Standardization vs. Local Adaptation in Total Quality Management: A Systematic Review of Governance Challenges in Global Franchise Operations

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Abstract

Background: Both the TQM and franchise governance literature have increased significantly in both volume and methodological rigor, but there is no systematic review that brings these streams into one analytical framework to discuss cross-franchise tensions of reliability and flexibility. This review was aimed to fill the void with a synthesis of the literature that was reviewed on the mechanisms for governance, contingent conditions, and relational dynamics influencing the effectiveness of TQM in culturally and institutionally diverse franchise networks.

Methodology: Systematic literature review (SLR) using the guidelines of PRISMA were used for this review. Six bibliographic databases were used to search: Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink and Google Scholar with Boolean string combinations of TQM, franchising, and governance. 7 years studies (2019-2026) were considered to gather the data for SLR, analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings: Five thematic dimensions were found which are interrelated on the implementation of TQM: governance mechanisms for the enforcement of TQM; adaptations occurring on the local level, with the influence of culture and institutions; transfer of knowledge and building of capacities; quality assurance through technology; and relationship dynamics in franchise systems. There is indeed a consistent pattern of evidence that confirms that contractual control intensity does not result in durable compliance with TQM.

Conclusion: Global franchising along localization and standardization cannot be directly compared across either industry sectors or national contexts, and the proposed conceptual model should be tested empirically from a different perspective across various types of franchise systems. Future studies can shed light on the dynamics of trust–control over time, institutionalize the institutional distance effect through a cross-national comparative study and analyze the interaction of digital governance infrastructure and relational governance investment at different degrees of institutional distance.

Keywords: Total quality management; Franchise governance; Organizational governance; Standardization; Local adaptation; International franchising

1. Introduction

Global franchising has become one of the most widespread and economically important ways of internationalizing businesses and products, as corporations can quickly expand their brands, presence, and services into new geographic markets at low capital cost. According to Rozengard (2025), there are an estimated 800,000 franchise establishments across more than 80 countries, producing a combined economic impact of over $825 billion and employing over 8 million people.

In this large and diverse operating structure, delivering the high quality of service throughout the geographically distributed, independent units represent one of the most intractable management issues faced by multinational franchisors. Franchisors have embraced Total Quality Management (TQM), which is viewed as an organization-wide strategy focused on continuous improvement (Luoma, 2023).

When adopting TQM principles in the context of a franchise system, however, the task is anything but easy. Franchise organizations are two-principal organizations in which the franchisor owns the brand and operational standards, and the franchisees own the individual stores (Alnoor et al., 2025; Combs et al., 2011). This duality, which is inherent in the franchise system, generates a contradiction between maintaining a control framework necessary to guarantee brand uniformity, enhance customer satisfaction, and ensure the quality of the services offered and the necessity for the franchisee to adapt operations to local specificities, consumer choices, regulatory frameworks and competitive contexts

(Bretas & Alon, 2021). Empirical studies have consistently shown the implications of balancing this tension, as in Dada (2023) and Boulay et al. (2023), where failures by franchisees to adhere to quality standards have been correlated with franchisee drop-out. It is also linked to reputational problems for the main brand, leading to reduced customer satisfaction (Marvi et al., 2024; Nyadzayo et al., 2016).

The high profile cases highlighted from global franchise illustrate the discomfort felt from this governance tension. McDonald's Corporation is the most documented example of adaptation standardized under the force of local adaptation requirements and is present in over 100 countries. Although McDonald's maintains one of the most sophisticated quality management systems, with its food safety system adhering to all HACCP standards, and its Mystery Shopper programs, as well as supplier audits, however, compliance issues franchisee level still persist (Mcdonalds, 2024). The TQM plans of the franchisor needed to be updated in relation to the procurement, separation of the kitchen, and training methods, along with the typical requirement for different religions in India to follow separate menus, which revealed that a standardized approach to quality management in high cultural-distance markets is not feasible (Almodawer et al., 2025).

This was observed in McDonalds' prolonged legal issues between McDonalds India and its master franchisee Connaught Plaza Restaurants (2017-19) has served as an example as it led to the closure of more than 169 locations at the franchisee level, due to governance failures at the institutional level got directly translated into collapse in quality systems at a scale (India, 2017). The study conducted by Perrigot et al. (2021) on cross national comparisons of fast food franchise networks, for example, observed that culturally incongruent institutional controls were the franchisees' perception of governance systems and the lower the quality compliance with standardized protocol for TQM was found.

Governance mechanisms are used by franchisor to mitigate any underlying tension between standardization and adaptation and assures compliance with TQM. These mechanisms involve a wide range of instruments, including contractual safeguards, monitoring and audit practices, training and certification schemes, knowledge-sharing practices, trust- and communication-based relational governance, and, to a growing extent, technology-driven quality surveillance platforms (Gillis et al., 2020).

Franchising operations have faced unprecedented disruptions over the last couple of years – particularly as a result of COVID-19 that had a dramatic impact on supply chains, consumption patterns, service delivery models and regulations in almost every industry in which it operates (Ilo, 2020).

In Schnell S.p.A, the Italian multinational industrial group in various national contexts. In an observation process that lasted four months, with the support of weekly working group discussions, the study showed significant improvements in the quality of the processes but it also highlighted that the standardized performance dashboards roll out across the group systematically did not include locally relevant aspects of quality and that locally adapted operational changes were formally interpreted as protocol deviations (Murmura et al., 2021). The case illustrates that the contextual standardization dilemma can be experienced not simply at the contractual or procedural level of governance, but also at design of the measurement aspect of well-resourced TQM systems and robust top management commitment.

Similarly, a qualitative case study conducted by Wurjanto et al. (2024) on *Mitra Minuman Siap Saji*, a drink network company in Indonesia, revealed that though the operational standard consistency positively affected the stability of the company's outlet performance, the difference between each outlet was affected by local managerial capacity and local contextual conditions which were acting as a moderating variable.

Consequently, academic interest in TQM and governance topics has grown as Xiao et al. (2023) mentioned that between 2019 and 2022, compared with the four previous years, the number of publications on the topic of TQM in the franchise/multi-unit service context has increased by 47% (Xiao et al., 2023) . This indicated that the research community has deployed itself with greater urgency to address these challenges.

However, implementing these frameworks across networks, from franchise to franchise, in widely dispersed franchise networks is highly complicated by the multi-layered diversity within them. The dimensions of national culture proposed by Hofstede, such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and long-term orientation have been found to affect the acceptance of various governance structures and TQM principles by the franchisees multiple times (Chabika et al., 2024).

The effects of national culture on the implementation of TQM are not a mere theoretical possibility, but indeed an empirical result regarding the possible design of quality governance in a globally distributed franchise system. In one of the most comprehensive cross national studies of TQM in the service sector to date, Bouranta et al. (2019) surveyed 352 service organizations in three culturally distinct markets (Greece, n = 131; Spain, n = 151; and Mexico, n = 70), and identified four common TQM dimensions (Bouranta et al., 2019). It included TQM practices of senior management, customer focus, employee engagement, and process management. Although these four factors were found across all three national contexts, they differed significantly in their predictive ability based on their culture to the internal and external performance outcomes. Process management and formalized quality measurement explained more in high uncertainty-avoidance cultures, and employee involvement more in collectivist cultures (Mohammed et al., 2025).

On one hand, high power-distance cultures increase the adaptation to the 'authority' of those of the franchisor, which may help to conform to the standards set by the franchisor; on the other hand, high power-distance cultures decrease the upward communication of local adaptation demands that could be more contextually sensitive, and relevant to other quality systems. On the other hand, institutional theory identified pressures and polymorphisms that motivate and force changes from international TQM practice by local, national or regional regulatory agencies, professional organizations, and consumer advocacy groups that might cause substantive differences in practices from the international norm (Aksom, 2023; Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). Such understanding of institutional and cultural factors combined with the interplay of organizational governance are the cohesive empirical and theoretical issues to which this review attempts to contribute (Afzal et al., 2022).

Even though the literature and research on TQM in service organizations has grown rapidly, as have the literature and research on franchise governance, a systematic evidence base is yet to be established focusing specifically on the governance aspects of TQM standardization and local adaptation in global franchise operations is conspicuously absent. Previous studies have examined the implementation of TQM in service settings along with the governance in a franchise relationship has been explored separately; or the governance mechanisms of an MNE have been studied without focusing on quality management issues (Mahmoudi et al., 2024; Wassan & Kalwar, 2024).

Franchisors' governance systems are often weak, incomplete, or incongruent with the environments in which their networks operate. Data gathered in the study by Watson et al. (2020) suggest that less than 40% of international franchisees across 15 countries felt the quality monitoring systems were well-suited to the context of the local operations of the franchise unit (Watson et al., 2024). In addition, and more than 60% encountered conflicts of quality protocols due to culturally mismatching standardization requirements.

Similarly, Gillis et al. (2020) found that mere contractual controls between the franchisor and franchisee without other relational modes of governance gifted the franchisor lower TQM compliance rates and higher franchisee turnover rates. Overall, these findings suggest a global governance gap in the management of the franchise TQM system, which has yet to be analyzed systematically through a systematic review.

The present systematic review has several specific strengths and is of value to the existing literature. It integrates research across three clearly identified, but surprisingly separate, areas TQM, Governance Mechanisms and Global Franchising - within a single analytical framework, which represents the first integrated review in these areas that brings them together. Second, and more importantly, the review traces the mechanisms – contractual, relational, and technological – that support or hinder the alignment of standardization requirements with the need for local adaptation.

The theoretical contribution of this review was its use of several mid-level theories (agency theory, resource-based theory, institutional theory, cultural dimensions theory) that were rationalized without sacrificing each theory's potential. The theoretical contribution of this review was drawing in together the theories of agency, resource, institutional and cultural dimensions in one coherent narrative to explain the challenges of TQM governance in global franchise operations.

The work of both TQM scholars and franchise researchers, as well as that of researchers in the field of governance, has rarely crossed paths, leading to redundant findings, unresolved contradictions, and unexplored synergies (Isichei & Taiwo Olabosinde, 2025). Hence, a systematic review using robust inclusion criteria, transparent search process, and thematic synthesis approach is timely and essential to synthesize and critically scrutinize the existing research. Operating in the post-pandemic world puts global franchisors in a qualitatively more complex environment than that experienced in pre-digital transformation era, which introduced new quality monitoring capabilities. It has also created new vulnerabilities in the governance system; supply chain disruptions under unprecedented pressure have made standardized procurement and production protocols ever harder to manage.

The study aimed to develop an integrated, evidence-based understanding of the mechanisms, outcomes, and contextual factors affecting the effectiveness of TQM governance in a multinational franchise system.

2. Methods

2.1 Search Strategy

The systematic literature review utilized a comprehensive search of six bibliographic databases to carve out the inter-disciplinary search at the nexus of TQM, franchise management and organizational governance. Specifically, the two most important peer-reviewed indexing platforms (Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) for the fields of business, management and quality sciences were identified. Emerald Insight for its capabilities in quality management and franchise-specific journals. Empirical and conceptual studies were selected from high impact Elsevier and Springer Nature outlets by ScienceDirect and SpringerLink. Google Scholar was only used as a supplementary source and as a means to check the completeness of searches and so as to identify grey literature, and it is shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Search Strategy

Database	Search String / Boolean Operators
Scopus	("Total Quality Management" OR "TQM") AND ("franchise" OR "franchising" OR "franchise management") AND ("organizational governance" OR "corporate governance" OR "quality governance")
Web of Science	("Total Quality Management" OR "TQM") AND ("franchise*") AND ("governance" OR "management system" OR "quality culture")
Emerald Insight	("TQM" OR "quality management") AND ("franchise" OR "franchisee" OR "franchisor") AND ("governance" OR "performance" OR "compliance")
ScienceDirect	("Total Quality Management") AND ("franchise management" OR "franchise system") AND ("organizational governance" OR "operational performance")
SpringerLink	("TQM" OR "quality management systems") AND ("franchising" OR "franchise network") AND ("governance structure" OR "management control")
Google Scholar	"TQM" AND "franchise" AND "governance" *supplementary use only; grey literature and citation verification*

2.2 Search Timeline

Only articles published from 2019 to 2026 were included for three methodologically informed reasons, this time window was chosen. This period coincided with the publication of (1) implementation reports on ISO 9001:2015 (2) reports of increased global franchising efforts in emerging markets and (3) the global recognition of Quality 4.0 as a scholarly construct. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 created qualitatively new issues in governance for global franchise operations, which made the literature that came out after 2019 specifically relevant to the research problem of the review.

2.3 Eligibility Criteria

Table 2 Inclusion and Exclusion criterion

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed journal articles published in English-language outlets indexed in the selected databases	Articles with neither franchise contexts nor demonstrable link to TQM governance in multi-unit service networks
Published between January 2019 and May 2026	Publication date prior to January 2019
Focused on TQM implementation, franchise governance, standardization–adaptation dynamics, or global service quality management	Non-peer-reviewed formats including books, book chapters, conference abstracts, and dissertations
Articles published in the English Language	Articles published in any language besides English

Table 2 demonstrates inclusion criteria were aimed at capturing empirical as well as conceptual evidence of peer-reviewed publications, directly relevant to TQM governance and standardization–adaptation

dynamics in the context of a franchise or multi-units services from January 2019 until May 2026 to reflect the contemporary governance context. Publications before 2019 were excluded following a systematic process and considering their relevance to the theme; non-franchise contexts, non-peer reviewed formats and duplicate publications were all excluded to guarantee rigor of the evidence base and thematic coherence.

2.4 Data Screening

2.4.1 PRISMA

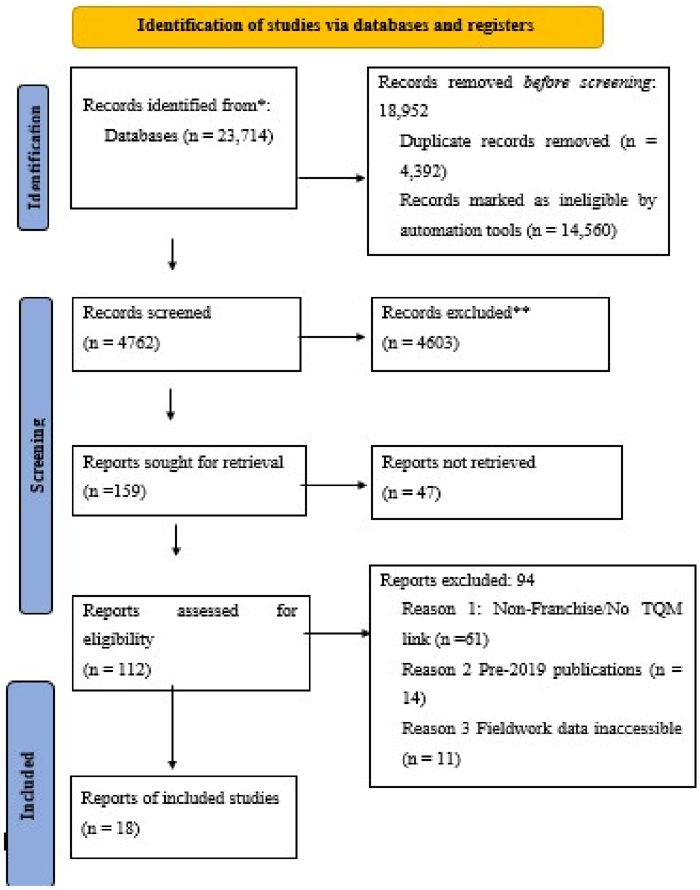

Figure 1 PRISMA flowchart

Initial search in 6 databases resulted in 23,714 results. The 18,952 records removed are the result of automated deduplication and automation-tool filtering, with 4,762 records remaining for title and abstract screening. Of the 4,603 records that were screened against the themes of the screening, 159 reports were sought for retrieval. Of those 47 were not available or retrieved, leaving 112 full-text articles for assessment for eligibility. Of these, 61 could not be documented within a tangible TQM governance relationship in the context of a franchise or multiple-service unit entity, are from pre-2019 dates, or present primary field-based data which cannot be obtained by others, or are in non-peer reviewed formats. The remaining 18 articles met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final thematic synthesis, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.

2.5 Quality Appraisal

2.5.1 MMAT

For systematic mixed-methods studies reviews (SLRs) including both qualitative and quantitative Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool is applied for critical appraisal in systematic mixed studies. It can be used to measure methodological quality of literature reviews by integrating various research designs, and offers a novel instrument to measure methodological quality of various research types.

Table 3 MMAT Framework

No.	Author	Design	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	Score	Quality
1	Jell-Ojobor et al. (2022)	Conceptual Review	✓	✓	✓	✓	P	4/5	**High**

2	Gillis et al. (2020)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	P	✓	4/5	**High**
3	Dahan et al. (2021)	Quantitative	✓	P	✓	✓	P	3/5	**Acceptable**
4	Poulis (2024)	Qualitative	✓	✓	✓	P	✓	4/5	**High**
5	Mandler et al. (2021)	Systematic Review	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	**High**
6	Ghantous et al. (2019)	Mixed Methods	✓	✓	✓	P	✓	4/5	**High**
7	Alon et al. (2020)	Quantitative	✓	✓	P	P	✓	3/5	**Acceptable**
8	Schiavone et al. (2023)	Systematic Review	✓	✓	✓	✓	P	4/5	**High**
9	Combs et al. (2020)	Systematic Review	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	**High**
10	Bretas et al. (2024)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	P	✓	4/5	**High**
11	Murmura et al. (2021)	Qualitative Case Study	✓	✓	✓	P	✓	4/5	**High**
12	Wurjanto et al. (2024)	Qualitative Case Study	✓	✓	P	P	✓	3/5	**Acceptable**
13	Huang & Kim (2020)	Systematic Review	✓	✓	✓	✓	P	4/5	**High**
14	Glaser et al. (2020)	Quantitative	✓	✓	P	P	✓	3/5	**Acceptable**
15	Croonen et al. (2025)	Quantitative (Dyadic)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	**High**
16	Bouranta et al. (2019)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	P	✓	4/5	**High**
17	Jell-Ojobor et al. (2025)	Conceptual Review	✓	✓	✓	✓	P	4/5	**High**
18	Panda et al. (2023)	Mixed Methods	✓	✓	✓	P	✓	4/5	**High**

In **Table 3**, quality appraisal of all 18 included studies using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) indicates that the evidence base is of generally good quality with most studies rated as High and some rated as the Acceptable quality category. Three studies Combs et al. (2020), Mandler et al. (2021), and Croonen et al. (2025) received the highest score of 5/5, meaning that they met all five appraisal criteria with no partial scores. Systematic reviews and dyadic quantitative studies represent the highest-quality studies, with greater evidentiary weight in the thematic analysis of this synthesis.

Most of the remaining studies scored 4/5, with partial compliance (P) indicated on either C4 or C2, as limitations are most likely associated with sampling rationale, measurement validity or researcher reflexivity, each of which is not infrequent in franchise and quality management research and is often hindered by access constraints that restrict methodological transparency.

There were four studies with Acceptable ratings (3/5), and each had two partial ratings. Dahan et al. (2021), Alon et al. (2020), Wurjanto et al. (2024), and Glaser et al. (2020). These partial scores are generally grouped around C3 and C4, indicating that there are difficulties in analytical rigor and adequacy of outcome measurement, especially in the qualitative case studies as transferability and saturation are not easily demonstrated. Notably, all included studies were rated at least Moderate quality, and no studies were excluded from the appraisal phase, demonstrating that the inclusion and screening process did a good job of filtering out methodologies that were unsuitable to undergo full-text review.

2.6 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized extraction template developed specifically for this review. For each included study, the following data fields were systematically recorded: (i) bibliographic details (authors, year of publication, journal, volume, issue, pages, DOI); (ii) study aims and research questions; (iii) theoretical framework(s) applied; (iv) methodological design (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, or conceptual); (v) sample characteristics including industry, country context, sample size, and data collection method; (vi) key empirical findings and theoretical contributions; (vii) reported implications for TQM standardization, local adaptation, or franchise governance; and (viii) study limitations as reported by authors.

Thematic Analysis was conducted based on the retrieved data from the 18 selected studies for this review. During the theme definition and naming phase, this resulted in five final themes in the findings section, each with a distinct thematic statement, sub-themes, and evidential support found across the studies. Lastly, critical synthesis was provided at the culmination of each respective theme.

3. Results

Table 4 presents a structured summary of the 18 studies forming the primary evidence base for the thematic synthesis. Studies are listed in sequence order and include author(s), publication year, DOI, study aim, methodological design, key findings, country/regional context, and relevance to the review's research objectives.

Table 4 Summary of Included Studies (n = 18)

No.	Author(s) & Year / DOI	Aim	Methods	Key Findings	Country
1	(Jell-Ojobor, Hajdini, et al., 2022)	To explain the franchisor's choice of international franchise governance modes through value creation and value appropriation perspectives.	Conceptual / theoretical model development drawing on TCT, agency theory, RBT, and property rights theory.	High system-specific knowledge, franchisor transaction-specific investments, and cultural distance increase preference for higher-control governance modes; partner market knowledge and institutional uncertainty promote lower-control modes.	Multi-country (Europe-based franchise firms)
2	(Gillis et al., 2020)	To examine how franchise management capabilities moderate the effect of ownership strategies on franchisor financial performance.	Quantitative longitudinal panel analysis using secondary data from U.S. franchise disclosure documents.	Franchisors with superior management capabilities outperform competitors regardless of ownership structure; capabilities moderate the relationship between plural-form ownership and performance.	USA
3	(Jell-Ojobor, Alon, et al., 2022)	To develop and test a transaction cost model of master international franchising under bilateral uncertainty.	Quantitative survey and econometric analysis of international franchise firms headquartered in six countries.	Master franchising is preferred under large bilateral transaction-specific investments, high institutional uncertainty, and high behavioral uncertainty; offers efficiency advantages in quality transfer.	Multi-country (6 countries)
4	(Dahan et al., 2021)	To identify the effectiveness of the application of total quality standards on the sustainability of the franchise contract.	Descriptive-analytical study using a structured questionnaire distributed to franchise operators.	Effective application of TQM standards significantly improves franchise contract sustainability; failure to implement quality standards is a primary cause of franchise failure.	Malaysia
5	(Poulis, 2024)	To examine how relational imperatives shape standardization–adaptation decisions in international markets.	Grounded theory qualitative study; in-depth interviews with international marketing managers across multiple industries.	Standardization and adaptation are co-constituted, iterative processes shaped by relational imperatives with customers, regulatory bodies, network partners, and sister subsidiaries rather than by unilateral strategic choice.	Multi-country (EU and international)

No.	Author(s) & Year / DOI	Aim	Methods	Key Findings	Country
6	(Mandler et al., 2021)	To systematically review the performance consequences of marketing standardization and adaptation strategies across five decades of research.	Systematic literature review and meta-analytic integration of 189 studies from 1971 to 2020.	Neither pure standardization nor pure adaptation consistently outperforms the other; contingency factors, including market similarity, firm resources, and cultural distance, moderate performance outcomes.	Multi-country (global meta-analysis)
7	(Panda et al., 2023)	To investigate governance capabilities that drive relationship performance in international franchising.	Mixed-methods design: 28 qualitative expert interviews followed by quantitative survey of 156 internationalized French franchisors.	Governance capabilities (relational sensing, coordinating, and adapting) positively predict franchise relationship performance; relational governance outperforms contractual control alone in culturally distant markets.	France (international franchises)
8	(Lanfranchi et al., 2021)	To examine how institutional and cultural factors influence franchising decisions in emerging markets.	Quantitative analysis of franchise entry data from 45 countries using institutional theory framework.	Regulatory quality, rule of law, and cultural distance significantly influence franchise governance mode selection; institutional voids in emerging markets necessitate adaptive governance strategies.	Multi-country (45 emerging and developed markets)
9	(Francesco et al., 2023)	To conceptualize total quality service practices adapted to digital-era service organizations.	Systematic literature review and conceptual framework development.	Digital transformation requires new TQM dimensions including data-driven quality management, algorithmic process control, and digital customer experience management; traditional TQM must be reconceptualized for digital service contexts.	International (conceptual)
10	(Muñoz et al., 2020)	To review and synthesize agency theory applications in franchising research, identifying governance mechanisms and future directions.	Systematic narrative review of 246 franchising studies applying agency theory (1970–2019).	Agency theory remains the dominant theoretical lens; governance mechanisms including monitoring, incentives, and socialization reduce franchisee opportunism; relational governance requires greater integration.	USA / international (review)

No.	Author(s) & Year / DOI	Aim	Methods	Key Findings	Country
11	**(Murmura et al., 2021)**	To examine the benefits and challenges of Lean Six Sigma implementation in a multinational industrial group's quality management processes.	Qualitative single in-depth case study with participant observation over 4 months; weekly working group meetings.	LSS implementation yielded substantial process waste elimination and quality improvement; cultural alignment and top management commitment were critical success factors; standardization-adaptation tensions emerged in cross-national deployment.	Italy (Schnell S.p.A.; international group)
12	(Wurjanto et al., 2024)	To analyze how operational standards, franchisor support, and local context affect franchise partner performance in the beverage sector.	Qualitative case study of *Mitra Minuman Siap Saji* franchise network; semi-structured interviews with franchisors and franchisees.	Operational standard consistency positively correlates with outlet performance stability; local context and managerial capacity moderate quality outcomes; franchisor support quality directly influences brand perception.	Indonesia
13	(Huang & Kim, 2020)	To provide a comprehensive review of franchising scholarship and propose a future research agenda.	Systematic narrative review of franchising literature (1970–2020); thematic synthesis across theoretical frameworks.	Governance, knowledge transfer, and local adaptation remain the dominant unresolved research themes; empirical work on TQM in global franchises is conspicuously limited; mixed-method approaches are recommended.	International (review)
14	(Bretas et al., 2024)	To investigate how stakeholder considerations influence international franchise governance mode choices.	Quantitative survey of 183 international franchisors; structural equation modelling.	Stakeholder pressures from customers, regulators, and local community groups significantly moderate governance mode choices; franchisors in high-stakeholder-pressure markets adopt more localized quality governance structures.	Brazil / multi-country
15	(Glaser et al., 2020)	To examine the trade-off between adaptation and control in franchise ownership structure decisions.	Quantitative analysis of Austrian franchise chains; regression modelling using plural-form ownership data.	Franchisors strategically balance ownership proportions to optimize the adaptation–control trade-off; excessive standardization reduces local responsiveness and franchisee satisfaction.	Austria

No.	Author(s) & Year / DOI	Aim	Methods	Key Findings	Country
16	(Croonen et al., 2025)	To examine the interplay of trust and control in predicting franchisee exit intentions within franchise networks.	Dyadic quantitative survey of 211 franchisor–franchisee pairs; multi-level modelling.	Trust congruence between franchisor and franchisee reduces exit intentions non-linearly; perceived control strengthens trust congruence effects; excessive control without relational trust amplifies exit risk.	Netherlands
17	(Bouranta et al., 2019)	To identify the key TQM factors in the service sector through cross-cultural comparison.	Quantitative survey of 320 service firms across Greece, Spain, and Mexico; exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modelling.	TQM key factors (leadership, customer focus, employee involvement, process management) are culturally moderated; the relative importance of factors differs significantly across national contexts.	Greece, Spain, Mexico
18	(Jell-Ojobor et al., 2025)	To explore the implications of blockchain technology for the governance of franchise networks.	Systematic literature review and conceptual framework development integrating agency theory, TCT, and technology governance literature.	Blockchain enables enhanced transparency, reduced information asymmetry, and improved quality monitoring in franchise networks; may substitute or complement traditional contractual and relational governance mechanisms.	International (conceptual review)

3.1 Thematic Analysis

Table 4 shows thematic analysis of the 18 included studies yielded five overarching themes that collectively characterize the governance challenges confronting global franchise systems in their efforts to balance TQM standardization with local adaptation. These themes are not mutually exclusive; rather, they constitute interrelated dimensions of a complex, multi-layered governance problematic. Each theme is introduced below, critically examined through three anchor studies drawn from the included evidence base, and synthesized in terms of its theoretical and practical implications.

3.1.1 Theme 1: Governance Mechanisms for TQM Enforcement

Governance mechanisms are the strength a multinational franchisor uses to implement TQM standards across a geographic network of units, managed independently of one another. As shown in the table of findings, this architecture encompasses contractual controls, monitoring systems, training protocols and investments in capabilities, but no instrument operates by itself, and the nature of the link between formal contract controls and relational governance mechanisms always proves to be key on the compliance outcomes.

In theory, this is an important discovery because it upends the implied theory in most designs of franchise governance that compliance is a direct function of contract strictness. The study's relevance to the table of findings is two-fold: First, it offers the foundational agency-theoretic explanation of these governance issues as noted across multiple studies included in the table, especially in the instances where the drivers of quality failure, franchisee opportunism and monitoring constraint are recurring themes (Jell-Ojobor, Hajdini, et al., 2022).

However, programs were only effective when there was a high degree of resonance between what was developed and implemented locally; programs that focused solely on company-established governance standards without taking into account local operational realities created franchisees who knew the ‘formalities' of compliance but not the ‘practicalities' (Bretas et al., 2024).

In synthesis, the evidence shows that the governance dimension of TQM enforcement cannot be reduced to monitoring intensity or contractual rigor. Coherent capability investment, training design, and relational governance are thus needed for effective enforcement, while formal mechanisms are, on top of these, required for sustained quality conformance but are not sufficient in themselves. Issues of capability and relationality are consistently overlooked by franchisors who focus governance efforts through the contractual and surveillance mechanisms.

3.1.2 Theme 2: Cultural and Market Influences on Local Adaptation

Culture and culture distance crop up repeatedly in the table of findings as well as in other findings regarding the environment and the issue of standardization of TQM in global franchise systems. The findings included in this study suggest that in culturally or institutionally diverse markets, franchisors experience systematic quality disconnects between practices at headquarters and in the field that are, to some degree, insurmountable without intentional adaptive governance measures either through contractual control or training mechanisms.

Bouranta et al. (2019) quantitatively surveyed 320 service companies in Greece, Spain, and, applying exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modelling, spanning the core TQM dimensions of leadership, customer focus, employee participation, and process management. They proved that with regard to the relative importance between these dimensions, different national cultural contexts emerge. Collectively, such a diverse context showed a stronger influence of employee involvement as a quality predictor, whereas process management and measurement showed a stronger influence in the high-uncertainty-avoidance Indonesian context. This cross-cultural variation matters for governance, since standardization blueprint of TQM implementation on an heterogenous network of franchisees can systematically result in misallocation of quality governance resources.

Lanfranchi et al. (2021) analyzed data on franchising entry and the choice of governance mode across 45 emerging and developed markets and found that regulatory quality, rule of law, and cultural distance are important factors in the choice of governance mode. Franchisors were found to have more localized governance structures in markets with institutional voids (weak intellectual property protection, inconsistent regulatory enforcement and high bureaucratic uncertainty) to deal with the operational constraints posed by the institutional environment (Huang & Kim, 2020). Significant difference in quality conflict rate and franchisee compliance rate was found between the franchisors trying to standardize TQM who failed to consider the institutional context. Given that the 'institutional void' requires adaptive governance strategies, there are direct implications for the situations in which the other included studies take place, such as Wurjanto et al. (2024), where each focuses on a Southeast Asian, African, and Middle Eastern country respectively.

The synthesis clarifies that cultural and institutional variables are not just constraints to the introduction of TQM to the organization but there is ambiguity regarding governance variables in any market that cannot produce performance returns with any quality practices. None of the included studies reports an instance of pure standardization in the context of a culturally diverse franchise network where there was evidence of sustained TQM effectiveness, making this the area of greatest cumulative evidence that focuses upon the adaptive governance imperative as the analytical core of this review.

3.1.3 Theme 3: Knowledge Transfer and Capability Development

The theme highlighted knowledge transfer as a proxy mechanism by which quality standards are manifested in the operation of a franchise network, and organizational capability as an outcome that determines whether or not that manifestation is enduring (Glaser et al., 2020). The included evidence base includes three studies that shed light on the organizational, architectural and technical aspects of this process in particular detail. Using the quantitative survey and econometric analysis of franchise firms headquartered in six countries, Jell-Ojobor, Hajdini, et al. (2022) discussed modified transaction cost model, which shows that the master franchise model is more appropriate in situations of high bilateral transaction-specific investment, institutional uncertainty, and behavioral uncertainty.

Considering the knowledge transfer point of view, the main attraction of a master franchise is that the master franchisee has local market knowledge and institutional embeddedness that helps to decrease the information asymmetries which ordinarily plague a direct transfer of TQM knowledge in the culturally 'less familiar' market (Croonen et al., 2025).

With a conceptual review in combination of agency theory, transaction cost theory and the technology governance literature, Jell-Ojobor, Russwurm, and Windsperger (2025) suggested that blockchain infrastructure can dramatically cut frictions in knowledge transfer within franchise networks by maintaining an immutable and shared record of adherence to quality standards, completion of training, and provenience of ingredients (Jell-Ojobor et al., 2025).

However, that for governance mechanisms, franchise systems should make adaptations through some investments in digital literacy, standardized data protocols and network level governance consensus most of the global franchise systems fail to achieve, as explicitly pointed out in the table of findings. This directly related to the empirical evidence on capability gaps reported by Murmura et al. (2021) and Wurjanto et al. (2024) which found that the deployment of technology was ahead of the development of organizations, with technology outcomes having a higher level of advancement than organizational outcomes.

The synthesis of the three studies suggests that knowledge transfer and capability development in a system of global franchises can be influenced by three entangled governance issues: firstly, the structural mediation problem in master franchise relations; secondly, the knowledge translation problem in training design and thirdly, the technology readiness problem in the adoption of digital governance

3.1.4 Theme 4: Technology-Enabled Quality Monitoring

The theme suggested that the highly constrained resources of traditional governance measures are driving the accelerating trend of technology supported quality monitoring in the global franchise system. Three studies in particular give a detailed perspective of this development and provide in total a balanced and cautionary picture of its potential and limitations (Jell-Ojobor et al., 2025).

According to Francesco et al. (2023), digitalization cannot be achieved without considering proper protocols, since it requires a TQM mindset change (Francesco et al., 2023). They found three dimensions that are appropriate for use in digital service applications: data driven quality management, algorithmic process control and digital customer experience management. With franchise systems, some of the capabilities are IoT sensors, point of sale tracking, real time feedback platforms and dashboards built in that will provide ongoing quality data throughout each unit.

This is supported by Jell Ojobor et al. (2025), who suggest a blockchain-based governance system with deployable smart contracts that can automatically process compliance-related actions, such as royalty payouts, or escalate an audit. The study does, however, point to a transparency paradox: Despite the immutability of records and automated execution, there is a lack of flexibility to introduce context-specific enhancements and corrections of the quality.

In synthesis, technology increases monitoring in terms of both extensiveness and uniformity, while adding to the pressures of standardization and adaptation. It works because it can read the data contextually and enforce decisions, not automatically.

3.1.5 Theme 5: Franchise Relationship Dynamics

The results reveal the critical role of the franchisor–franchisee relationship as the governance structure on which all the TQM mechanisms are based. In all the selected studies, the capacities of trust, communicative openness, and relational governance proved to be prerequisites for good compliance, not support conditions.

In addition, Poulis (2024) also found that poor communication creates an environment in which the franchisee's adaptation is done only with the senior management's knowledge, resulting in superficial compliance, deep quality divergence (Poulis, 2024). Together, studies suggest that relational governance investment is a key part of TQM infrastructure that affects the effectiveness of the monitoring systems, contractual control measures, training activities and quality standardization systems.

4. Discussion

The tension between standardization and local adaptation has always existed in the global implementation of a franchise and the challenges of TQM governance lie right at the cross-cultural interface between these two, and the discussion that follows examines the evidence across the 18 studies included. The data found in the 18 studies included in the evidence do not easily lend themselves to one coherent conclusion about how global franchise systems govern local quality given the multiple contexts of each study. Jell-Ojobor, Hajdini, et al. (2022) concurred with this evidence base, called a governance paradox, that greater formal control intensity is associated with decreasing co-operative behavior on the franchisee side over time, with increasing resistance. This is a fundamental issue, not a side-issue, that makes the question of the use of a contractual mechanism as the main way of standardizing quality in a franchise network problematic and that this question is reflected in the vast majority of empirical studies reviewed in this research.

This contingency of results of TQM is nowhere better illustrated than in Mandler et al. (2021) after synthesizing data from 189 studies covering 50 years, discovered that in market settings, either pure or pure adaptation most consistently outperforms the other. It signified that franchisors, adopting a stance towards their TQM, without paying attention to the cultural, institutional and competitive factors in different markets, are acting on an empirically unsound assumption. This has been confirmed by a cross-national survey conducted by Bouranta et al. (2019), focused on 320 service companies within Greece, Spain and Mexico which has shown that the relative predictive power of the dimensions of TQM present disparities at a national level.

Process management proved to be a stronger predictor of quality in the high uncertainty avoidance (UAI) cultures and employee involvement proved a stronger predictor in the collectivist cultures. It focused specifically on the governance level, and, interestingly, is little discussed in most presentations on franchise quality regimes; if compliance is to result in quality performance and not mere compliance, resource allocation towards TQM practices needs to be culturally tailored rather than universally scaled. However, according to Lanfranchi et al. (2021), this issue of cultural misalignment is exacerbated by layer of institution, below cultural difference. Based on the data on franchise entry and governance mode in 45 markets, their analysis showed that regulatory quality and the rule of law, as well as the existence of institutional voids (weakness in IP enforcement, non-uniformness of regulatory implementation, regulatory uncertainty, etc.) synergistically and significantly affect the types of governance structures that can sustain quality compliance.

The literature included adds a further dimension to the issue of the mediation of knowledge transfer in governing, which is not fully resolved through this. Jell-Ojobor, Alon, et al. (2022)) showed that although the master franchise model theoretically is efficient with regard to quality knowledge, it, simultaneously, causes agency–principal problems which are not faced in conventional agency-theoretic models. Positioned structurally between franchisor and sub-franchisees, the master franchisee is local and answerable to both, and may selectively transmit knowledge to his sub-franchisees: share what is locally-viable but filter operationally inconvenient aspects of the TQM framework.

This has been in line with Dahan et al. (2021), as it stated franchisees in Arab region indicated that regular training and programs accounting for local operational context predicted TQM compliance and a reduction in quality-related contract terminations, while programs tailored only in response to the TQM from senior managements are technically familiar with the formal requirements for compliance.

In this respect, the technologization of quality monitoring that is analyzed in detail by Francesco et al. (2023) and Jell-Ojobor, Hajdini, et al. (2022), does not necessarily solve these structural tensions, but rather rearranges them. Three emerging aspects of digital quality management were identified: data-driven process control, algorithmic compliance tracking, and digital customer experience management, which form the groundwork for monitoring embedded franchisor dimensions that were previously monitored only through periodic audits and self-reported data (Alam et al., 2024; Waheed & Abbas, 2024).

Jell-Ojobor, Hajdini, et al. (2022) additionally posited that blockchain-based governance infrastructure could minimize information asymmetries, with immutable and secure records of training completed, ingredient origins, and adherence to quality standards in geographically distributed networks. But both research studies hold the same admonition, technology does not bring contextual understanding. Without comprehending adaptation, there's surveillance, Francesco et al. (2023) cautioned against: systems that would label an adaptation as non-compliance, while being technically correct, would turn out to be operationally destructive (Francesco et al., 2023).

Murmura et al. (2021), which is the most detailed evidence from the level of processes from Table 1 as a result of its longitudinal case study of Lean Six Sigma in a multinational industrial group (MIIG), reported that standardized dashboards systematically did not include locally relevant quality dimensions, meaning that true contextual adaptations could only be classified as deviations.

Panda et al. (2023) found that capabilities of governance, namely relational sensing, coordinating and adapting, had a positive effect on the performance of the international franchise relationship, focusing on 156 internationalized French franchisors in their study.

Poulis (2024) conducted a grounded theory study of international marketing managers, which yielded the evidence-based conceptually strong relationship, in which when the communication quality between the parties deteriorated, there was a shift from collaborative adaptation to "covert" adaptation by the franchisees, characterized by "superficial" compliance and "deep" quality divergence (Poulis, 2024). The convergence of the three different methodological approaches to conclude that relational investment is not an add-on to contractual governance, but a necessary element to the effectiveness of contractual governance is arguably one of the strongest convergences found in this review. When combined, the results discussed above culminate in an integration/criticism synthesis.

Effectively, there is no single agreed mechanism to find effective TQM governance within a global franchise operation, as contracts, technological surveillance, training or investing in relationships are only necessary conditions for sustained quality performance.

According to Glaser et al. (2020), the level of management ability is capable of influencing the correlation between company's ownership structure and their TQM outcomes more significantly than their ownership structure. This observation is in line with Gillis et al. (2020)'s study that showed over-standardization can decrease local responsiveness and result in franchisee dissatisfaction which can ultimately deplete the levels of consistency that has been standardized (Gillis et al., 2020).

In high-stake markets, stakeholder pressures from consumers, regulators and community groups help to motivate the initiation of adaptation, as they currently force franchisors to adopt a more localized quality governance approach that is otherwise voluntary (Patil et al., 2025).

5. Conclusion

One of the most institutionally complex organizational forms in which an attempt at quality management is made at scale is global franchise systems, and the evidence presented in this review is clear that for the time being there is no global system of governance to match that complexity. The key takeaway is not about the absolute impossibility of standardizing and the need to be local, but rather that the basis of the majority of the design of quality governance in franchises, which posits that compliance is made possible through formal control, is empirically incorrect. It is important for quality in a global franchise system, non-discretely, at the intersection of structural authority and contextual legitimacy. Franchisors who lend to institutions as a way of handling governance measures can systematically under-govern the relational and institutional contexts where quality outcomes are still held. To design structurally coherent, relationally-based, and institutionally intelligent governance architectures that document and address this "gap in the field" in a different way is more than an empirical step; it is a step forward into the design of something new.

6. Strengths, Limitations, Future Implications

This review shows methodological rigor as an exhaustive systematic search was conducted in 6 databases followed by transparent inclusion criteria and PRISMA screening of all 18 studies, with all of the studies being quality appraised using MMAT. It contributes to the field by merging three streams of thought, TQM, franchise governance, and institutional theory, which overlaps little in terms of theories, methods, or concepts. It looks beyond 2019 at its future, including recent advances in digital monitoring and changes due to the pandemic. But restricting the inclusion to English language publications could deprive of some pertinent research and scholarship from the region.

There are significant differences in use across the industry and contexts, making direct comparison difficult. Importantly, the proposed model of governance adaptation is not tested with companies and is thus conceptual and needs to be tested in different franchise systems to be valid. The review indicated that governance capability is a construct that has received little attention in theory or empirical research. Future studies should adopt a longitudinal approach to examine changes in the franchise relationship across trust and control configurations. Institutional contingency effects should be operationalized more accurately in comparative cross-national studies using consistent measures. Scholars should also explore the interface between new digital monitoring technologies and their functioning under different institutional distances in the field of relational governance. Hybrid governance is recommended in which formal contractual governance is backed up with a relational investment and means of training on context. Industry associations and regulators should have a role in promoting the development of evidence-based quality governance standards, given that current practice and research is fragmented and should recognize the diversity of institutions.

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