

Effects of Franchisors' Management Styles on Dissolution Intention: Mediation Effects of Task-Focused and Procedural Conflict and Moderation Effects of Image of Franchisor

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Abstract

This study was intended to suggest a sound business model by establishing the effects of franchisors' franchisee management styles on dissolution intention and the roles of franchisors' images, task-focused conflicts and procedural conflicts arising in the course of running a franchise business chosen by startups as an option for reducing business risks. To that end, valid questionnaire responses from 258 franchisees were analyzed. The analysis results suggested that franchisors should actively take the cooperative management approach and try to prevent conflicts from arising for the duration of contracts, and that conflicts had a negative impact on franchisors' positive images. The present findings suggested that franchisors should adopt the cooperative management style, maximize the positive interactions with franchisees and strive to develop conflict management strategies to prevent conflicts, while franchisees should refer to the information disclosure documents, peruse the terms and conditions before signing the contracts and meticulously check franchisors' management and support systems with existing franchisees.

Keywords: Franchise, Franchisee Management Style, Images on Franchisors, Conflict, Dissolution Intention.

1. Introduction

Many people choose to become franchisees rather than independent sole proprietors because they can earn stable profits without much expertise and knowledge by taking advantage of franchisors' core competency, knowhow, and support. Yet, according to the data published by the Fair Trade Commission, the number of franchise disputes received by the mediation committee increased from 243 in 2013 to 578 in 2012, whilst the 'franchisors' unfair and despotic treatment of franchisees has been persistently reported, e.g. franchisors' designation of consumables not specified in the information disclosure statement as compulsory items, coercing franchisees into purchasing certain items, forced interior change, territorial overlap, and unilateral contracts. In addition, franchisees are subject to a downturn in sales resulting from the compromised images of franchisors due to trademark disputes, dereliction of duties and embezzlement. After all, the foregoing aspects are likely to serve as the burden on prospective individual franchisees despite the advantages of franchising business.

This study built on [1]'s research and was an extension of [2]'s research on franchise conflicts, sub-classified franchisors' management behaviors towards franchisees into evasive, cooperative and coercive management styles, and identified the effects of the three management styles on franchisees' perceived task-focused conflicts, procedural conflicts, and dissolution intention.

At the same time, this study noted the franchisors' images perceived by franchisees, because the image of a franchisor is one of the important reasons for franchisees to choose the franchisor, as well as a factor preceding their satisfaction with the franchisor. That is, even when a franchisor's management style changes, unless its image has not been compromised, and if the conflicts resulting from the evasive or coercive management decrease and thus the dissolution intention decreases, the franchisor can be dedicated to improving the image.

Given the expanding franchising industry resulting from diverse causes including economic downturn, the empirical data of this study alerts franchisors to franchisee management strategies, while suggesting some clues for success to prospective franchisees that are worth noting before signing a contract.

2. Related Researches

2.1. Franchise management styles

Franchise system is regarded as an option to avert risks when one lacks in business-related experience or knowledge and is a very useful system in that it provides verified selective alternatives [3, 4]. Franchise system not only addresses the challenges - e.g. risk management, resource constraints and managerial efficiency - that most business owners encounter, but also serves as a very efficient means of financing or expansion of stores and rapid growth with limited resources [5]. In addition, franchisees can make the most of verified business packages, reduce risks, and relatively easily stabilize business via diverse support from franchisors [6].

The present study sub-classified the franchisors' management styles into evasive, cooperative, and coercive management styles in reference to the conflict management styles. First, the evasive management style is characterized by the aversion to a dubious situation, instead of an active involvement in franchisee management. Franchisors adopting the evasive management style usually pay attention to signing the franchise contract, suggest franchisees should take the initiative in solving subsequent problems, and are unwilling to get involved. The evasive management style is prone to frequent and continuous conflicts [7, 8]. The cooperative management style, on the other hand, is

characterized by taking the initiative in solving any problems together [9]. That is, the cooperative style benefits both franchisors and franchisees, where both parties seek creative solutions for important problems and try to build a long-term positive relationship, for which franchisors are inclined to care about franchisees [7]. Thus, assuming franchisees realize profits, the cooperative management style is likely to increase franchisees' satisfaction while decreasing their dissolution intention. Finally, the coercive management style is often manifested when a franchisor holds a dominating position. Coercive franchisors are characterized by pursuing their own profits irrespective of franchisees' interests or hopes [10, 11]. The coercive management style is likely to cause franchisees to take negative attitudes towards collaboration or become indifferent [7].

2.2. Conflicts

Conflicts take place in our life anytime, and exist in any organization [12]. The disparity of goals between franchisors and franchisees and the discrepancy in the perception of reality between the two parties are likely to cause conflicts [13]. In particular, task- focused conflicts are often associated with the conflicts over the franchisors' inherent responsibilities and performance. That is, task-focused conflicts arise from some different perspectives on information analysis or different ideas or behaviors relative to a given business [14].

2.3. Franchisor's image

A corporate image is a combination of a holistic impression of a company and its traits [15] and is defined as a systematic attitude towards a company [16]. Thus, a corporate image may be translated as a negative or positive image as a whole people have toward a company from an attitudinal perspective [17, 18, 19]

2.4. Dissolution intention

In general, the close relationship between sellers and buyers is one of the important sources for enhancing corporate competitiveness [20, 21]. Yet, in case a franchisee loses the preference for certain products or companies, any long-term relationship is likely to stop. For example, in case individuals or companies have any negative experiences of products, they could discontinue the relationship [22, 23].

3. Research Model & Hypotheses

As retaining the relationships with existing franchisees is highly important to a franchisor, strategic efforts are indispensable to increase its continuous and long-term competitiveness [24]. Yet, according to the resource dependence theory,

franchisees cannot but be the weak side in their relationship with franchisors. The theory posits as any organization cannot fully meet its need for resources [25], its dependence on resources determines the power relationship between the organization and environment [26]. As franchise businesses form the supply and demand relationships involving capital, staff, raw materials and information, the franchisee management styles may vary with the extent to which the parties involved depend on resources. That is, franchisors' management styles may differ depending on the binding force of contract terms on support and payment of expenses. The most ideal management style of a franchisor toward a franchisee is the cooperative approach as aforementioned. Still, it is a practical approach to take different management approaches in accordance with franchisors' goals, the potential to create continuous revenues, and the agreed terms on continuous supply of materials.

In case a franchisee as a business owner fails to realize profits from the exchange relationship with a franchisor and loses autonomy, the inherent task-focused conflicts may arise. In that case, when the franchisor takes an evasive or coercive management approach, the task-focused conflicts will undoubtedly increase. However, when the franchisor takes a cooperative management approach while maintaining the partnership with the franchisee in pursuit of a reciprocal symbiotic relationship [27], the task-focused conflicts will decrease. Procedural conflicts may arise when franchisees' opinions are not reflected in business operation and joint events or when franchisees are dissatisfied with the procedure, in which case the franchisor's management style is to exert certain effects as in the case of task-focused conflicts. The dissolution of business relationship occurs when one is dissatisfied with the relationship or feels unfairly treated. Thus, conflicts over tasks or procedures will surely increase the dissolution intention.

Image is a holistic picture representing a certain object and a sensible impression felt through associations [28]. Thus, a franchisor's image is likely associated with a positive perception and awareness of its status in the market [29]. A successful franchise business system is relatively large in scale, sufficiently supports its franchisees in the early stage, has high brand awareness and maintains a long-term relationship with franchisees [30]. Therefore, franchisors develop diverse strategies and make investments to succeed in the market while building positive images. After all, when franchisees perceive very intense images of franchisors, the conflicts over franchisee management approaches and the dissolution intention will decrease.

However, when franchisors build less attractive images, they cannot expect such positive effects and have to burnish their images.

Conflicts are part of a mutual antagonism resulting from the discrepancies in goals, expectations or desires between two or more parties and an inevitable and universal phenomenon caused by a clash of distinct needs, backgrounds and beliefs [31]. [32] argued that from the perspective of individuals the conflicts or problems arising within a relationship served as a gateway to developing into an intimate relationship and that once such conflicts were addressed well, the quality of the relationship possibly grew. Still, any maladjusted response to or negative analysis of conflicts may have serious systemic effects on the relationship ([33], [34]). To apply the foregoing arguments to the franchise industry, the conflicts perceived by franchisees may exert positive or negative effects on the management styles and dissolution intention. Hence, the present study hypothesized and research model as shown in figure 2 below.

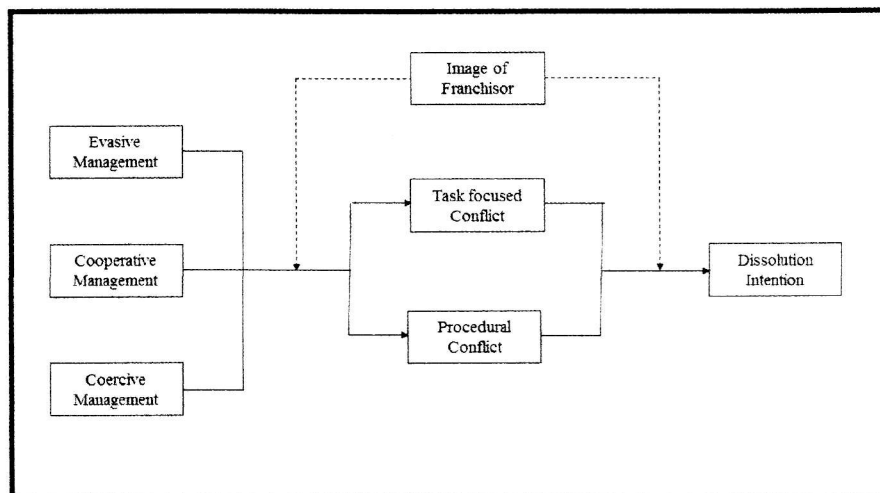


Figure 2. Research Model

4. Data collection and Research Methods

To carry out this study, we used 258 participants of information such as sales and investment cost among the sample of the residents of Seoul franchise stores based on [1]'s research. Franchisee management style was on measured 4 items of evasive, 5 items of coercive, and 9 items of cooperative related to conflict resolution behavior based on [35], [36] and [37]'s research. Task focused conflict and procedural conflict was measured each 7-points Likert scale on 4 items adjusted to the situation of this study based on [38] and [39]. Dissolution intention was measured on 6 items 7-point Likert scale based on [40]. Image of Franchisors was measured on 7 items 7-point Likert scale based on [41] and [19].

5. Results

As for the internal consistency of question items tested, the Cronbach's α values of evasive, cooperative, coercive were 0.843, 0.940 and 0.936. The Cronbach's α values of task-focused conflict, procedural conflict, image of franchisor and dissolution intention were 0.924, 0.868, 0.967 and 0.952. The confirmatory factor analysis performed to test the validity found 1 item on task-focused conflict, and 1 item on procedural conflict had standardized estimation below 0.5. Thus, those items were eliminated prior to another factor analysis, where the construct reliability and the average variance extracted (AVE) were 0.739-0.861 and 0.356-0.609, respectively. Despite the construct reliability and AVE of variables being 0.7 or less, respectively, both of which were below the reference level, its discriminant validity was proved by the correlation analysis. Thus, the question items were parameterized.

To verify the hypotheses, type of business, gender, age and education level were controlled for the regression analysis. Statistically significant effects of evasive ($\beta = .625, p < .01$), cooperative ($\beta = -.463, p < .01$), and coercive ($\beta = .590, p < .01$) on the task focused conflict were found, respectively. Specifically, evasive and coercive type increased task focused conflict, but cooperative type reduced the task-focused conflict. Meanwhile, statistically significant effects of evasive ($\beta = .680, p < .01$), cooperative ($\beta = -.447, p < .01$), and coercive ($\beta = .529, p < .01$) on the procedural conflict, respectively. In other words, evasive and coercive type increased task focused conflict, but cooperative type reduced the procedural conflict, too. Therefore, from <hypothesis 1> to <hypothesis 6> were all adopted.

The results of the multiple regression were as follows: Task focused conflict were impacted by evasive ($\beta = .364, p < .01$), coercive ($\beta = .288, p < .01$), and cooperative ($\beta = -.211, p < .01$), and procedural conflict were impacted by evasive ($\beta = .518, p < .01$), cooperative ($\beta = -.186, p < .01$), and coercive ($\beta = .143, p < .05$).

And task focused conflict ($\beta = .508, p < .01$) and procedural conflict ($\beta = .461, p < .01$) was statistically significant positive effect on dissolution intention. The results of the multiple regression showed that impacted in order to task focused conflict ($\beta = .363, p < .01$), and procedural conflict ($\beta = .202, p < .01$). Therefore, <hypothesis 7> and <hypothesis 8> was all adopted.

For the purpose of moderation effect of image of franchisor, hierarchical moderated regression was performed after constructing the interaction terms between antecedent variables and moderating variable. The interaction term such as 'evasive \times image ($\beta = -.042, p = .805$)', 'coercive \times image ($\beta = .208, p = .194$)' was not statistically significant, respectively. However, 'cooperative \times image ($\beta = -.557, p < .05$)' was statistically significant between the cooperative type and the task

focused conflict. Therefore, <hypothesis 9-1> and <hypothesis 9-3> was not adopted. However, <hypothesis 9-2> was adopted.

Also, the interaction term such as 'evasive \times image ($\beta = -.042, p=.805$)', 'coercive \times image ($\beta = .178, p=.285$)' was not statistically significant, respectively. However, 'cooperative \times image ($\beta = -.759, p<.01$)' was statistically significant between the cooperative type and the procedural conflict. Therefore, <hypothesis 9-4> and <hypothesis 9-6> was not adopted. However, <hypothesis 9-5> was adopted.

The interaction term such as 'task focused conflict \times image ($\beta = .427, p<.01$)' was significantly moderation effect between the task focused conflict and dissolution intention, and 'procedural conflict \times image ($\beta = .765, p<.01$)' was significantly moderation effect between the procedural conflict and dissolution intention, respectively. Therefore, <hypothesis 9-7> and <hypothesis 9-8> was all adopted.

Finally, to verify the mediating effect of task focused conflict and procedural conflict between franchisors' management style and dissolution intention we conducted [45]'s 3-step mediated regression. These results are reported in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Mediation Effect of Task Focused Conflict

| Mediating variable | Independent variable | Step | Result (β) | R ² | F |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Task Focused Conflict | Evasive | 1(β_1) | .625** | .432 | 31.241*** |
| | | 2(β_2) | .568** | | |
| | | 3(β_3,IV) | .405** | | |
| | | 3(β_4,MV) | .260** | | |
| | Cooperative | 1(β_1) | -.463** | .345 | 21.616*** |
| | | 2(β_2) | -.331** | | |
| | | 3(β_3,IV) | -.122* | | |
| | | 3(β_4,MV) | .452** | | |
| | Coercive | 1(β_1) | .590** | .520 | 44.408*** |
| | | 2(β_2) | .659** | | |
| | | 3(β_3,IV) | .541** | | |
| | | 3(β_4,MV) | .200** | | |

Note) * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$, Dependent variable: Dissolution Intention

Table 3. Mediation Effect of Procedural Conflict

| Mediating variable | Independent variable | Step | Result (β) | R ² | F |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Procedural Conflict | Evasive | 1(β_1) | .680** | .404 | 27.800*** |
| | | 2(β_2) | .568** | | |
| | | 3(β_3,IV) | .462** | | |
| | | 3(β_4,MV) | .155* | | |
| | Cooperative | 1(β_1) | -.447** | .309 | 18.328*** |

| | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-------------------|---------|------|-----------|
| | | 2(β_2) | -.331** | | |
| | | 3(β_3,IV) | -.156* | | |
| | | 3(β_4,MV) | .393** | | |
| | .Coercive | 1(β_1) | .529** | .515 | 43.594*** |
| | | 2(β_2) | .659** | | |
| | | 3(β_3,IV) | .567** | | |
| | | 3(β_4,MV) | .173** | | |

Note) * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, Dependent variable: Dissolution Intention

6. Conclusions

The present study focused on the franchise business, which is widely chosen as an alternative to lessen business risks in times of economic recession, and determined the effects of franchisors' franchisee management styles on the dissolution intention as well as the roles of franchisors' images, task-focused conflicts and procedural conflicts in the franchisor-franchisee relationship to provide some reference data for potential franchisees to consider in their selection of franchisors as well as the true roles of franchisors. The analysis highlighted the following conclusions and implications.

First, franchisors' evasive and coercive management styles increased the task-focused and procedural conflicts, whereas their cooperative approach subdued both conflicts. These findings suggest that after all franchisors should fulfill their inherent roles and make win-win efforts and that franchisees should carefully examine the terms and conditions and refer to the information disclosure statements prior to signing the contracts as well as inquire of existing franchisees about their franchisors' management styles and support systems beforehand.

Second, franchisors' images had moderating effects. Only when franchisors took the cooperative management style, their images created synergistic effects (see Figure 3), whereas conflicts led to disappointment and have negative effects on their images, increasing the dissolution intention (see Figure 4).

Thus, franchisors should first take the cooperative management approach to maximize positive interactions with franchisees and be committed to conflict management strategies to prevent conflicts. In the same vein, franchisors should allow franchisees to get involved in business strategy development or empower franchisees by taking into account their locations and commercial settings ultimately to support franchisees' realization of profits.

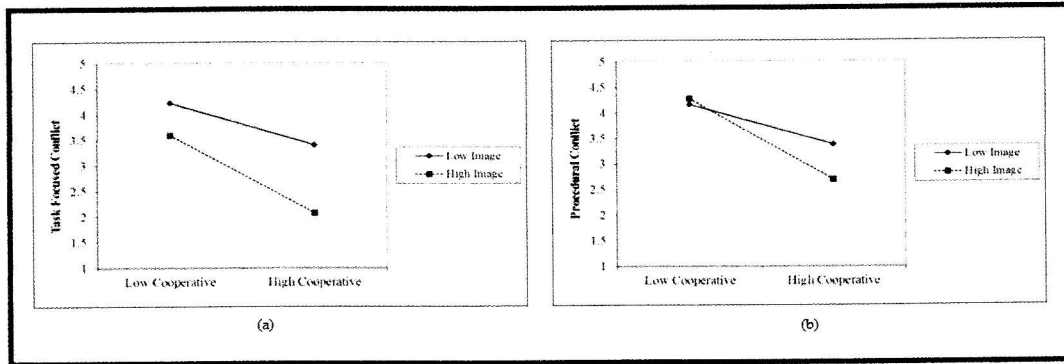


Figure 3. Moderation Effect of Image between Cooperative and Conflict

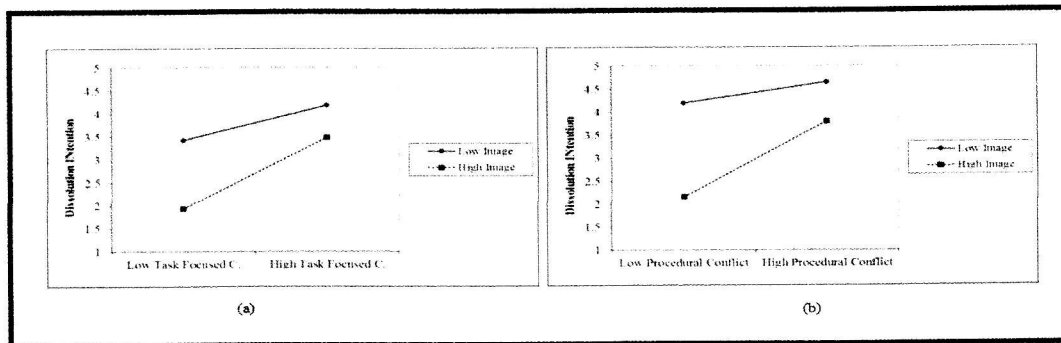


Figure 4. Moderation Effect of Image between Conflict and Dissolution Intention

Third, conflicts had mediating effects. The evasive and coercive management styles mediated the increasing effects of task-focused and procedural conflicts on the dissolution intention, whilst conflicts per se were found to serve as a considerable burden even when the cooperative management style was taken. Therefore, these findings suggest that franchisors should change their management styles and support measures so that their ideal goal of sales revenue maximization could be achieved based on franchisees' profit realization. That is, franchisors should actively pay attention to and address the diverse challenges of franchisees that lack in information and knowhow to seek win-win measures and to develop competitive business models.

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