchisee business continuity during economic shock (Othman et al., 2023). The effectiveness of government support on franchise survival (Abd Aziz et al., 2019) and the best practice to survive the global crisis for franchisees (Bui et al., 2022) need to be further explored. Although the Malaysian Franchise Association is supposed to play a facilitating role, serving as a forum for information exchange and coordinating the goals of the government and industry players, its effectiveness in addressing the long-term sustainability of franchisees is still under-researched. Thus, to what extent does the external support and managerial capability assist

franchisees in surviving the crisis? Therefore, this study looked into the impact of franchisor support, government assistance, and market orientation strategy on franchisee survival ability.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Resources Scarcity Theory (RST) in entrepreneurship was developed by Oxenfeld and Kelly (1969), Caves and Murphy (1976), Norton (1988), and Lafontain and Kaufmann (1994) (in Diaz-Bernardo, 2012). Oxenfeld and Kelly (1969), who proposed the theory, argued that franchising facilitates rapid market penetration in the early phases of firms' growth trajectories by facilitating access to key resources. Oxenfeld and Kelly (1969) and Norton (1988) used the Resource Scarcity Theory, which explains that the new venture or entrepreneur uses the franchising system to gain access to a fundamental resource for growing a business (from the franchisee's outlet). RST underpins this study, explaining how franchising decisions for survival and growth (Aliouche et al., 2015) are driven by the need to mobilize essential resources during crises. RST suggests that in times of resource scarcity, such as a global crisis, organizations turn to franchising to access critical resources and strategy. The strategy to gain external resources from government and franchisor support and the market orientation strategy enables franchisees to grow and maintain operations while minimizing costs (Saharum et al., 2017), thereby enhancing resilience and adaptability. The study provides an important opportunity to delve into franchisee survival perspectives during the global crisis, as there is a very limited amount of theory-based empirical research conducted to identify and examine business survival constructs (Abed, 2022). This study offers some critical insights into franchisee survival constructs, which are different from franchisee performance variables because the factors associated with a firm's performance and success may not automatically become factors related to a firm's survival and performance.

4.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on Neise et al. (2021) found that organizational continuity depends on the organization's coping strategies (including marketing strategy), and the study also found that improved marketing will lead to better business resilience. Market orientation (MO) is the marketing strategy to satisfy customers and other relevant stakeholders and also represents superior skills in understanding and satisfying customers and other relevant stakeholders to create value and increase profit and performance (Narver & Slater, 1990). The concept of MO is, development of the concept of marketing in the business and its benefits on its operations and performance. Researchers also agreed that there is a positive, significant, and robust link between MO and a firm's performance (Morgan et al., 2009). Market orientation is a strategic orientation that can produce greater business efficiency and performance (Sahi et al. 2020). Research also considered market orientation (MO) as one of the indispensable elements of business survival, especially during an economic crisis (Bui, 2021). The literature, therefore, suggests that:

H1: Market orientation has a significant positive impact on franchise survival ability.

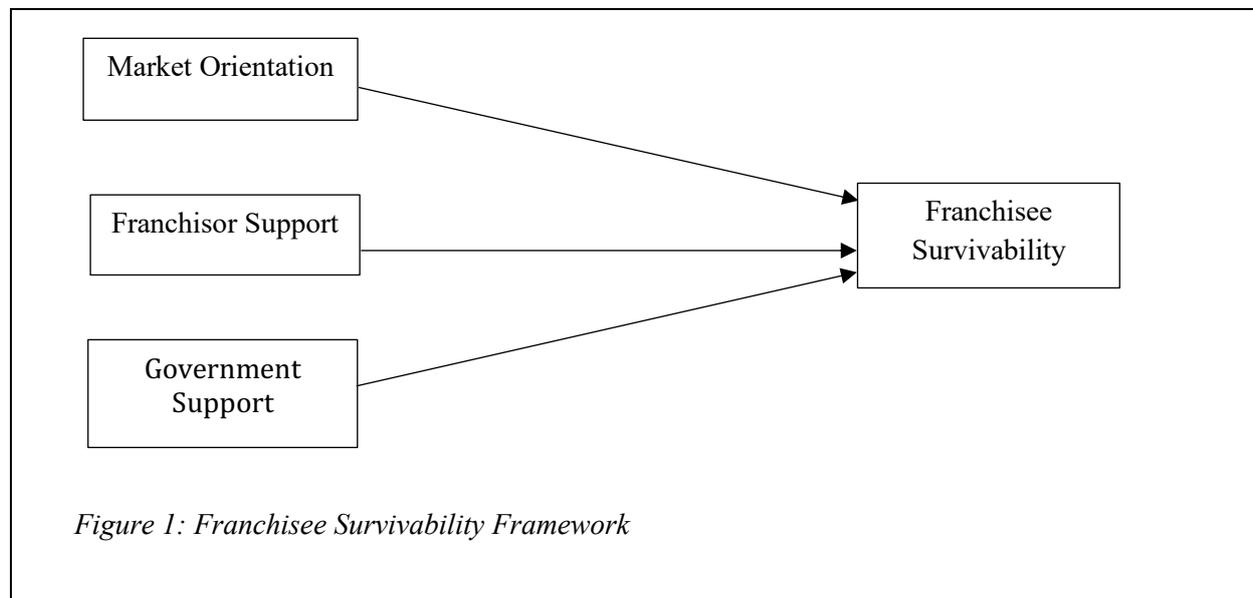
The effective relationship, communication, cooperation, and support between franchisor and franchisee are the key to both performance (Gillis et al., 2020). Both franchisor and franchisee need to work together to survive the pandemic crisis, as one failure will cause problems for the other party (Perrigot et al., 2020). Meanwhile, as a franchising business, the franchisee and franchisor are bound by a business-to-business relationship where both have the obligation to portray a good affiliation to remain in business and gain sustainable outcomes (Lee & Choi, 2023). As the franchisee pays the brand owner, the franchisor, a certain amount of royalties and a franchising fee, in return for managerial support and knowledge (Jang & Park, 2019). In addition, during the pandemic, the franchisor supported franchisees with leadership, governance, and knowledge to help franchisees survive the crisis (Bui et al., 2021).

H2: Franchisor support has a significant positive impact on franchise survival ability.

The impact of the exogenous shock on small businesses is often thought to be more sensitive due to their vulnerable condition, as they have fewer resources and capabilities. Past research agreed that the more resources accumulated, the better the organization is, resulting in better performance and resilience capability (Landini et al., 2020). Even though smaller firms might have fewer resources, they are more flexible than bigger organizations, so they can easily change or modify their strategic direction and business model to adapt and respond to the current crisis (Miklian & Hoelscher, 2021). However, to be able to do the transformation and innovation, it might cost them a certain amount of expenditure. Therefore, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) need funding or non-financial support from the government to help the SMEs increase their capability to recover and survive (Najib et al., 2021). Evidence shows that external factors, such as governments, influence a company's survival (Adam et al., 2021; Hernández et al., 2020; Salunkhe et al., 2021).

H3: Government support has a significant positive impact on franchise survival ability.

According to the hypothesis development, the conceptual framework for the study is shown in **Figure 1**.



5.0 RESEACH METHOD

Sample and Data Collection

This study adopted a quantitative approach and conducted a cross-sectional survey among homegrown franchisees in Malaysia. The purposive sampling was employed with the sample criteria of homegrown franchisees, who must have been operating before the pandemic. A total of 270 questionnaires were distributed among these franchisees, with only 198 valid responses (73% response rate). For further insights, Table 1 offers a summary of the respondents' general characteristics.

Table 1*Sample description*

		Frequency	Per cent
Type of franchise	Franchisee of the foreign franchisor	89	43.4
Business	Franchisee to the local franchisor	109	56.6
Number of Outlet	Single Outlet	158	79.8
	Multiple Outlets	40	20.2
Years of Operation	5 years	56	28.3
	Between 6 to 10 years	103	52.0
	Between 11 to 15 years	30	15.2
	Between 16 to 20 years	6	3.0
Total Number of Employee	More than 20 years	3	1.5
	Below 5 employees	109	55.1
	Between 5 to 29 employees	87	43.9
	Between 30 to 75 employees	2	1.0

Instruments and Measures

The survey instrument was developed using established scales for franchisee resilience, based on Roopa & Rani (2012), adapted to match franchise businesses with a seven-point scale. The survey is made up of three sections: Section A (Demographic and screening questions), Section B for Factor Effecting Franchisee Survivability, and Section C: Franchisee Survival Ability. Franchisee survival ability (FSA) contained 6 items that were adapted from Adam et al. (2021) and Najib et al. (2021). Measurement of government support (GS = 13 items) was adapted from Yang and Yu (2022), while franchisor support (FS = 12 items) and market orientation (MO = 15 items) were adapted from Abdullah (2008) and Fakhreddin et al. (2022). Pre-test were carried out with three academics and three franchisees to ensure clarity and accuracy. Then, the expert agreement on the items was selected using the Content Validity Index (CVI), with those scoring above 80% retained, 70% to 80% modified, and below 70% deleted (Connelly, 2008; Pilot & Beck, 2006). The final instruments after deletion were FSA (6), FS (8), GS (12), and MO (12). Next, a pilot study with 30 franchisee owners confirmed the reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values for FSA (0.951), FS (0.928), GS (0.942), and MO (0.953), which exceeded 80%. Moreover, Pearson Correlation analysis further confirmed the validity of all items, where each item's score with the construct's total score is higher than 0.30, showing that the items were valid (Oktavia et al, 2018).

A questionnaire was created and distributed to franchisees to gather their input on variables. The study employed non-probability sampling as the sampling frame was not available and the population was specialized (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The study focused on franchisees in various industries, operating before and after the global pandemic. A total of 280 questionnaires were sent to franchisees in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (franchise-saturated area based on KPDM report) according to the franchisor brand registered with MFA, with 214 completed responses received (76.43%). Data screening found 7 incomplete responses (with over 15% unanswered), which were removed. Next, the dataset was screened for outliers, leading to the deletion of 9 additional responses. Next, the remaining 198 data points were screened for normality and linearity (Soewin & Chinda, 2018) via SPSS and were later analysed through Smart PLS 4.0.

6.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is employed in this study for the multivariate analysis of latent variables, as it is an exploratory study, involving latent constructs and non-normal data distribution. Therefore, the structural equation model was tested using Partial Least Squares (PLS). PLS-SEM, a variance-based SEM approach utilizing SMARTPLS 4.0, was well-suited for exploratory research and testing empirical frameworks.

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement and structural model were evaluated to validate the model and meet empirical work quality standards. Reflective measurement models were used for all constructs. In Table 2, all the reliability items met the standardized reflective indicator loadings of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2017). Then, the model was assessed for internal consistency, indicator, convergent, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 2

Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Loading	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
Franchisee	FSA1	0.741	0.879	0.885	0.623	1.749
	Survival	FSA2				0.785
Ability	FSA3	0.862	0.933	0.942	0.680	3.020
	FSA4	0.820				2.786
	FSA5	0.773				2.523
	FSA6	0.749				2.026
Market Orientation	MO1	0.765	0.933	0.942	0.680	3.596
	MO3	0.797				3.868
	MO4	0.812				3.569
	MO5	0.863				3.417
	MO6	0.878				4.409
	MO7	0.827				3.697
	MO9	0.821				3.219
	MO8	0.829				3.519
Franchisor Support	FS1	0.762	0.892	0.901	0.650	1.999
	FS2	0.808				2.313
	FS3	0.811				2.411
	FS4	0.860				2.609
	FS5	0.811				2.122
	FS8	0.781				2.059
Government Support	GS10	0.771	0.933	0.939	0.600	2.661
	GS11	0.791				2.977
	GS12	0.711				2.181

GS2	0.774	2.631
GS3	0.767	3.129
GS4	0.775	2.998
GS5	0.747	2.213
GS6	0.772	2.475
GS7	0.824	3.135
GS8	0.748	2.695
GS9	0.833	3.428

According to Table 2, indicator reliability has been established where only items that exceeded 0.708 loadings were retained in the analysis (Hair et al., 2017). Internal consistency of the measurement criteria was met when all constructs achieved a Composite Reliability value of greater than 0.708 and the Cronbach Alpha (CA) value was between 0.879 to 0.933, indicating good internal reliability. Convergence validity results of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct were established, thus, the constructs explained 50% of the variance of the items (Ramayah et al., 2018). Cross-loading in Table 6 in the appendix describes the cross-loading for each latent variable, which is more than 0.1, and the value is only higher on its construct.

Structural Model Assessment

The evaluation of the structural model focuses on the assessment of collinearity issues, the relevance of relationships, the assessment of coefficient determination, effect size, and predictive power. First, we examined the structural model for collinearity using variance inflation factor (VIF) values, which is crucial for structural model regression analysis in Common Method Variance Analysis. Table 2 indicates that the structural model exhibited low collinearity, with VIF values below five for the outer model. Similarly, the inner model displayed VIF values for all constructs that were lower than 3.3 for all constructs, demonstrating that discriminant validity has been met. Next, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) mean in Table 3 illustrates the value of item correlations, which were all below 0.85, indicating that the constructs were distinct from each other.

Table 3

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)

	FS	FSA	GS	MO
Franchisor Support	1	0.507	0.692	0.394
Franchisee Survival Ability	0.507	1	0.508	0.450
Government Support	0.692	0.508	1	0.256
Market Orientation	0.394	0.450	0.256	1

Next, the model fit indices, as suggested by Tenenhaus in Ramayah et al. (2018), were tested using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Henseler et al. (2015) recommended SRMR values below 0.08, and the model achieved an acceptable fit with an SRMR value of 0.074. For explanatory research, the R^2 value, according to Falk and Miller's rule (in Ramayah et al., 2018), should be above 0.10, thus, the model's R^2 value was 0.342 (substantial), indicating that the endogenous construct was accurately explained by the model. Meanwhile, Cohen's f^2 was then employed to estimate effect size, where values less than 0.02 to 0.105 indicated a very small effect size. Subsequently, in Table 4, the structural model's

predictive power via PLS prediction is demonstrated, as indicated by the root-mean-square error (RMSE), which is mostly lower than the LM_RMSE and non-zero Q² value.

Table 4

Predictive Power Assessment

Items	Q ² predict	PLS-SEM RMSE	LM RMSE
FSA1	0.259	0.751	0.796
FSA2	0.137	0.918	0.918
FSA3	0.246	0.801	0.835
FSA4	0.193	0.855	0.876
FSA5	0.144	0.921	0.922
FSA6	0.152	0.954	0.942

Hypotheses Testing

For the purpose of determining path assessments and t-statistics for the proposed structural paths, the bootstrapping process was carried out using a 5000 resample. The purpose of this investigation was to assess the hypotheses. The structural model and hypothesis outcomes are shown in Table 5, while Figure 2 shows the PLS model results.

Table 5

Structural Model Result

Relationship	β Coefficient	CI 5.0%	CI 95.0%	T statistics	ρ values
MO -> FSA	0.283	0.180	0.380	4.600	0.001
FS -> FSA	0.169	0.067	0.267	2.752	0.003
GS -> FSA	0.302	0.207	0.387	5.521	0.001

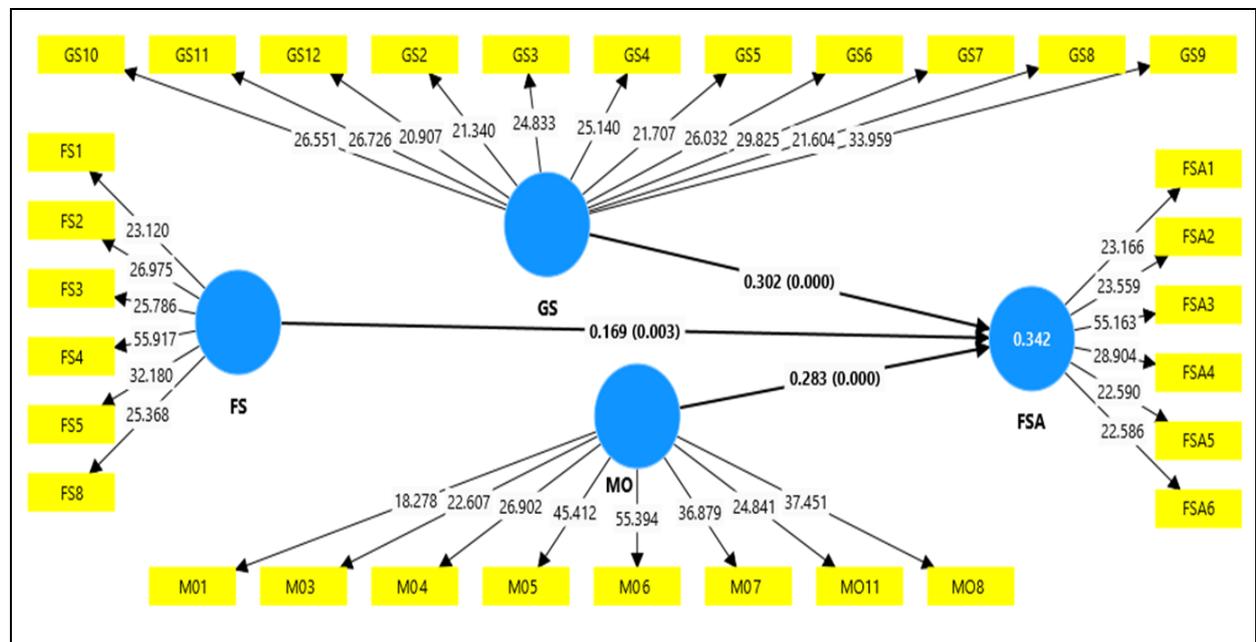


Figure 2 PLS Model

DISCUSSION

The pandemic crisis has shown that the franchise industry is not prepared for such a problem, that led to huge franchise failures, putting franchisees at risk of not surviving, and a large number of franchises have permanently shut down their operations. Vulnerable franchisees lack resources to sustain operations; thus, they need external resources to support their business, such as a survival strategy to maintain operations, generate positive revenue, and minimise debt to recover and survive the crisis. Consequently, the current study discussed the franchisee ecosystem and strategic orientation to retain business from environmental pressure and achieve sustainability. The current study employs alliance capability to gain support from franchisors and government agencies, with market orientation as a survival strategy, which has been shown to have a significant positive effect on franchisee survival during the crisis.

Tjahjadi et al. (2024) claimed the importance of MO to provide a significant measure to meet customers' satisfaction to increase business performance and protect organisations from volatile market forces. The result has shown that franchisees with the ability to implement this strategy were able to survive the economic crisis. Therefore, MO is one of the survival strategies needed for a business to compete in a highly competitive market, especially during a crisis and this has been mentioned in research conducted by Tjahjadi et al. (2024), Bokhari et al. (2022) and Lee & Choi (2023), The ability to adapt the MO consistently improves the franchisee's ability to survive and grow in volatile market conditions. Franchisees should not just focus on the customer alone, but they should also develop competitor orientation, inter-functional coordination, and responsiveness of the franchising systems to generate business survival outcomes.

Similarly, Lee & Choi (2023), Gillis et al. (2020), and Bui et al. (2022) also mentioned that franchisors that provided support such as training, operational procedures, marketing, and financial support created a significant impact on franchisee survival ability during the pandemic outbreak. The findings confirmed that business-to-business relationship or strategic alliances in franchising helps to sustain the franchisee business and allow them to remain in the franchising system (Xue & Li, 2023). The inter-connected survival and performance of franchisor and franchisee have ensured that the franchisor provides both financial, as well as and non-financial support to avoid franchisee failure or intention to exit the franchising business, which eventually affects the franchise system as a whole.

Government support, especially financial in terms of grants, loans, and funds, financial incentives, regulatory relief, monetary policy, and cost reduction, assists businesses in increasing their financial capability to sustain operations during a crisis (Ayub et al., 2022). The business survival study during the pandemic in Malaysia also found that government support has a significant positive relationship with business resilience. The current study has proven that business franchisees in Malaysia have a high know-how capability and adaptability with the provision of government assistance such as technical, regulatory, financial support, and implementing strategy, forming new norm business methods and business digitalization, thus successfully maintaining performance during the crises and the ability to survive till post-pandemic.

This study, which looked at franchisees' survival ability in Malaysia, further confirmed prior studies that a combination of market orientation strategies, franchisor support, and government assistance played an important role in ensuring franchisees' survival during an economic downturn. Previous studies, such as Bui et al. (2021) and Lee and Choi (2023), have emphasized the importance of franchisor support and market orientation in maintaining franchise performance and resilience. This research extends this understanding by demonstrating that a strong and statistically significant role of government support, an area that is often conceptually acknowledged but less empirically explored (Najib et al., Assefa,2021). Unlike previous work that has largely focused on the franchisor perspective

or relied on survival rates as performance indicators, this study uniquely focuses on the franchisee's perspective and uses structural equation modeling to reveal that government support has an impact, followed by market and franchisor support.

This model not only fills the theoretical gap identified in Dada (2021) and Othman et al. (2023) but also challenges the traditional reliance on internal factors by empirically illustrating the need for external alliance capabilities in navigating resource scarcity caused by crises. Anchored in Resource Scarcity Theory, this study extends the theory on how franchisees strategically leverage external resources and franchisor expertise, in a situation of resource limitations, to survive and grow, namely, franchisors and government support to overcome constraints during crises. The significant effect of government support underscores the theoretical premise that access to limited but critical external resources increases. The theoretical framework offers new approaches to retain business through alliance capability with the third sector to gain external support for franchisees to ensure survival ability during a pandemic and other crises. Thus, the franchisee resilience network must be tested by future research to empirically examine its significant ties with franchisee survival during a crisis. This study serves as a scholarly platform for further in-depth studies on several resilience resolutions, especially for franchisee businesses. The novel framework will help franchise players, other enterprises from various sectors, and policymakers to portray good relationships with the external sector to gain business support to better adapt and prepare for future catastrophes.

This study offers several practical implications for enhancing franchisee resilience to crises by addressing the government's role in franchisee sustainability during the global crisis. However, the government, through franchise-specific agencies, should consider redesigning and formalizing more sector-specific support mechanisms accessible including direct financial assistance, regulatory relief, and advisory services that can be mobilized quickly and easily during periods of economic disruption. Franchisors are also encouraged to institutionalize structured resilience development programs, such as digitalization, incorporating training and support systems in crisis adaptation, operational flexibility, and crisis response strategies. Despite its contributions, this research is limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference and temporal analysis of survival dynamics. Future studies should use longitudinal methodologies to examine how the influence of market orientation, franchisor support, and government intervention evolves over time, particularly across phases such as pre- and post-crisis and sector-specific recoveries.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The study emphasizes the significant challenges that franchisees face during crises, such as the pandemic, and the importance of both internal and external support for franchisee survival and sustainability. While many franchisees struggled due to resource scarcity and operational inefficiencies, the findings highlight that survival is dependent not only on individual effort but also on the strength of external alliances, particularly those with franchisors and government agencies. The study confirms that strong collaboration with external entities, such as franchisors and government agencies, is critical for franchisees to be able to adapt, continue with business operations, and recover effectively. This study contributes to the franchising literature by integrating Resource Scarcity Theory with alliance capabilities and market orientation building, offering a new theoretical framework that explains how franchisees can leverage on survival strategy, financial and non-financial support from franchisors and government agencies to overcome their resource and capability limitations during crises. By empirically confirming the impact of market orientation, franchisor support, and government assistance on franchisee survival, this study advances the theoretical understanding of franchise resilience strategies and addresses previous gaps in the literature that have largely focused on internal capabilities or single-source support from the franchisor. Thus, the findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of franchise survival by showcasing how market orientation and external support enhance a franchisee's ability to withstand economic turbulence. Future research should explore these resilience networks in

greater depth, integrating more stakeholders to solidify their practical application in crisis management, offering a path forward for policymakers and franchise systems alike. This framework provides valuable insights for franchisee businesses aiming to strengthen their crisis preparedness and long-term franchise sustainability.

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