

Franchisee well-being: The roles of entrepreneurial identity, autonomy perceptions, and franchisor management practices

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ABSTRACT

Using two-level data drawn from franchisors and their franchisees, this paper explores how individual and work characteristics influence franchisee well-being. Franchising is an interesting context in which to examine well-being, given the boundary spanning nature of the franchisee role, both within the organization and across the employee-entrepreneur divide. Drawing on the Job-Demands Resource Model, we examine how a key tension in franchise systems – the desire for autonomy by franchisees and the need for standardization by franchisors – impacts franchisees' emotional exhaustion. We find that franchisees who self-identify as entrepreneurs and who are granted greater autonomy suffer less emotional exhaustion. Interestingly, our results also show that franchisees who are members of systems with strong operating routines (which should counteract autonomy perceptions) experience less emotional exhaustion, suggesting that routines can be important in reducing job demands. Our findings have a number of practical implications for franchisors. In particular, franchisors should favor franchisees with prior industry experience, which we found to be positively associated with franchisee mental well-being, and should not avoid entrepreneurial franchisees – as often suggested.

1. Introduction

As “quasi-employees” or semi-autonomous entrepreneurs (Croonen et al., 2016; Lawrence & Kaufmann, 2011) franchisees embody a unique organizational blend, combining business ownership and autonomy with dependency and operating as part of a larger chain, as well as the associated restrictions to ensure brand uniformity. While franchising as an organizational form draws on the “best of two worlds” through entrepreneurial motivation and market-closeness with well-established operating routines and associated related economies of scale (Kaufmann & Eroglu, 1999), the aforementioned characteristics may make franchisees particularly prone to emotional exhaustion.

Franchisees need to navigate the high levels of uncertainty, complexity, and responsibility associated with entrepreneurship (Stephan, 2018), yet they have limited opportunities to counterbalance entrepreneurial role stress (job demands) through autonomy and job control – two factors which have been found to be important in explaining the higher levels of well-being entrepreneurs experience

compared with employees (Stephan, 2018). In this regard, the extent to which franchisees self-identify as entrepreneurs (i.e., have an entrepreneurial identity) may be important, as this is likely to influence the extent to which they value independence. Further, with many franchisees being in direct interaction with customers (Watson, Dada, et al., 2020; Watson, Senyard, & Dada, 2020), similar to salespeople or frontline employees, they provide the bridge between customers and the firm (Low et al., 2001). This boundary spanning role of franchisees may contribute to several sources of stress (e.g., Singh, 2000) and thus potentially add to the danger of experiencing emotional exhaustion, i.e., the “feeling of being emotionally over-extended and exhausted at work” (Fernet et al., 2013, p. 123).

Whilst these factors suggest that franchisees may experience particular challenges compared to both employees and entrepreneurs that might make them susceptible to emotional exhaustion, franchising, as a governance form, also offers a range of specific instruments and resources that may help mitigate against this. For example, franchisors provide franchisees with know-how and operating routines, and

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network support is available from both their franchisor and network peers which might not only help them achieve work tasks, but also mitigate risks (Ramírez-García et al., 2024) and act as a buffer against stress and exhaustion. Thus, the management capabilities of the franchisor in the form of knowledge-sharing, operating, and trust routines (Gillis et al., 2020) may be important job resources that can help mitigate job demands.

Within the literature exploring psychological well-being and emotional exhaustion at work, antecedents of well-being and, more specifically, emotional exhaustion, have mainly been explored with a focus on employees and on entrepreneurs (e.g., Crawford et al., 2010; Nielsen et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2024), suggesting a complex picture of various factors that might affect entrepreneur and employee well-being. However, few studies have considered well-being in hybrid entrepreneurship contexts. By focusing on the particular organizational setting of franchising alongside its specific set of governance instruments, we seek to address this gap and develop a two-level model conceptualizing the role of perceived autonomy and entrepreneurial identification, as two important psychological resources franchisees may possess, and the management capabilities (as potential job resources) the franchisor provides.

We empirically tested our model using nested data collected across 38 franchise systems with responses from 348 franchisees and their franchisors, seeking to understand how the paradoxical nature of franchisee ownership (Larty & Hopkinson, 2021), with its inherent tensions between balancing franchisee autonomy and the need for compliance with franchisor guidelines, impacts franchisee emotional exhaustion as a measure of well-being. We focus on emotional exhaustion, as this has been found to be the “central quality of burnout and the most obvious manifestation of this complex syndrome” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 402). By so doing, we make a number of contributions.

First, by focusing on a form of quasi-entrepreneurship, we extend the literature on emotional exhaustion and burnout to the case of hybrid organizational forms located on the continuum between entrepreneurship and traditional employee-employer work relationships. Franchising, as a specific form of B2B relationship (Panda et al., 2019) that contributes significantly to many economies (Lanchimba et al., 2021), provides a relevant context in which to expand our knowledge of how different entrepreneurship settings might impact emotional exhaustion. Such an understanding is important given that emotional exhaustion is associated with negative organizational outcomes, such as intention to leave, absenteeism, and reduced productivity (Guo et al., 2023).

Research considering aspects of mental well-being (including emotional exhaustion) for different types of organizational governance forms is relatively limited; within the entrepreneurship context, existing studies have primarily focused on differences between opportunity entrepreneurs (entrepreneurs who choose to be entrepreneurs) compared with necessity entrepreneurs (those who enter into entrepreneurship because of a lack of other employment options) (Sevä et al., 2016; Stephan et al., 2023). Further, as highlighted by Shir et al. (2019), independent, self-employed entrepreneurs have been the primary entrepreneurial context, leading to calls for research in different entrepreneurial settings (Shir et al., 2019; Stephan et al., 2023). Outside of market (entrepreneur) or hierarchical (employee-employer) organizational contexts, research exploring well-being processes in hybrid organizations, such as franchises, joint ventures, or co-operatives, is notably sparse. Although focusing on outcomes rather than antecedents, Park's (2019) study of worker co-operatives suggests, however, that there may be different processes of emotional exhaustion in hybrid organizational settings.

Second, drawing on the Job-Demands Resources theory, we aim to add to our understanding of how effective organizational-level mechanisms are in terms of mitigating emotional exhaustion in a hybrid governance form such as franchising. As Roczniowska et al. (2022) highlight, job demands (aspects of the role that require effort) and resources (the motivational and functional factors that facilitate role

accomplishment), are two key factors which have been found to be linked to emotional exhaustion and inform our study. However, these are often conceptualized as workplace factors, yet measured at an individual level (Roczniowska et al., 2022). Our two-level approach enables us to address the potential weakness of this conceptual and measurement inconsistency. Further, exploring both individual and organizational factors enables identification of relationships which otherwise could not be detected (Roczniowska et al., 2022). By investigating individual perceptions and characteristics as well as organizational factors, we are able to offer new insights into how the tension between autonomy and compliance affects franchisee outcomes. As such, we are able to provide guidance to franchisors as to how to minimize franchisee burnout, primarily through a rigorous recruitment approach which seeks to ensure a good fit between organizational culture in relation to autonomy and franchisee entrepreneurial characteristics.

Third, we contribute to the franchising literature, which has largely ignored issues of well-being among franchisees. Despite much discussion of the apparent tensions created by franchisee entrepreneurial values within a uniform franchise system (termed by Watson & Dada, 2017, as an “entrepreneurial paradox”), there has been scant consideration of how these tensions impact franchisee mental well-being. The few studies that have explored well-being issues have focused on franchisee satisfaction, exploring either its antecedents and/or behavioral outcomes such as intention to remain in the system (Chiou & Droge, 2015; Kalargyrou et al., 2018; Mellewigt et al., 2011). While some papers have explored employee well-being within franchise chain contexts (mainly in hospitality settings) (DiPietro et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2023), there are no studies to date to our knowledge, which have explicitly considered well-being of franchisees with its individual and system-level antecedents.

2. Research background

As highlighted earlier, researchers have become increasingly concerned with understanding factors that influence well-being in the workplace, given its impact on both individual and organizational outcomes. Research can be broadly categorized by the focal referent of the study – employees (for reviews, see Crawford et al., 2010; Nielsen et al., 2017; Roczniowska et al., 2022) or entrepreneurs (for reviews, see Stephan et al., 2023 and Williamson et al., 2024). Other studies have sought to compare the two (Baron et al., 2016; Bergman et al., 2021; Nikolaev et al., 2020; Obschonka et al., 2023). By exploring franchisee emotional exhaustion, this study provides an opportunity to bridge these literatures by seeking to understand factors that influence the well-being of quasi-entrepreneurs (franchisees).

In seeking to understand well-being, a number of different operationalizations of well-being have been used, either focusing on positive aspects of well-being, such as life satisfaction and positive affect (Wiklund et al., 2019), or negative aspects, such as burnout, emotional exhaustion, or feelings of stress (Stephan et al., 2023). In this study, we focus on a negative aspect of well-being, namely, emotional exhaustion, given that it is considered to be a central component of burnout (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2016; Maslach et al., 2001; Seidler et al., 2014). As such, it has received particular attention from researchers (Sun & Pan, 2008).

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a review of this burgeoning literature, it is worth highlighting some of the key findings in relation to antecedent factors that have been identified in relation to workplace well-being. Antecedents can be broadly divided into organizational factors, such as job autonomy, demands and resources (Fernet et al., 2013; Guo et al., 2023; Tahar et al., 2022; Van den Broeck et al., 2011) and personal factors, such as human capital resources including competence (Fernet et al., 2013), risk tolerance, and internal locus of control (Stephan, 2018), with some studies considering the interaction between the two in the form of person-job fit (de Mol et al., 2018; Van

den Broeck et al., 2011).

Whilst these studies provide some useful insights into emotional exhaustion, it is important to note that differences have been found in the extent to which emotional exhaustion is experienced and the associated processes, dependent on the role of the focal person and the sector in which they operate. For example, it is suggested that those who are in customer-facing roles, such as those in the hospitality (e.g., Pu et al., 2024; Shahzad et al., 2023) and the healthcare sector (e.g., Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Martínez-Inigo et al., 2007), are likely to experience greater burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Job roles which are deemed to be boundary spanning, where “workers have to interact with multiple constituencies and navigate conflicting agendas” (Ambrose et al., 2014, p. 1070) are also found to be particularly prone to emotional exhaustion. Because of this, salespeople have been the focus of several studies (Edmondson et al., 2019; Peasley et al., 2020). Research exploring salespeople has highlighted that for different types of job role the processes of emotional exhaustion may differ (Lewin & Sager, 2007), with different roles experiencing different sources of stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) which trigger emotional exhaustion. These findings provide support for exploring emotional exhaustion within the context of franchising, given that it cannot be assumed that findings from other employee (or entrepreneur) contexts can be generalized to franchisees, given their unique combination of both entrepreneurship and employment characteristics. It is important to note that research exploring well-being and emotional exhaustion within entrepreneurial contexts suggest that entrepreneurs’ well-being differs from employees’ well-being (Baron et al., 2016; Nikolaev et al., 2020; Stephan et al., 2023) and that different types of entrepreneurs may also respond differently to job demands. However, little is understood about well-being for different types of entrepreneurs beyond opportunity and necessity entrepreneurs (Stephan et al., 2023). Research into quasi-entrepreneurs such as franchisees is sparse.

From the review, we conclude that emotional exhaustion processes may differ dependent on the employee job role, whether the individual is an employee or entrepreneur, and the type of entrepreneur. The boundary spanning role and quasi-entrepreneurial status of franchisees provides a distinct context from other extant studies and can thus extend our understanding of emotional exhaustion. Table 1 positions our study within the literature.

3. Theoretical background

In understanding burnout and its key component of emotional exhaustion, researchers have primarily drawn on the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model (Fernet et al., 2013; Guo et al., 2023). The JD-R model proposes that the demands of a job can place a burden on an individual’s mental and physical energy, thereby contributing to emotional exhaustion. Job demands relate to the “physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (e.g., exhaustion)” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501), and include factors such as workload, time pressures and role conflict (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022). Job resources, the “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312) which facilitate the achievement of work goals, however, can reduce the effects of job demands on exhaustion by not only facilitating task accomplishment (reducing strain), but also by improving motivation.

Whilst several potential job resources have been identified, such as support from others and job control, perceived autonomy is considered to be a core resource as it allows individuals greater control and freedom by which to achieve job demands (Guo et al., 2023; Tahar et al., 2022) and thus buffers the impact of job demands. Further, drawing on self-determination theory, autonomy is a key psychological need (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and the absence of autonomy can be a source of psychological strain and thus contributes to emotional exhaustion

(Crawford et al., 2010). Extensions to the JD-R model have included personal resources, the “psychological traits or qualities of the self that are typically linked to resiliency and that allude to the capacity to successfully influence and control one’s surroundings” (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022, p. 3) as important resources which can enhance well-being.

4. Hypotheses development

4.1. The relationship between perceived autonomy and emotional exhaustion

As noted earlier, the degree to which franchisees are, and should be, granted autonomy is a contentious issue and has received substantial attention in the franchising literature (see Dada, 2018, and Watson & Dada, 2017 for reviews). Franchisee autonomy, that is “the extent to which franchisees are able to exercise independence of thoughts and actions to operate freely outside the standardized confines of the franchise system” (Dada, 2018, p. 207), is considered to be particularly contentious because of the potential for franchisees to deviate from proven operating systems and engage in opportunistic behaviors. Such behaviors could compromise system uniformity, resulting in a loss of corporate identity or a dilution of brand equity (Paik & Choi, 2007).

Research on the impact of franchisee autonomy has tended to focus on performance outcomes, particularly at the system level (Dada & Watson, 2013a; McDaniel et al., 2022), with few considering the effect on franchisees. Whilst there has been some consideration as to whether autonomy impacts franchisee satisfaction with the system (Gassenheimer et al., 1996), franchisee-franchisor relationships (Dada & Watson, 2013b), and contract terminations (López-Bayón & López-Fernández, 2016), the impact on franchisee mental well-being has not been explored. However, given the substantial evidence on the role of perceived autonomy as an important job resource on emotional exhaustion in both employee (Guo et al., 2023) and entrepreneur (Shir et al., 2019; Stephan et al., 2023, 2020; Wiklund et al., 2019) contexts, we propose:

H1. Franchisee perceptions of entrepreneurial autonomy are negatively related to emotional exhaustion.

Fig. 1 shows our conceptual model.

4.2. The relationship between entrepreneurial identity and emotional exhaustion

Research comparing burnout between entrepreneurs and employees has suggested that the lower levels of burnout experienced by entrepreneurs, despite seemingly higher job demands, might be explained by two key factors: one relating to work characteristics, most notably the greater autonomy that entrepreneurs experience compared with employees (job resource), and the other relating to personal resources, more specifically the different personality traits that entrepreneurs possess compared to non-entrepreneurs (Stephan, 2018). We therefore include entrepreneurial identity as a personal characteristic that might impact franchisee well-being. Franchise systems often use entrepreneurial rhetoric in their recruitment material (Watson et al., 2019) stressing the opportunity to “be your own boss”, and the independence offered by being a franchisee (Dada & Watson, 2013b; Watson et al., 2019), and thus are likely to attract individuals who self-identify as entrepreneurs (Watson et al., 2019) and possess entrepreneurial traits.

As Murnieks et al. (2014, p. 1589) explain, entrepreneurial identities are “the cognitive schemas of interpretations and behavioral prescriptions that allow individuals to understand what it means to be an entrepreneur”. Individuals who identify as entrepreneurs have internalized the external meanings associated with the term and made these self-defining. As such, they are motivated to emulate behaviors they associate with entrepreneurship, such as proactivity and risk taking, and value attributes, such as the independence associated with

Table 1

Literature Review: Selected Empirical Studies on Antecedents of Burnout / Emotional Exhaustion.

Authors (Year)	Context	Study Design	Market	Hierarchy	Hybrid	Antecedents L1	Antecedents L2	Main Result(s)
Babakus et al. (1999) Lin et al. (2013)	B2B field sales organization	Cross-sectional survey; $n = 203$		x		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Role ambiguity (+) ■ Role conflict (+) ■ Neuroticism (+) ■ Psychoticism (+) 	./.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Role ambiguity and role conflict identified as antecedents of EE
	Employed managers; international joint venture	Cross-sectional survey; $n = 288$		x	(x ^a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Job satisfaction (–) ■ Occupational stress (+) ■ Social support (–) 	./.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support for neuroticism, psychoticism, job satisfaction, occupational stress and social support as antecedents of EE
Edmondson et al. (2019)	Salespeople	Meta-Analysis; 29 studies with 104 effect sizes		x ^b		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Role ambiguity (+) ■ Role conflict (+) ■ Work overload (+) ■ Work–family conflict (+) ■ Perceived organizational support (–) ■ Supervisory support (–) 	./.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strong positive relationships of role conflict, work overload, and work–family conflict with EE ■ Strong negative relationships of supervisory support and perceived organizational support with EE ■ Moderate positive relationship of role ambiguity with EE
Yeniaras et al. (2024)	Sales employees	Two cross-sectional surveys; $n = 254 / 251$		x		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Managerial upselling emphasis ■ Exploratory learning, exploitative learning (Moderators) 	./.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Positive relationship of managerial upselling emphasis with EE ■ Exploitative (explorative) learning positively (negatively) moderates the relationship between upselling emphasis and EE
Van Ruysseveldt et al. (2011)	Diverse	Cross-sectional survey data; $n = 4589$		x		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Workload (+) ■ Emotional demands (+) ■ Cognitive demands (+) ■ Learning opportunities (–) ■ Task variety (–) ■ Autonomy (–) 	./.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Positive relationship of job demands (workload, emotional and cognitive demands) with EE ■ Negative relationship of job resources (learning opportunities, task variety and autonomy) with EE
Tahar et al. (2022)	Entrepreneurs	Cross-sectional survey data; $n = 273$	x			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emotional demands (+) ■ Autonomy (–) (direct and moderator) ■ Job satisfaction (–) (direct and moderator) 	./.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Positive relationship with emotional demands and burnout ■ Negative relationship of autonomy and job satisfaction and burnout ■ Autonomy moderates (buffers) effects of emotional demands on burnout
Obschonka et al. (2023)	Entrepreneurs and employees	Panel data $n = 348$ entrepreneurs and 1002 employees	x	x		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Job resources (autonomy) (–) ■ Personal resources (psychological capital) (–) ■ Job demands (administrative tasks, role ambiguity, role overload, time pressure, workload) (+) ■ Work recovery (–) 	./.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Entrepreneurs had lower levels of EE compared with employees; and solo entrepreneurs lower levels of EE compared with employer entrepreneurs ■ Entrepreneurs lower EE can be explained by the greater autonomy, and the fewer job demands associated with EE they experience ■ No mediating effects found for personal resources or work recovery, although both negatively related to EE
Sardeshmukh et al. (2021)	Entrepreneurs	Two cross-sectional surveys $n = 168/215$	x			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Role ambiguity (+) ■ Work–family conflict (+) 	./.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Positive relationship of role ambiguity with EE ■ Positive relationship of work–family conflict with EE
Li et al. (2023)	Employees, various industries	Cross-sectional survey data (L1, $n = 2049$), job analysis ratings (L2, $n = 97$)		x		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emotional demands (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emotional job characteristics (customer contact and positive displays) (+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EE positively related to exit intentions ■ Positive indirect relationship of positive displays with exhaustion, mediated through perceived emotional demands ■ No support for an indirect relationship of customer contact with exhaustion,

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Authors (Year)	Context	Study Design	Market	Hierarchy	Hybrid	Antecedents L1	Antecedents L2	Main Result(s)
This study	Franchising, various industries	Cross-sectional, two-level survey data (n = 38 franchise systems, 348 franchisees)			x	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Autonomy (–)■ Entrepreneurial identity (–)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Knowledge-sharing routines (–)■ Operating routines (–)■ Trust routines (–)■ Industry experience requirement (–)	<p>mediated through perceived emotional demands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Negative relationship of perceived autonomy and entrepreneurial identity with EE■ Entrepreneurial identity moderates the relationship between autonomy and EE■ Negative relationship of operating routines and EE, with trust routines of marginal significance (also negative)

a: hybrid in relation to the nature of the organizational context (international joint ventures) b: not specified/identifiable for all studies included.

entrepreneurs (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2011). If, however, they are unable to engage in the behaviors they associate with entrepreneurs (that is, are unable to engage in activities that are consistent with their entrepreneurial self-identity), this may lead to psychological distress due to lack of self-verification (Feng et al., 2022). Thus, the extent to which franchisees self-identify as entrepreneurs is likely to have implications for their mental well-being.

For franchisees, autonomy may create particular tensions; franchisees often express a desire to be autonomous, with franchising used as a route to business ownership and freedom from employment (Larty & Hopkinson, 2021), yet the restrictions of the franchise system can impede the “quest for autonomy and independence” (op. cit., p. 11). Thus, for franchisees who strongly identify as entrepreneurs, the inherent restrictions of the franchise system that arise due to the need to comply with processes set out by the franchisor may create tensions that could lead to greater emotional exhaustion.

Whilst the work characteristics associated with franchising may suggest that franchisees who identify as entrepreneurs may experience greater emotional exhaustion than those who do not, the personal resources associated with entrepreneurs suggest the opposite. Studies using a personal resources perspective have suggested that entrepreneurs possess greater psychological capital (a second order variable reflecting self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience), and thus they experience less stress, and in turn, their well-being is enhanced compared with non-entrepreneurs (Baron et al., 2016). Franchisees who identify as entrepreneurs are therefore likely to have greater psychological capital, given as Obschonka et al. (2015) note, individuals who possess entrepreneurial personality characteristics are more likely to identify as entrepreneurs.

Whilst the personal resources perspective would suggest a negative relationship between entrepreneurial identity and emotional exhaustion, the work characteristics perspective would suggest that entrepreneurial franchisees may experience greater emotional exhaustion. However, given that franchisees presumably enter the franchise system with an understanding of its relative benefits and challenges (Grace et al., 2013) and, more specifically, the requirement to adhere to franchisor processes, we propose that franchisees who identify as entrepreneurs will experience lower emotional exhaustion than non-entrepreneur franchisees. Thus:

H2. *There is a negative relationship between the extent to which franchisees self-identify as entrepreneurs and emotional exhaustion.*

4.3. *The interaction effect between entrepreneurial identity and perceived autonomy*

Langfred and Moye (2004) argue that benefits and costs associated with being granted task autonomy differs based on individual preferences and traits. In our context, franchisees with an entrepreneurial identity may particularly value autonomy, while franchisees for whom entrepreneurship is not such a central part of their identity may not. There is, in fact, evidence to suggest that franchisees may enter the franchise system because of the clear processes that they must follow (Croonen et al., 2022), and therefore if they are offered significant autonomy, they may interpret this as a weakness of their franchisor’s support. For franchisees with strong entrepreneurial identities, however, autonomy may be more motivational as it enables them to engage in behaviors consistent with their identity. For example, in times where job demands are high, they are able to think about workarounds and develop creative solutions – that is engage in the proactive and innovative behaviors that characterize the entrepreneur archetype (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2011). For franchisees who do not identify as entrepreneurs, however, autonomy might simply contribute to task ambiguity and may not be seen as a valued resource.

Thus, whilst autonomy as a form of job resource can have a motivational effect for entrepreneurs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), for non-

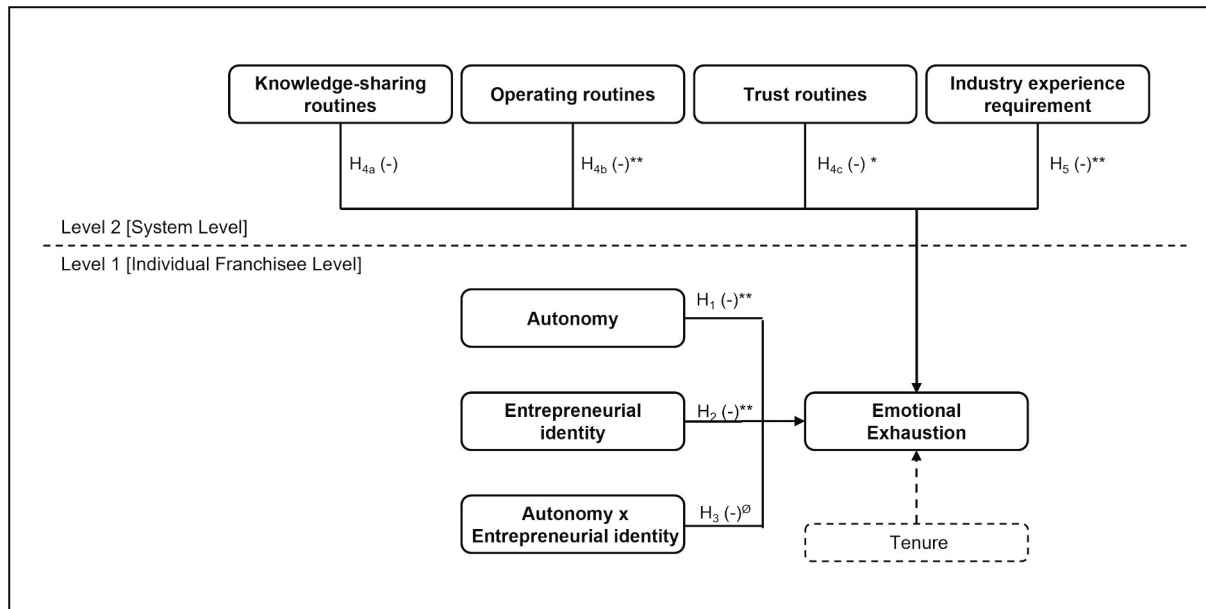


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model.

* $p \leq 0.10$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; ^o significant, but in opposite direction to that hypothesized.

entrepreneurs autonomy may be perceived as increasing job demands. Ultimately, the benefits of autonomy in terms of acting as a buffer against job demands and consequently emotional exhaustion will be particularly strong for franchisees who strongly identify as entrepreneurs, whereas they may be less pronounced for franchisees who identify less as entrepreneurs. We therefore propose:

H3. *Entrepreneurial identity moderates the relationship between perceived autonomy and emotional exhaustion such that under conditions of high (low) entrepreneurial identity, the negative relationship between perceived autonomy and emotional exhaustion is more (less) pronounced.*

4.4. The relationship between franchise management capabilities and emotional exhaustion

It has been suggested that job resources can be situated at the level of the organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), as it is the organization that often controls how work is managed (role clarity) and supported. Indeed, Maslach et al. (2001) highlight that the wider organizational context, its hierarchies, operating rules, and resources will all influence burnout. We thus consider how franchise management capabilities, as a form of job resource, impact emotional exhaustion. Franchise management capabilities refer to the “main cognitive, behavioral, and organizational routines that enable a franchisor to achieve both standardization and adaptation in working with franchisees” (Gillis et al., 2020, p. 5) and comprise three key dimensions, namely standard operating routines, knowledge-sharing routines, and trust routines.

Consistent with the alliance of management capability of communication, knowledge-sharing routines enable “information about what constitutes the most effective routines to be communicated to franchisees” and provide a “forum for communicating information quickly about local adaptations and solutions to common problems” (Gillis et al., 2020, p. 5). Thus, strong knowledge-sharing routines provide an important job resource in the form of instrumental support which can assist with task completion. Further, knowledge-sharing routines should lower job demands by reducing role ambiguity. Role ambiguity as a form of job demand (McDowell et al., 2019) is associated with emotional exhaustion (Parayitam et al., 2021). Knowledge-sharing routines should also promote learning and personal development, a form of job resource (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Standard operating routines are another form of job resource, as they are designed to help franchisees achieve work goals. By providing clear rules and procedures for franchisees to follow, they should also help reduce role ambiguity and enhance perceptions of competence and mastery, two factors which are deemed as important psychological constructs that positively impact well-being (Shir et al., 2019). However, they may also increase other forms of job demands, such as work pressure, and thus their impact on emotional exhaustion is less clear. Nevertheless, on balance as part of the wider evidence of franchise management capabilities, we propose they will favorably impact emotional exhaustion of franchisees.

The final franchise management capability is interfirm trust, which “...facilitates sharing knowledge and helps when franchisors need to persuade franchisees that changes to the system are in their best interest” (Gillis & Combs, 2009, p. 557). Organizational trust is considered a job resource as it can facilitate the achievement of work goals (Shantz & Alfes, 2015), primarily through its motivational effect (Karapinar et al., 2016), and has been found to reduce emotional exhaustion (Karapinar et al., 2016; Özgür & Tektaş, 2018). Trust routines, by helping ensure that franchisees feel supported, and improving franchisor-franchisee relationship quality, can provide an important job resource. Further, trust can help promote feelings of competence (Ergeneli et al., 2007) and thus reduce emotional exhaustion.

We therefore propose that franchise management capabilities, by providing franchisees with job resources, will negatively impact emotional exhaustion. Thus:

H4a. *Knowledge-sharing routines are negatively related to emotional exhaustion.*

H4b. *Operating routines are negatively related to emotional exhaustion.*

H4c. *Trust routines are negatively related to emotional exhaustion.*

4.5. The relationship between franchisee industry experience and emotional exhaustion

The JD-R model highlights the important role that job demands can play in contributing to burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Key here may be the role of expectations – if an individual misunderstands what a role entails, they may be unprepared for the job demands and risk

burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Franchisees with prior experience within the industry before joining the franchise system may be better prepared for the demands of the role, and thus their expectations are more aligned with the reality of franchisor requirements (Semrau & Biemann, 2022). As López-Fernández and López-Bayón (2018, p. 680) note, many franchisors require franchisees to have prior industry experience as “a means of ensuring that franchisees have some baseline level of expertise”. A requirement for prior industry knowledge by the franchise system should therefore help ensure that franchisees’ expectations will be more realistic, and that their perceived competency is strong which, as Fernet et al. (2013) argue, may play an important role in reducing burnout. Perceived self-efficacy is seen as an important component of psychological capital and a personal resource by which to cope with job demands (Baron et al., 2016; Dóci et al., 2023). Further, prior industry experience should ensure that franchisees have less role ambiguity, given they should have a clear understanding of what is required within the sector. We thus propose:

H5. *Franchisor requirement for prior industry experience will be negatively related to franchisee emotional exhaustion.*

5. Methodology

5.1. Data collection and sample

We chose the franchising sector in France as our empirical study context. In 2022, France had 1972 franchisors operating through a total of 84,497 franchised stores, generating an estimated 76.6 billion euros of total sales (French Franchise Federation, 2023). We collected two-level nested data in two stages. For the first stage, the sample was drawn from the directory of the French Franchise Federation. Franchise systems with at least three franchised stores were identified (593), and a questionnaire was sent to their top managers, along with a letter of introduction and a prepaid envelope for its return. We received 130 usable returns from franchisors, representing a response rate of 22 %, which is comparable with prior survey studies of franchisors (Gillis et al., 2014). To test for non-response bias, we compared respondents and non-respondents by their age, size, sector, and proportion of company-owned outlets. No significant differences ($p > 0.05$) were found between groups, suggesting that non-response bias is not a serious problem with our sample.

In the second stage, self-administered questionnaires were mailed to a sample of 5000 franchisees belonging to the 130 franchise systems from which completed franchisor surveys had been received. We received 768 completed and usable questionnaires, corresponding to an overall (weighted) average response rate of 15.36 %, which compares favorably with rates obtained in prior research (Deshpande & Tsai, 2021). Among the 768 respondents, 65.6 % of franchisees were male. The mean age was 45.5 years ($SD = 9.20$). A total of 26.3 % were multi-unit franchisees and 79.3 % had fewer than 11 employees. To estimate the likelihood of a non-response bias, we compared substantive variables for early and late respondents (Mumdzhev & Windsperger, 2011; Werner et al., 2007). No significant differences in the responses ($p > 0.05$) were found, which again suggests that non-response bias is not a major concern.

After matching franchisors with their franchisees using the survey’s code, systems with fewer than six replies were excluded, as models based on very small group sizes might fail to identify group-level effects (Theall et al., 2011). After this exclusion process, our final sample comprised 38 chains, and 348 franchisees, resulting in an average of 9.2 franchisees per chain (range = 6–18 franchisees), with the average age of the systems 21.95 years and the mean size 194.41 franchised units. The survey respondents covered a broad range of industries including retail, services and hospitality franchises.

5.2. Measures

Both surveys were administered in French. The measures were originally written in English and were then translated, with backward translation undertaken to ensure accuracy. The key properties of the constructs for both the franchisee level and the franchise system level (means, standard deviations, and correlations) are shown in Table 2.

5.2.1. Level 1 measures

Level 1 measures comprised two key constructs; *perceived autonomy* measured using a three-item adaptation of Cochet et al. (2008), and *entrepreneurial identity* measured by five items, including the additional item that Feng et al. (2022) introduced to the four items used by Murnieks et al. (2014). Our dependent variable was a level 1 measure – the emotional exhaustion of the franchisee – and was measured using the five-item version of Schaufeli et al.’s (1996) Maslach Burnout Inventory–General Survey (MBI-GS) following the approach taken by Vandenberghe et al. (2015). Reliability and validity of measures were in accordance with generally suggested thresholds, with Cronbach’s Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted exceeding 0.7, 0.6 and 0.5 (see Table 2). With correlations between all level 1 constructs being generally low and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) being met, discriminant validity is established. Given that franchisee-franchisor relationships undergo different life-cycle phases with implications also for autonomy perceptions (Blut et al., 2011), we included the tenure of the franchisee as a level 1 control variable, based on a self-reported measure of the number of years a franchisee had been in the system. The full set of items used (for level 1 and level 2) can be found in the appendix.

5.2.2. Level 2 measures

The level 2 data measures three franchisor management capabilities, *operating routines* (4 items), *knowledge-sharing routines* (4 items), and *trust routines* (3 items) adapted from Gillis et al. (2014). The emphasis given to *franchisee industry experience* as a recruitment criterion was measured using three items, adapted from Gillis et al. (2014). For the level 2 measures, reliability and validity checks were also run, suggesting that all measures are reliable (see Table 2). Analogous to the level 1 constructs, discriminant validity was established also for the level 2 measures, drawing on the approach suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

5.3. Analytical approach

Given that franchisees belong to a particular franchise system and its management capabilities, our franchisee data is nested. In such cases of clustering of micro-units in macro-units, observations are not independent from each other, which would deem ordinary regression approaches not appropriate (e.g., Snijders & Bosker, 2012). To test our conceptual model, we therefore estimated a two-level random intercept model (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) which we implemented using the Linear Mixed Models procedure provided by IBM SPSS Statistics 26. The literature suggests assessing the necessity of following a multilevel approach by calculating the Design Effect (DEFF). In our sample, a Design Effect of 1.2 did not point towards sufficiently large variation of our dependent variable emotional exhaustion between the 38 systems (Muthén & Satorra, 1995). However, simulation analysis results suggest that even when the threshold of a DEFF > 2 does not hold, statistical approaches considering clustering of the data should still be applied, namely in cases where higher-level predictors are of interest or where cluster sizes of less than 10 occur (Lai & Kwok, 2015). However, with the strong conceptual case for investigating franchisee-level data through a two-level lens, consideration of clustering through a two-level approach seems warranted. Our model thus comprises four franchisor-level predictors with an average cluster size of 9.2 within our sample. To account for the relatively small sample size, in particular at level 1, as well as

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics, Correlations and Psychometric Properties.

Variables	Mean (SD)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Level 2: Franchise Systems								
(1) Knowledge sharing routines	5.92 (0.730)	1						
(2) Operating routines	5.60 (1.09)	0.035	1					
(3) Trust routines	5.71 (0.68)	0.430***	0.145	1				
(4) Industry experience	3.95 (1.59)	−0.169	−0.355**	−0.221	1			
Level 1: Franchisees								
(5) Emotional Exhaustion	3.17 (1.34)	.049 ^{n.s.}	.018 ^{n.s.}	−.052 ^{n.s.}	−0.173***	1		
(6) Autonomy	5.15 (1.39)	−.036 ^{n.s.}	−.102 ^{n.s.}	.086 ^{n.s.}	.034 ^{n.s.}	−0.158***	1	
(7) Entrepreneurial Identity	5.79 (1.01)	−.085 ^{n.s.}	.052 ^{n.s.}	−.015 ^{n.s.}	−.046 ^{n.s.}	−0.169***	0.133**	1
(8) Tenure (# of years)	8.2 (6.11)	−.084 ^{n.s.}	−0.224***	.016 ^{n.s.}	0.140***	−0.084	−0.029	0.022
Cronbach's Alpha		0.830	0.830	0.789	0.780	0.895	0.689	0.862
Composite Reliability		0.924	0.901	0.871	0.872	0.924	0.836	0.910
Average Variance Extracted		0.784	0.705	0.576	0.695	0.709	0.630	0.671

some variation between cluster sizes, model computation was based on a restricted maximum likelihood approach with Kenward-Roger adjustment (Garson, 2020).

6. Results

Table 3 shows the results from the two-level regression. Consistent with hypothesis H1, franchisee autonomy perceptions have a significant and negative impact on emotional exhaustion ($b = -0.138$, $p = 0.010$). Similarly, entrepreneurial identity has a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion ($b = -0.168$, $p = 0.018$), thus supporting H2. The moderating effect between perceived autonomy and entrepreneurial identity is also significant ($b = 0.105$, $p = 0.019$). However, in contrast to our expected relationship (H3), we find that the negative effect of perceived autonomy on emotional exhaustion is weakened by entrepreneurial identity, as indicated by the positive interaction coefficient. Fig. 2 provides a graphical representation of the interaction effects for different moderator levels using the interActive utility developed by McCabe et al. (2018). Looking at the graphs from left to right (that is, as entrepreneurial identity increases from two standard deviations below the mean, to two standard deviations above the mean), it can be seen that the intercept with emotional exhaustion is lower as identification increases, confirming the negative relationship between entrepreneurial self-identification and emotional exhaustion. It can also be seen that for all levels of entrepreneurial identity, emotional exhaustion reduces as perceived autonomy increases, but autonomy has a greater (negative) effect on emotional exhaustion when entrepreneurial identity is low. This suggests that entrepreneurial identity is the primary predictor of emotional exhaustion. Thus, support is only found for hypotheses H1 and H2 pertaining to level 1 data.

Table 3
Linear Mixed-Model.

Predictor (DV: Emotional Exhaustion)		Coefficient	t-ratio
Level 1 direct effects			
Autonomy	H ₁	−0.138	−2.635**
Entrepreneurial identity	H ₂	−0.168	−2.370**
Autonomy x Entrepreneurial identity	H ₃	0.105	2.356**
Level 1 control variable			
Tenure		−0.019	−1.608
Level 2 direct effects			
Knowledge sharing routines	H _{4a}	0.097	0.857
Operating routines	H _{4b}	−0.154	−2.132**
Trust routines	H _{4c}	−0.215	−1.859*
Industry experience requirement	H ₅	−0.212	−4.052***

* $p < 0.1$.

** $p < 0.05$.

*** $p < 0.01$.

Hypothesis H4 explored the impact of franchisor management capabilities (level 2). Here, the results are mixed. Operating routines (H4b) are found to have a negative and significant impact on emotional exhaustion ($b = -0.154$, $p = 0.042$). The impact of trust routines (H4c) is also negative, but only of marginal significance ($b = -0.215$, $p = 0.078$). Knowledge-sharing routines (H4a) have no significant impact, however. Thus, we found support for H4b and H4c, but not H4a. The negative coefficient for industry experience as a selection criterion ($b = -0.212$, $p = 0.000$) was in keeping with hypothesis H5 – systems who favored franchisees with prior industry experience had lower levels of emotional exhaustion than those who did not.

7. Discussion and conclusion

Our findings provide novel insights into the entrepreneurship debate within franchising. Whilst previous studies have considered how the entrepreneurial identity and behaviors of franchisees effect performance outcomes at both franchised unit and system levels, this is the first study, to the authors' knowledge, to consider the impact on franchisee well-being. Indeed, franchisee well-being has received scant attention. By examining how both individual values (entrepreneurial identity) and organizational factors simultaneously impact well-being, we respond to Stephan's (2018) call for more research to combine these two domains.

We find that the entrepreneurial identity of franchisees is negatively related with emotional exhaustion. This perhaps suggests that the personal resources associated with entrepreneurs help mitigate the limitations to autonomy that entrepreneurs may find frustrating within franchise systems. For example, it has been suggested that entrepreneurs possess psychological capital, which means they are better able to cope with work-related stress (Ross et al., 2021). This positive association between entrepreneurial identity and mental well-being therefore suggests that entrepreneurial values may act as a personal resource that helps individuals manage their job demands (Baron et al., 2016).

Just as entrepreneurial identity has a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion, so too does perceived autonomy. Our results suggest that the greater the limit to franchisees' autonomy, the greater their emotional exhaustion. This finding is in keeping with other studies of burnout/emotional exhaustion in other settings and would suggest, like employees and entrepreneurs, autonomy plays an important role in the well-being of franchisees (Kachanoff et al., 2019; Parker, 2003). Interestingly, we find that the presence of strong operating routines also negatively impacts franchisee emotional exhaustion, such that those franchisees in systems with clear operating routines on average experienced less emotional exhaustion. This finding may seem counterintuitive given operating routines may be seen as limiters to franchisee autonomy, but clear operating routines can provide franchisees with a strong direction, steer them in their decision-making, and set clear

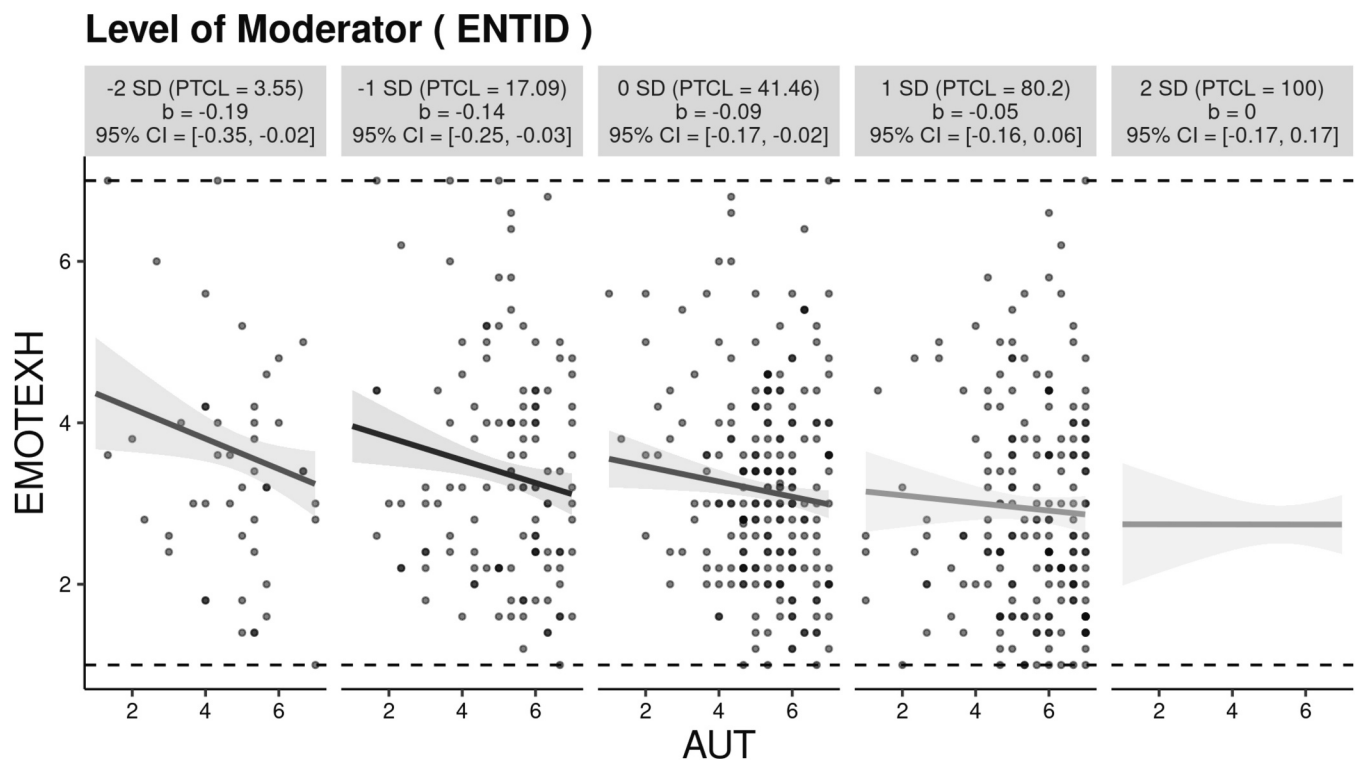


Fig. 2. Interaction between autonomy and entrepreneurial identity.

boundaries, thus reducing role ambiguity. The presence of strong operating routines, by reducing job demands, may ensure that franchisees do not feel overwhelmed, whilst giving them a sense of control to meet their psychological needs (Lauto et al., 2020). Furthermore, whilst operating routines may seem to suggest limited autonomy, they may pertain to specific tasks. Thus, whilst they effect task autonomy (that is, the discretion individuals are given to complete a specific task), their impact on job autonomy (that is, the overall level of discretion across the range of tasks associated with a job role) is less clear. As Langfred and Moye (2004) note, a job comprises multiple tasks and the level of autonomy given for each task may vary. Indeed, within the franchising context, researchers have found that there are variances in the latitude franchisees are given in decision-making rights across a number of areas, such as pricing, human resource management, and merchandising (López-Bayón & López-Fernández, 2016). It is possible therefore that strong operating routines may still enable autonomy in tasks where franchisees value discretion.

It is also important to note the interactive effect we found between autonomy and entrepreneurial identity. As highlighted by Langfred and Moye (2004), individuals may differ in the level of autonomy they find desirable, with entrepreneurs placing greater importance on autonomy compared with non-entrepreneurs (Feng et al., 2022). Contrary to our expectations, we find that the negative impact of autonomy on emotional exhaustion is less strong for individuals who identify more strongly as entrepreneurs, i.e., higher levels of autonomy have a less marked impact on emotional exhaustion for franchisees with strong entrepreneurial identities. This suggests that the buffering effect of autonomy in reducing the impact of job demands on emotional exhaustion (Bakker et al., 2005) may be less for franchisees with strong entrepreneurial identities, perhaps because they possess the greater psychological resources attributed to entrepreneurs, and these psychological resources have a stronger safeguarding effect against emotion exhaustion than autonomy. It is also perhaps worth noting that the franchisee sample on average strongly self-identified as entrepreneurs (mean 5.79). Thus, our data may not fully uncover how franchisees with a weak entrepreneurial identity respond to high levels of autonomy.

Contrary to our expectations, system-level knowledge-sharing routines do not seem to affect franchisees' emotional exhaustion. One potential explanation for this is that whilst, as hypothesized, knowledge-sharing routines provide opportunities for franchisees to innovate and share information about effective routines (Gillis et al., 2014) (i.e., they provide important job resources), they may also create additional job demands for franchisees. Knowledge-sharing routines, such as Franchisee Advisory Councils or regional and national meetings where ideas are shared, or training and dissemination activities (Gillis et al., 2014; Watson, Dada, et al., 2020; Watson, Senyard, & Dada, 2020), all require additional time resource from franchisees. For some franchisees, these routines can be seen as an additional burden to the already stretching demands of day-to-day operations (Watson, Dada, et al., 2020; Watson, Senyard, & Dada, 2020). Indeed, Zhang et al. (2022) suggest that knowledge sharing can be seen as time consuming, and thus increases job demands.

7.1. Contributions to the literature

Overall, our findings make a number of contributions. By exploring emotional exhaustion in the context of a hybrid organizational form, that of franchising, we provide an important extension to the well-being literature, which has tended to focus on traditional hierarchical employee contexts or independent entrepreneurs. Whilst the B2B literature has explored well-being among salespeople (Ambrose et al., 2014; Childs et al., 2024), by exploring emotional exhaustion of franchisees, we extend our understanding of factors that influence well-being in other boundary spanning B2B job role contexts. Further, Stephan et al. (2023) highlight there is a need for an improved understanding of drivers of mental well-being for different types of entrepreneurs, beyond necessity and opportunity entrepreneurs. By focusing on franchisees as quasi-entrepreneurs, we respond to this call. Franchisees are neither employees nor fully independent entrepreneurs, and thus experience particular tensions between their quest for autonomy and the franchisors' desire for uniformity. This study provides new insights into how these tensions may impact franchisee well-being.

Our two-level analysis enables us to simultaneously explore the level 1 drivers and the organizational context on emotional exhaustion and develop an understanding of how system level management capabilities affect an individual's emotional exhaustion. Given franchise systems vary considerably in their management approaches (Evanschitzky et al., 2016; Gillis et al., 2020), it is important to consider both level 1 and level 2 effects. Yet, as Stephan (2018) comments, studies of entrepreneurs that have considered both individual and work characteristics are sparse.

Our study highlights the nature of well-being as a concept primarily situated at the individual franchisee level, rather than the system level. However, even though only a relatively small share of variance of franchisee-perceived well-being is located at the organizational level, recruitment practices and franchisor management capabilities (operating routines and, with marginal significance, trust routines) have been identified as significant organizational-level antecedents of franchisee well-being.

7.2. Managerial implications

A number of studies have highlighted the importance of franchisee selection on outcomes such as franchisor-franchisee disputes and relationship quality, franchisee satisfaction, and system and unit performance (Jambulingam & Nevin, 1999). Our study provides insights into two areas of contention with respect to recruitment criteria – the extent to which franchisees possess entrepreneurial traits and whether they should have prior industry experience. By focusing on an important contributor to mental well-being, emotional exhaustion, our research provides new insights into how franchisors may benefit from recruiting franchisees who self-identify as entrepreneurs. We find that franchisees who consider themselves to be entrepreneurs experience less emotional exhaustion than those who do not. Given the associated benefits of mental well-being on work related outcomes (Kim et al., 2018), this suggests that franchisors should consider the extent to which franchisees possess entrepreneurial traits as part of their recruitment criteria.

We also find that franchisees who are part of systems that value franchisees with prior industry experience and include this as part of their criteria, experience less emotional exhaustion. It has been suggested that franchisors can be hesitant to recruit franchisees with prior industry experience, as they may have strong convictions as to how tasks should be completed or developed habits and norms that are not compatible with the franchise systems' culture and processes (Semrau & Biemann, 2022). Our findings, however, suggest that franchisors would benefit from applying past industry experience as a favorable franchisee attribute in their recruitment process.

Our research also highlights the importance of established operating routines for franchisee well-being. Gillis and Combs (2009) note that plural form systems with franchised and company-owned units tend to emphasize knowledge-exchange routines over operating routines and provide franchisees with more autonomy, whilst wholly franchised chains tend to place more emphasis on operating routines and standardization. Our results suggest that across the various types of systems, well developed operating routines will promote franchisee well-being. Similarly, autonomy has a positive impact on mental well-being. While actual system-level procedures and practices should conceptually play a key role in shaping franchisee autonomy perceptions, not all routines may equally influence autonomy perceptions. For example, for more routine or mundane tasks, strict operating procedures may simply reduce job demands and not influence overall autonomy perceptions. This suggests, even in the context of highly standardized chains, franchisors should carefully consider where task autonomy can be granted to ensure that overall job autonomy is maximized within the confines of the standardized system.

7.3. Limitations and future research

It should be noted that our results are derived from a single country context (France) and one that has been characterized as having a relatively low entrepreneurial culture (Watson, Dada, et al., 2020; Watson, Senyard, & Dada, 2020). This represents a potential limitation of the study, as it is possible that, compared with other cultures such as the US or UK, French franchisees are less likely to self-identify as entrepreneurs. It may be that for very high levels of entrepreneurial identity, the results may differ. Whilst we find that emotional exhaustion decreases with entrepreneurial identity, it is possible that the relationship is non-linear and that, beyond a certain point, the restrictions that the franchise system places could create frustrations and conflicts leading to emotional exhaustion for highly entrepreneurial individuals. There is also evidence that the relationship between autonomy and mental well-being may also differ in different cultural contexts. For example, Guo et al. (2023) find that the negative relationship between job autonomy and burnout is stronger for individuals from cultures with lower power distance orientation (PDO) than those from higher PDO. Thus, it would be interesting for future studies to consider different cultural contexts to see if the effects differ. Relatedly, given the relatively small cluster size of our sample at level 1, a note of caution is warranted in terms of the generalizability of the study results.

It should also be noted that in our study we focused on job autonomy, that is the overall perception of the extent to which franchisees felt they had decision-making power. It could be interesting to explore task autonomy and, in particular, whether there are specific tasks where autonomy is more important to franchisees in terms of their mental well-being. It may be that some areas of decision-making are important in terms of franchisees' self-identity or in providing franchisees with a sense of control. For example, franchisees may consider some areas of decision rights as more critical in terms of their ability to meet local market conditions (for example pricing, or labor decisions), whereas in other areas they may be more content to follow franchisor prescribed routines (merchandising). There is some evidence that, depending on the type of decision rights, franchisees may respond differently. For instance, López-Bayón and López-Fernández (2016) found a differential impact of pricing, labor, merchandising, and local advertising decision rights allocation on franchisor-franchisee disputes. Further, it would be interesting to consider how franchise management capabilities affect franchisee autonomy and the interactive effects on emotional exhaustion.

Whilst a number of studies have compared mental well-being between employees and entrepreneurs (Rahim, 1996; Stephan et al., 2023), as well as different types of entrepreneurs (opportunity compared to necessity entrepreneurs) (Nikolova, 2019), no study to our knowledge has yet compared the mental well-being of franchisees to employees or independent entrepreneurs. It could be interesting to see how they compare. Stephan et al. (2023) suggest that there have been conflicting arguments on the impact of entrepreneurship on well-being compared with employees. On the one hand, the greater autonomy and independence that entrepreneurs experience promotes well-being, whilst on the other the greater uncertainty they face and higher workload may be detrimental to mental health (Stephan et al., 2023). It might be that franchising could potentially represent a "sweet spot", by providing social support through the network, greater autonomy (compared to employees), reduced risk (compared to independent entrepreneurs), and potentially fewer job demands (compared with entrepreneurs). This could also be extended to consider different forms of well-being. Here, we have focused on emotional exhaustion, but there are other potential dimensions to well-being, both positive and negative, and physical as well as mental (Stephan et al., 2023).

It is our hope that our study of franchisee well-being inspires further work in this neglected area, enabling deeper understanding of factors influencing mental well-being in this important B2B context.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Anna Watson: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Christof Backhaus:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Methodology, Formal analysis,

Conceptualization. **Assaad El Akremi:** Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Karim Mignonac:** Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Rozenn Perrigot:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration.

Appendix 1. Scales and factor loadings

Construct	Item	Factor loading	Source
Level 1			
Autonomy	I make most of the decisions affecting the operation of my franchised unit myself	0.79	Adaptation from Cochet et al. (2008)
	I have the opportunity to have a great deal of influence on the quality level of the services and/or products I sell	0.83	
Entrepreneurial Identity	My franchisor leaves me free to implement my own ideas and try my own methods	0.76	Feng et al. (2022) Adapted from Murnieks et al. (2014)
	I define myself as an entrepreneur	0.80	
	Being an entrepreneur is an important part of who I am	0.88	
Emotional exhaustion	It is obvious to me that I am an entrepreneur, I don't even ask myself the question anymore	0.87	Schaufeli et al. (1996)
	I would really miss it if, for some reason, I was no longer an entrepreneur	0.79	
	Being an entrepreneur is very often at the heart of my thoughts	0.75	
	I feel exhausted after a day of work	0.80	
	When I get up in the morning and have to face a new work day, I feel tired	0.88	
	My work exhausts me	0.87	
	My work frustrates me	0.79	
	I feel like I am at the "end of my rope"	0.75	
Level 2			
Operating routines	In our network, unit performance depends heavily on strict adherence to procedures	0.78	Adapted from Gillis et al. (2014)
	We have a precise set of written procedures that must be rigorously followed by our franchisees and unit managers	0.77	
	When our franchisees or unit managers follow our procedures to the letter, success is usually achieved	0.75	
	When our franchisees or unit managers deviate from a strict application of our procedures, they are generally less successful	0.75	
Knowledge- sharing routines	If one of our franchisees finds a better way to do things, we are quickly informed	0.72	Adapted from Gillis et al. (2014)
	Our franchisees help us identify and develop good ideas	0.90	
Trust routines	Our franchisees share their information and knowledge of the field with us	0.90	Adapted from Gillis et al. (2014)
	We encourage our franchisees to freely share their ideas with us	0.74	
	We maintain a fair and equitable relationship with our franchisees	0.74	
Franchisee industry experience	We do not need to monitor our franchisees closely because they generally behave honestly	0.70	Adapted from Gillis et al. (2014)
	We and our franchisees trust each other	0.85	
	Our franchisees willingly put aside the purely contractual aspects of our relationship to cooperate with us	0.72	
	We and our franchisees are generally honest and truthful with each other	0.78	
	We prefer to hire franchisees who have no professional experience in our industry (R)	0.80	
	We place a high value on our franchisees having previous experience in our industry	0.84	
	It does not matter whether or not our franchisees have previous experience in our industry (R)	0.85	

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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