



Relational Bonding and Relationship Satisfaction in Sustaining Franchise Relationships in the Food and Beverage Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of relational bonding and relationship satisfaction on long-term relationships in the food and beverage franchise sector in Purwokerto, Indonesia. Relational bonding is defined through three dimensions: social, financial, and structural bonding. A survey of 113 franchise business owners was conducted using non-probability sampling, and the data were analyzed with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through AMOS. The findings show that all three dimensions of relational bonding significantly influence both relationship satisfaction and long-term relationships. Furthermore, relationship satisfaction plays a mediating role in sustaining franchise partnerships. These results contribute to franchise research by confirming the importance of relationship marketing and exchange-based perspectives, while offering practical implications for franchisors to build stronger interpersonal ties, provide fair financial incentives, and deliver reliable service support. The study is limited to one sector and region, and future research should explore other sectors and broader contexts to validate these findings.

Keywords: *Financial Bonding; Franchises; Long-term Relationship; Social Bonding; Structural Bonding*

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INTRODUCTION

The franchise business is growing rapidly. Based on data from the Indonesian Ministry of Trade, in 2024 the number of Franchise Registration Certificates (STPW) issued for domestic franchisors increased by 5% compared to the previous year. The most franchised business sector is food and beverage (F&B) at 48.34%. Other sectors include beauty and health services (11.26%), non-formal education services (10.60%), retail (8.60%), laundry (9.56%), automotive (3.9%), and other categories such as property services, electronic maintenance, travel agencies, pharmacies, karaoke, and hotels.

The number of local food and beverage franchises in Purwokerto is also growing. Popular outlets such as Kebab Baba Rafi, Ayam Gepuk Pak Gembus, Teh Desa, Loempia Bom, Kue Balok, Kaf Chicken, and Say Story have expanded significantly. The franchise

system offers many conveniences for franchisees because it is supported by the franchisor's operational system. This system reduces the risk of business failure since it has been tested in terms of both products and operations. Moreover, franchise businesses enable franchisees to save time and money, as franchisors provide full support including location surveys, employee recruitment and training, outlet design, marketing, and product services.

The growth of the franchise business has encouraged researchers to examine the factors that influence its success. The relationship between franchisee and franchisor is a key aspect of business continuity. Franchisors need to establish mutually beneficial relationships with franchisees through relationship marketing to sustain long-term operations. Relationship marketing is a marketing activity aimed at building, developing, and maintaining successful relationships (Ceptureanu, et al., 2020). It emphasizes relational factors because it involves long-term exchanges (Uripi & Rokhayati, 2013). In the franchising context, relationship marketing plays a key role in enhancing the effectiveness of the franchise system (Kim et al., 2020). At its core, it focuses on building strong, trust-based partnerships that serve as a foundation for collaboration and reduce uncertainty for both franchisors and franchisees (Hong & Ahn, 2023).

Relational bonding plays a critical role in franchise relationships as it reflects the depth and strength of the connection between franchisors and franchisees. According to Berry (1995), relational bonding comprises three key dimensions: social bonding, financial bonding, and structural bonding. These components significantly contribute to the sustainability of relationships within the franchise business. Such bonds provide a foundation for franchisees to perceive their partnership with franchisors as a long-term strategic alliance, thereby enhancing resilience against potential disruptions.

Koo & Lee (2024) found that social, structural, and financial bonding significantly influence satisfaction and long-term relationships in food franchise businesses in South Korea. While their research offers valuable insights, the findings may not be fully applicable to franchises with different operational models or market contexts. This suggests that although relational bonding is broadly relevant, its impacts and application strategies can vary across countries. Building on Koo & Lee's (2024) suggestion, this study was conducted in Indonesia's food and beverage franchise context and expands the analysis by incorporating relationship satisfaction as a key variable. Unlike previous studies, this research focuses on local franchises, where the number of domestic STPWs exceeds foreign ones, reflecting the increasing demand for local brands. The study also emphasizes the importance of franchisor support in maintaining sustainable business relationships. By introducing relationship satisfaction as a more specific construct, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of franchisee satisfaction and contributes to the literature on sustaining long-term franchise relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies on franchise businesses have applied several theories such as the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Expectation Confirmation Theory to explain how franchisor support influences franchisee performance (Bui et al., 2022). Additionally, Dube et al. (2020) utilized the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory to examine the

franchisor–franchisee relationship, showing that equitable support fosters stronger trust, relationships, and overall business success within the network.

Koo & Lee (2024) applied Social Exchange Theory and Prospect Theory to explain the role of social and financial bonding in franchise relationships. Social Exchange Theory emphasizes that the exchange of social and emotional resources strengthens relationships, while Prospect Theory explains how individuals evaluate potential losses and gains. In this context, financial incentives and discounts can mitigate perceived risks in franchise businesses. Furthermore, Burlaud & Simon (2024) used Morgan & Hunt's (1994) Commitment-Trust Theory to explain the role of structural bonding, which states that commitment and trust in a relationship foster cooperative behavior and increase satisfaction.

Lee and Lee (2022) emphasized that franchisors can enhance visibility and profitability by providing proportional support through strategic resource allocation. In this regard, the franchisor's valuable resources, combined with the franchisee's involvement and access to the business model, contribute to franchisee growth and sustainability.

Social Bonding, Relationship Satisfaction and Long-term Relationship

Social bonding refers to the interpersonal connections formed between franchisors and franchisees that provide psychosocial benefits. This bond is strengthened through continuous interactions, ranging from professional engagements to personal friendships, and plays a crucial role in sustaining business relationships (Koo & Lee, 2024; Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). Personal relationships fostered through social bonding can enhance satisfaction and increase the willingness to maintain long-term partnerships (Berry, 1995; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Empirical studies by Abou Kamar & Alsetoohy (2021) found that franchisor support and commitment enhance relationship quality and satisfaction, while horizontal relationships also affect long-term partnerships (Perrigot, 2022). Overall, social bonding positively influences both relationship satisfaction and long-term relational outcomes.

H1: Social Bonding has a positive effect on Relationship Satisfaction.

H2: Social Bonding has a positive effect on Long-term Relationships.

Financial Bonding, Relationship Satisfaction and Long-term Relationship

Financial bonding refers to the provision of economic benefits, such as financial incentives and attractive discounts, which strengthen the relationship between franchisors and franchisees (Koo & Lee, 2024). Based on Prospect Theory (Yong et al., 2024), individuals assess potential gains and losses before making decisions. Thus, financial incentives from franchisors help reduce perceived risks and potential losses, thereby enhancing franchisee satisfaction. Empirical evidence from Abou Kamar & Alsetoohy (2021) and Koo & Lee (2024) confirms that financial bonding positively influences satisfaction and supports the development of long-term franchise relationships.

H3: Financial Bonding has a positive effect on Relationship Satisfaction.

H4: Financial Bonding has a positive effect on Long-term Relationships.

Structural Bonding, Relationship Satisfaction and Long-term Relationship

Structural bonding refers to the service mechanisms that provide access to information and reports (Koo & Lee, 2024). According to Johanson & Mattsson (1987), structural bonding involves economic, strategic, and technical elements that deliver business benefits through unique service offerings and technological advances. Through structural bonding, franchisees can obtain alternative solutions that help sustain long-term collaboration. Alipour (2021) highlights the importance of integrating solutions in service delivery to strengthen franchise relationships. Previous studies (Abou Kamar & Alsetoohy, 2021; Koo & Lee, 2024) confirm that structural bonding significantly affects both satisfaction and long-term relationships.

H5: Structural Bonding has a positive effect on Relationship Satisfaction.

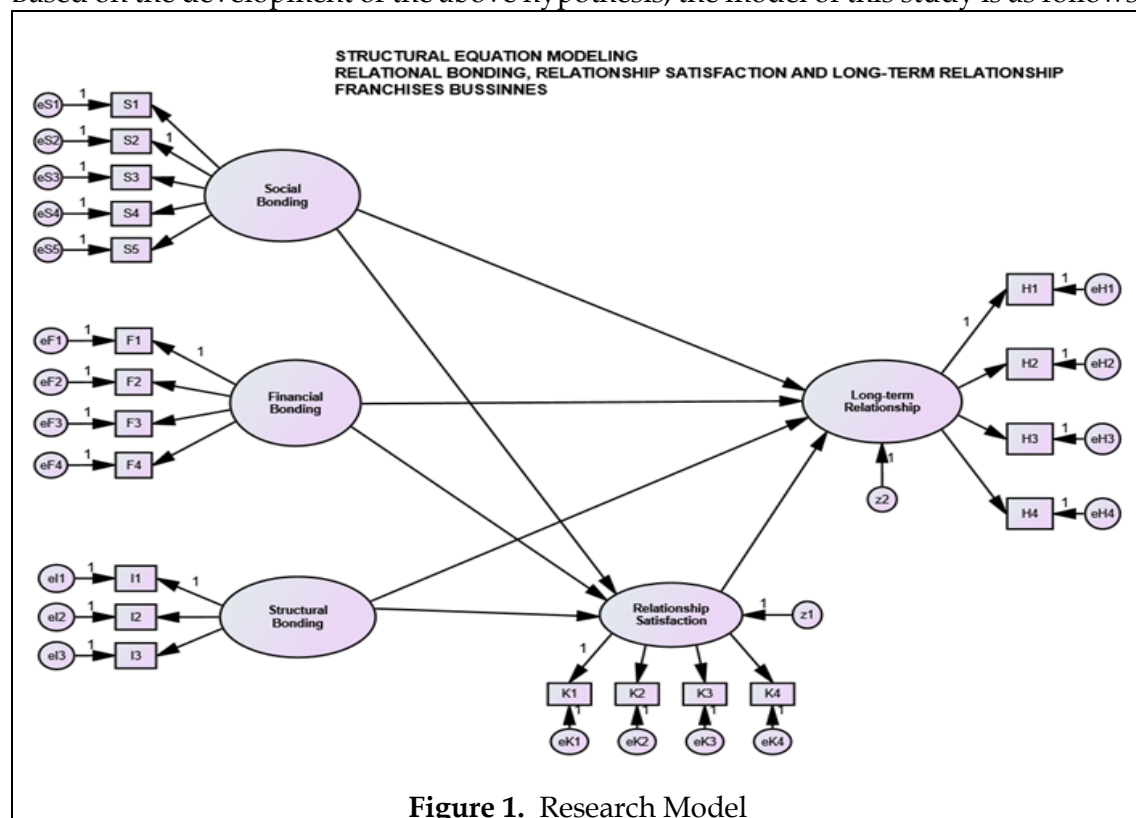
H6: Structural Bonding has a positive effect on Long-term Relationships.

Relationship Satisfaction and Long-term Relationship

According to Jang & Park (2019), sustainable franchise relationships are closely linked to relationship quality, particularly satisfaction. Research on customer satisfaction shows that satisfied individuals are more likely to make repeat purchases, resist competitor offerings, and share positive word-of-mouth. Similarly, in the franchise context, Lesmana and Iskandar (2022) emphasize that effective entrepreneurial and marketing strategies contribute to higher satisfaction and stronger business performance. Satisfied franchisees are therefore more inclined to continue their collaboration with franchisors, reinforcing long-term stability in the relationship.

H7: Relationship Satisfaction has a positive effect on Long-term Relationships.

Based on the development of the above hypothesis, the model of this study is as follows:



METHODS

The research applies a quantitative approach with a survey method. The study population consisted of 453 SMEs in Purwokerto operating local food and beverage franchises. This sector was selected because food and beverage franchises currently dominate franchise growth in the region. The minimum sample size was determined based on the requirements for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis using AMOS software, which requires at least 100 samples (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). A total of 113 valid responses were obtained, exceeding the minimum requirement and ensuring sufficient statistical power for SEM analysis (Kline, 2016).

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Form. Data collection was conducted between April and May 2025 using a convenience sampling approach, chosen for its accessibility and practicality in reaching respondents (Etikan, 2016). The participants in this study were franchise business owners, as most small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in this sector are directly managed by their proprietors.

The measurement instruments for each variable used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) and were adapted from established studies. Social bonding (5 items), financial bonding (4 items), and structural bonding (3 items) were adapted from Koo and Lee (2024); relationship satisfaction (4 items) was measured using indicators from Rusman, Sanusi, and Karim (2020); and the long-term relationship variable (4 items) was adapted from Alipour (2021). All question items are presented in Table 1.

Prior to hypothesis testing, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess construct validity, while Construct Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were used to evaluate reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010). CFA and SEM are widely recognized for their robustness in analyzing latent constructs and complex causal relationships (Croonen, Broekhuizen, & Brand, 2024; Dung et al., 2023). For hypothesis testing, the study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS software version 24.

RESULTS

The researcher collected primary data from 113 respondents using a questionnaire distributed online via Google Form. Based on the results, 59 respondents (52%) were male, the majority age group was over 40 years (47 respondents or 43%), and most respondents held a Bachelor's degree (74 respondents or 65%). This study investigates the influence of social bonding, financial bonding, and structural bonding on relationship satisfaction and long-term relationships. As shown in Table 1, the confirmatory factor analysis indicates that all items for each variable have factor loadings above 0.5. According to Hair et al. (2010), items with loading factors below 0.5 should be excluded from further analysis; however, in this study, all item loadings were within the acceptable range.

Table 1. Loading Factor, Construct Reliability and AVE

Item	Loading Factor	Construct Reliability	AVE
Social Bonding		0.969	0.717
Maintains a good relationship	0.934		
Cares about my needs	0.913		
Helps resolve my problem	0.947		
Asks for feedback on the service provided	0.894		
Pays attention to special moment	0.950		
Financial Bonding		0.970	0.891
Awards points based on sales volume	0.914		
Provides special prices for raw materials	0.941		
Offers rewards for certain transactions	0.981		
Provides discounts for certain sales volumes	0.938		
Structural Bonding		0.924	0.802
Offers multiple ways to access information	0.829		
Provides regular transaction reports	0.922		
Ensures adequate product availability	0.932		
Relationship Satisfaction		0.925	0.756
Satisfied with being a franchisee	0.834		
Feel the franchisor is good	0.868		
Feel the service is right	0.889		
Satisfied with the products and services	0.885		
Long-term Relationship		0.953	0.836
Believe the relationship is beneficial	0.895		
Maintaining the relationship is important	0.913		
Focus on long-term goals	0.920		
Be willing to balance interests in the long term	0.928		

Source: Data processed by Amos, 2025

Convergent validity was assessed to evaluate the construct validity. All latent variables, except for price value offerings, demonstrated average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.5, which indicates satisfactory convergent validity for most constructs. Furthermore, construct reliability values for all variables were above the 0.70 threshold, confirming strong internal consistency. For the evaluation of discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) was applied. This involved comparing the square root of each construct's AVE with the inter-construct correlations. The results confirmed that discriminant validity was achieved, as the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded the highest correlation with any other construct in Table 2.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	Social Bonding	Financial Bonding	Structural Bonding	Relationship Satisfaction	Long-term Relationship
Social Bonding	0.847				
Financial Bonding	0.692	0.943			
Structural Bonding	0.513	0.723	0.895		
Relationship Satisfaction	0.768	0.744	0.575	0.869	
Long-term Relationship	0.747	0.798	0.716	0.754	0.914

Source: Data processed by Amos, 2025

Based on the path diagram, the model fit indices suggest that the model demonstrates a marginally good fit ($\chi^2 = 206.324$, $p = 0.008$, $df = 74$, $CMIN/DF = 1.290$, $GFI = 0.845$, $AGFI = 0.797$, $TLI = 0.980$, $CFI = 0.983$, $RMSEA = 0.051$). These values indicate that the model is within acceptable thresholds for structural equation modeling, although some indices (e.g., GFI and $AGFI$) fall slightly below the commonly recommended cutoffs, suggesting areas for potential model improvement.

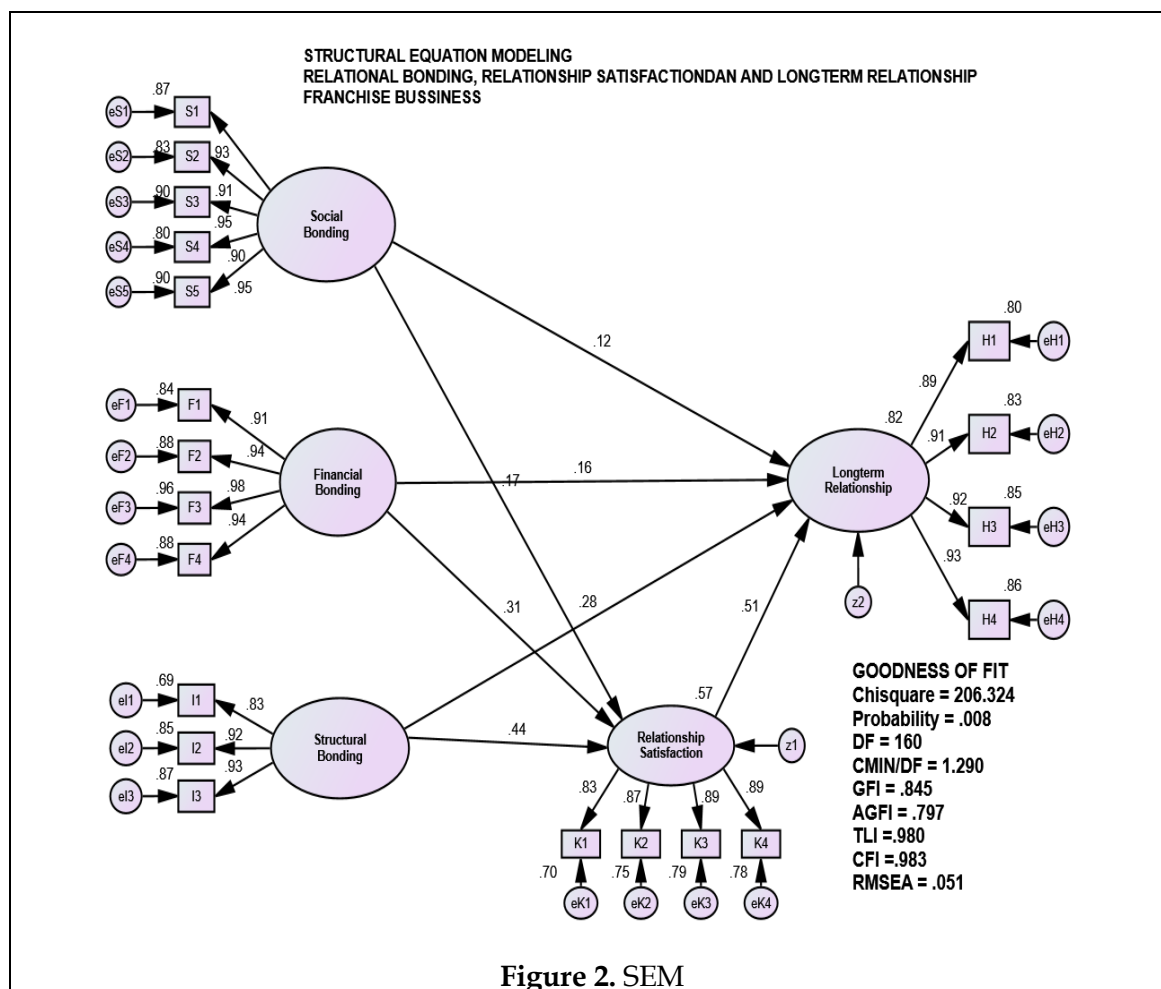


Figure 2. SEM

The structural equation of the measurement model is :

$$\text{Relationship Satisfaction} = 0.17 \text{ Social Bonding} + 0.31 \text{ Financial Bonding} + 0.44 \text{ Structural Bonding} + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Long-term Relationship} = 0.12 \text{ Social Bonding} + 0.16 \text{ Financial Bonding} + 0.28 \text{ Structural Bonding} + 0.51 \text{ Relationship Satisfaction} + \varepsilon$$

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that all proposed hypotheses are supported. Social bonding has a positive effect on relationship satisfaction (CR = 1.960, $p = 0.049$), as does financial bonding (CR = 3.266, $p = 0.021$), and structural bonding (CR = 4.755, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, social bonding also positively influences long-term relationships (CR = 1.984, $p = 0.047$), as do financial bonding (CR = 2.291, $p = 0.022$) and structural bonding (CR = 3.752, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, relationship satisfaction significantly impacts long-term relationships (CR = 5.673, $p < 0.001$). These findings confirm that hypotheses 1 through 7 are empirically supported, emphasizing the importance of relational bonding and satisfaction in fostering sustained franchise relationships.

Table 3. Hypothesis testing

	Hypothesis	CR	P value	Result
1	Social Bonding → Relationship Satisfaction	1.960	.049	Supported
2	Financial Bonding → Relationship Satisfaction	3.266	.021	Supported
3	Structural Bonding → Relationship Satisfaction	4.755	***	Supported
4	Social Bonding → Long-term Relationship	1.984	.047	Supported
5	Financial Bonding → Long-term Relationship	2.291	.022	Supported
6	Structural Bonding → Long-term Relationship	3.752	***	Supported
7	Relationship Satisfaction → Long-term Relationship	5.673	***	Supported

Source: Data processed by Amos, 2025

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the effects of relational bonding consisting of social bonding, financial bonding, and structural bonding on relationship satisfaction and long-term relationships in a franchise context. The results confirm that all three dimensions of relational bonding significantly contribute to relationship satisfaction and, in turn, strengthen the potential for sustaining long-term relationships between franchisors and franchisees.

These findings align with several theoretical perspectives. The Resource-Based View (RBV) and Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) emphasize that the value provided through franchisor support enhances relationship satisfaction and performance. The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory further suggests that high-quality exchanges characterized by mutual trust and support reinforce relational outcomes, thereby ensuring the success of franchise businesses. This indicates that when franchisors fail to generate relationship satisfaction through relational bonding, long-term relationships are unlikely to be sustained.

Consistent with Koo & Lee (2024), this study provides evidence that social, financial, and structural bonding play a decisive role in shaping relationship satisfaction and long-term relationships within the food and beverage franchise sector in Indonesia. The findings extend prior research by highlighting the role of relationship satisfaction as a mediating factor and by testing these constructs in a different cultural and business setting.

From a theoretical standpoint, social bonding can be explained through Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that the exchange of emotional and social resources enhances relational quality. Frequent, positive interactions characterized by openness and trust increase relationship satisfaction and strengthen the bond between franchisor and franchisee. This is consistent with Allen et al. (2022), who emphasize the human need for meaningful interpersonal connections.

In line with Prospect Theory (Yong et al., 2024), the study confirms that franchisees evaluate their relationships with franchisors based on potential economic gains and losses. Financial incentives, such as discounts and other monetary benefits, reduce perceived risks while enhancing relationship satisfaction and commitment. When such benefits are considered fair and advantageous, franchisees are more likely to maintain long-term relationships.

This result also supports Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which emphasizes that trust and commitment are critical for sustaining cooperative business relationships. When franchisors provide structural support such as technological infrastructure, clear standard operating procedures, and personalized assistance, franchisees develop stronger psychological commitment. This not only increases relationship satisfaction but also signals reliability and long-term value. Burlaud & Simon (2024) argue that this embeddedness in service relationships directly strengthens trust, while Alipour (2021) highlights the importance of integrated service solutions in reinforcing long-term relationships.

Lastly, relationship satisfaction emerges as a key determinant of long-term relationships. It reflects not only satisfaction with products or services but also the overall health of the franchisee-franchisor relationship. Recent studies by Wisnalmawati et al. (2023) and Jodiyosa and Tyas (2025) confirm that relationship satisfaction directly influences long-term relationships. Thus, continuously monitoring and improving relationship satisfaction becomes essential for sustaining high-quality franchise partnerships (Rosen & Surprenant, 1998).

Overall, the study confirms the theoretical importance of relational bonding and relationship satisfaction while also providing practical insights. For franchisors, strengthening interpersonal interactions, offering fair financial incentives, and ensuring reliable structural support are strategic levers to sustain long-term relationships in competitive markets.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that social bonding, financial bonding, and structural bonding have significant positive effects on relationship satisfaction. These three dimensions of relational bonding, together with relationship satisfaction, also positively influence long-term relationships between franchisors and franchisees.

This study contributes to the field of marketing management by providing insights into the key factors that support the sustainability of franchise relationships. The results emphasize the importance for franchisors to strengthen interpersonal interactions, offer fair financial incentives, and ensure adequate service-related support, such as timely access to information and performance reports, while maintaining a cooperative and consistent attitude toward franchisees.

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. It does not comprehensively examine the mechanisms through which relational bonding and relationship satisfaction jointly influence long-term relationships. In addition, the research is restricted to the food and beverage sector in one region, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future studies are encouraged to expand the scope to other industries and wider geographical areas to validate and extend these findings.

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