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## **An overview of Fiji's retail franchising climate**

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**Abstract:** The paper examines the retail franchising climate in Fiji, a small island country of the South Pacific region. This paper in particular discusses the various arrangements in which franchises operate in Fiji and will set the scene for Fiji's retail franchise system. There is a lot of potential for franchises to prosper in Fiji if they do it right. Fiji is a growing market with opportunities that many businesses can take advantage of and exploit. The present government has also made positive changes to some of its laws so that businesses can operate better. This study has found that despite the Fiji Government encouraging the growth of franchise industry, there is absence of an entity or a franchise association that could collect, store and maintain proper records of the franchise industry in Fiji.

**Keywords:** traditional franchising; business format franchising; multi-unit franchising; retail franchising; retail; Fiji.

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## 1 Introduction

Franchising has become a popular business format among many entrepreneurs. Franchising is no longer an unfamiliar concept in Fiji. Over the years, Fiji has seen a number of global franchise brands entering her shores, of which some survived and some closed down. A few of the identified reasons for franchise closure in Fiji will be discussed in this article.

This paper is the first of a series of publication that will focus on the retail franchising climate in Fiji. This paper is the first of its kind to look at retail franchising in a developing country like Fiji and clearly highlights the gaps in literature as it contributes to the creation of new knowledge whereby retail franchising in Fiji has not been previously studied. Literature is enormously focused on retail franchising in developed countries with little to no information on how franchises perform in developing countries especially in the South Pacific. Scholars are encouraged to explore this area and compare franchise performance in the South Pacific with franchises globally.

The content of this paper is descriptive given that it is based on the authors' observations, literature review and study of Fiji's economy. Despite the Fiji Government encourages the growth of franchise industry, there is absence of an entity or a franchise association that could collect, store and maintain proper records of franchise industry in Fiji. This paper will particularly discuss the various arrangements in which franchises operate in Fiji and will set the scene for Fiji's retail franchise system.

Fiji is one of the most developed island nations in the Pacific and is considered the hub of the South Pacific region due to the large amount of economic activity happening in the country given its small size and recent upgrades in infrastructure. Its positioning on the global frontier gives the country an added advantage to enjoy excellent connectivity with the rest of the world. Fiji is said to be entering a 'Golden Age', with a gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 3.8% forecasted as of June 2017 (Reserve Bank of Fiji, 2017) which saw a 1.8% increase from 2016 (Reserve Bank of Fiji, 2016). The increase in GDP is mainly attributed to manufacturing, financial and insurance activities, construction, wholesale and retail trade, and transport and storage sectors, whilst lending for investment and consumption has increased significantly as well.

The tourism industry has become Fiji's largest source of foreign exchange in comparison to other industries such as sugar, fisheries, garments, forestry and remittance receipts. The industry is mainly private sector driven and has grown substantially over the past few decades. Tourism contributes approximately 17.0% to GDP and provides direct

and indirect employment to around 40,000 people. Tourism is therefore a critical pillar of the economy (Investment Fiji, 2017).

The Honourable Minister for Tourism, Mr. Faiyaz Koya had declared that Fiji is “open for businesses and said Fiji is the ideal base for investors who want to access the wider Pacific market of more than 10 million people” (The Worldfolio, 2015). The Starwood/Sheraton resort franchise is an example of innovativeness and value addition to attract customers. The resort has expanded its operations to Tokoriki Island where customers accommodated at the Sheraton can take advantage of watersports at Tokoriki Island. Hence, this paves way for other franchises in the retail sector to be innovative through their product and service offering.

It is evident that more and more investors are starting-up businesses in the country, franchises being one of them where local businessmen acquire franchisee rights from the franchisor and are able to operate the global brand in Fiji. McDonalds, Burger King, Fatburger, Nando's, Gloria Jeans Coffees, Chatime, Donut King, Hard Rock Café, Avis Rent a Car, Marriott International Hotel, Hilton Hotel, etc. are some of the global franchises operating in Fiji. These are both product and service oriented franchises.

## **2 Franchising concept in Fiji**

Franchising has emerged since the last decade as a highly significant strategy for business growth, job creation, and economic development both in the USA and in world markets (Preble and Hoffman, 2006). No doubt, franchises in Fiji are making themselves visible with more outlets of existing franchisees opening in the country and new franchise brands tapping into the Fiji economy. The leading sectors of franchising growth globally have been in the line of restaurants, retailing and hotels.

The International Franchise Association, which represents franchising worldwide, aims to protect, enhance and promote franchising by working through government relations and public policy, media relations and educational programs (Beshel, 2010).

Berg and Friedman (1980), Blair and Lafontaine (2005) and Carney and Gedajlovic (1991) cited in Evanschitzky et al. (2016, p.1) stated that “franchising was common in sectors where organisations need to operate through diffused distribution networks with outlets that are located close to customers and managed by individuals with local knowledge.” This is true in the case of Fiji where franchisees are mostly situated in shopping malls or part of office buildings in the central business districts (CBDs) of major towns and cities and are mostly managed by local businessmen or immigrants. The capital Suva, for example, has McDonalds, one of the oldest and successful operating franchises, housed in the renowned old Regal theatre building while franchises like Donut King, Fatburger, Chatime and Gloria Jeans Coffees are operating in the famous shopping malls – MHCC, Tappoo City and Damodar City. These locations are advantageous for the franchises because they are easily accessible by high volumes of customers on foot and even those customers that use public or private transportation. New developments taking place, for example, upgrading of the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) complex pocketed another Gloria Jeans Coffees outlet while the upgrading of the Telecom Fiji Limited building has Burger King operating its first outlet in Suva. These infrastructural developments will further boost the franchise industry in the country.

Looking at the western division, a few of the franchises Nadi has, are Burger King which is centrally located, Hard Rock Café in the popular Port Denarau, newly renovated McDonalds and renowned franchise hotels like Hilton Fiji Resort and Spa, Radisson Blu Resort, Fiji Marriott Resort, etc. Due to the popularity of the locations of these hotel franchises and food/beverage franchises in the western division, tourists and locals are attracted in large numbers. Additionally, the Nadi International Airport which is the main and largest airport in Fiji, had a recent FJ \$80 million facelift to bring it to par with international airports around the world and is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities (Devi, 2014). The airport has the popular rental car company franchise – Avis Rent a Car catering for tourists and local travellers. In Lautoka City, the newly built FJ \$30 million (US \$16 million) development of the Tappoo City Lautoka shopping mall (Dowling, 2017) which opened its doors to businesses and customers in early 2017 also aimed to increase franchise outlets like Gloria Jeans Coffees in Fiji. Lautoka now has its first Gloria Jeans Coffees situated in the Tappoo City mall making it easier for coffee lovers in Lautoka and nearby areas who previously had to come all the way to Suva to enjoy Gloria Jeans Coffees. More economic developments are taking place in nearly all parts of Fiji, for example, Tappoo City mall is currently under construction in Labasa in Vanua Levu and is likely to have franchise outlets there too. More focus is needed on Sigatoka, which has a few hotel franchises like Shangri-la Fijian Resort, Ba and Rakiraki to increase the scope and connectivity of franchises with its customers in Fiji.

## 2.1 *Traditional franchising*

The US Department of Commerce classifies franchising into two categories – traditional and business format franchising (Boyle, 2002). Hoffman and Prebles (1993) cited in Boyle (2002) stated that traditional franchising involves using franchisees to distribute a product under a franchisor’s trademark and it is commonly found among oil companies/gasoline service stations, automobile dealerships and soft drink bottlers. Some of the examples in Fiji are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** List of traditional franchising companies in Fiji

<i>Oil companies</i>
• Mobil Exxon
• Total S.A.
• Pacific Energy (formerly known as BP SWP Ltd.)

Additionally, a few of these automobile dealerships are franchisees of global rental car franchises, for example, Asco Motors is a franchisee of Avis Rent a Car, Niranjans is a franchisee of Budget Rent a Car and Palas is a franchisee of Europcar rentals trading as Perfect Auto Rentals (PAR) Ltd. Since these rental car brands are renowned globally, they are conveniently located in the country for consumer usage and are also situated at the Nadi International Airport along with Hertz Car Rentals to attract tourists and be a preferred rental car choice for consumers.

Traditional franchising may be regarded essentially as a distribution arrangement through which the manufacturers (the franchisor) ensure that there are sufficient outlets to sell their products over a wide geographical area (Boyle, 2002). However, Blair and Lafontaine (2005) stated that traditional franchising also known as ‘product and trade

name franchising' is declining with most of the decline being attributed to gasoline station closings. Beshel (2010) also agrees that traditional franchises also known as 'product distribution franchises' represent the largest percentage of total retail sales but most franchises available today are business format opportunities.

However, Fiji has a good number of oil companies as well as automobile dealerships who are doing considerably well as reflected in the examples provided above. Despite the country's small geographical size, Fiji is doing well in terms of traditional franchising. Household consumers, for example, have their own preferences when it comes to buying automobiles. Since the automobile brands in traditional franchising are brand new-high quality-zero mileage vehicles, consumers are beginning to own more and more of these. High price remains an issue given the regulations on duty/taxes in the country, however, the government has reduced duty from 15% to 5% on brand new vehicles with engine capacity not exceeding 2,500 cc (Lal, 2016b). Car dealers selling these renowned brands have also shown flexibility in terms of hire purchase agreements and bank loans in order to allow consumers to buy their 'dream' car. In Fiji, owning a brand new car is usually within the means of high class societal people only and it remains a dream for middle income earners to own and drive a renowned brand car. Hence, automobile dealers have partnered with banks to provide people with loans to assist them to purchase brand new cars. Alongside the positive changes in duty regulations in Fiji, owning a brand new car may now seem within the reach of middle income earners.

In contrast, business consumers are able to afford these branded vehicles and almost all businesses in Fiji have renowned brand cars as part of their company vehicle fleet. The government however, usually leases these branded vehicles from the car dealers for their use. For example, the Fiji Police Force received 133 brand new Chevrolets on lease from Vision Motors to boost its operations (Panapasa, 2014) while Asco Motors leased 340 brand new Toyota vehicles to the government that are used across all government ministries (Valemei, 2015).

Furthermore, Fiji rarely has soft drink bottlers who import finished products and sell them in the local market. However, renowned soft drink brands like Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Foster's beer are manufactured locally in a business format franchising arrangement by Coca-Cola Amatil (Fiji) Ltd., Tappoo Group of Companies and Foster's Group Pacific Ltd. [now known as Paradise Beverages (Fiji) Ltd. – a subsidiary of Coca-Cola Amatil (Fiji) Ltd.], respectively.

Traditional franchising involves dealers that concentrate on a particular company's product line and identify their own business with that company (Blair and Lafontaine, 2005). These companies become the authorised dealers of the brand and have "specific territorial assignments and monetary obligations to franchisors based on gross margins" (Badrinarayanan et al., 2016). For example, the Ford dealer in Fiji, Shreedhar Motors, is identified as the sole distributor of Ford automobiles in the country. Traditional franchising is the oldest form of modern franchising where the franchisor is a manufacturer who sells finished or semi-finished products to its dealers/franchisees and in turn the franchisees resell these products to consumers or other firms in the distribution chain (Blair and Lafontaine, 2005). Since the franchisor's products are sold to its franchisees, the franchisor profits from its dealer network flow through the mark-up it earns on these products. As such, traditional franchisees do not pay running royalties on their sales (Blair and Lafontaine, 2005).

## 2.2 Business format franchising

Business format franchising is “the kind of franchising where the relationship between the franchisor and franchisee includes not only the product, service, and trademark, but the entire business format itself – a marketing strategy and plan, operating manuals and standards, quality control, and continuing two-way communication” [Lafontaine, (1992), p.264]. Beshel (2010, p.6) stated that “business format franchises are the most common type of franchise”, and according to *USA Today*, the ten most popular franchising opportunities are in industries such as fast food, service, restaurants, building and construction, business services, retail, automotive, maintenance, retail – food and lodging (Beshel, 2010). Badrinarayanan et al. (2016, p.3944) further assert that business format franchising is where “franchisees perform business functions in strict adherence with operating instructions stipulated by franchisors and pay various royalties and fees in return.”

Business format franchises in Fiji comprise of all franchisees operating in the larger retail sector (such as fast food, beverages, service, restaurants, lodging, etc.) except for oil companies and automobile dealerships. Some of the known business format franchises in Fiji are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2** Automobile dealerships and lubes (sole brand distributors in Fiji)

Carpenters Motors	Honda, Hyundai, Isuzu, Nissan, Caterpillar (CAT) plant and machinery and UD trucks
Eurocars (subsidiary of Niranjans Automotive Group)	BMW, Land Rover
Kia Motors (subsidiary of Tappoo Group)	Kia vehicles (sedan/SUVs/hatchbacks)
Mahindra CarCity (subsidiary of Tappoo Group)	Mahindra vehicles
Niranjans Automotive Group	Mazda, Hino, Komatsu and Suzuki
Nivis Motors	Mitsubishi, Fuso trucks and Kubota plant and machinery
Palas Automotive Group	Volkswagen, Jeep, Dodge, Chrysler, Fiat, Perodua, JCB plant and machinery, Hangcha forklifts, GT tyre and Monroe shocks
Shreedhar Motors	Ford, Subaru and Zhongtong coaches
Toyota Tsusho (South Seas) Ltd. Trading as Asco Motors	Toyota, Yamaha marine products, Massey Ferguson tractors, Bridgestone Tyres, Kobe batteries
Vision Motors	Chevrolet, Peugeot, Maxus, Sino trucks and Dongfeng trucks

Note: These manufacturer-authorized car dealers stock genuine parts/accessories and have service centres for the branded vehicles they distribute in Fiji.

Business format franchising is growing globally as well as in Fiji. It is an increasingly important form of entrepreneurial wealth creation and countries like the USA, Australia and Germany have majority of their retail sales generated from franchises (Croonen et al., 2014). In Fiji, the wholesale and retail trade statistics from the Fiji Bureau of Statistics for the September quarter of 2017 showed that total wholesale and retail trade sales stood at \$984.6 million. Total sales rose by 1.9% (\$18.8 m) when compared to the September quarter of 2016 due to an increase in the sale of motor vehicle and alcoholic beverages. Total sales rose by 0.7% (\$7.2 m) when compared to the June quarter of 2017 due to an increase in the sale of hardware material and alcoholic beverages (Devi, 2018).

Therefore, it is evident that the retail sector contributes significantly to the economic growth and development of Fiji.

2.3 *Single-unit vs. multi-unit franchising – which one is common in Fiji?*

Single-unit (direct-unit) franchising is the simplest and most common type of franchise, and is likely the oldest form of commercial franchising (Daszkowski, 2017). It is possible however, for a franchisee to purchase additional single-unit franchises once the original franchise unit begins to prosper. This is then considered a multiple, single-unit relationship.

On the other hand, multi-unit franchising is when the franchisee is granted the right to open and operate more than one franchise unit (Beshel, 2010). The multi-unit franchise is focused on:

- 1 area development
- 2 master franchise (sub-franchising).

Firstly, the *area development franchise* is where a franchisee has the right to open more than one unit during a specific time and within a specified area. For example, a franchisee may agree to open five units over a five year period in a specified territory. The franchisor grants the franchisee exclusive rights for the development of that territory. Secondly, a *master franchise* agreement gives the franchisee more rights than an area development agreement. In addition to having the right and obligation to open and operate a certain number of units in a defined area, the master franchisee also has the right to sell franchises to other people within the territory, known as sub-franchises. Therefore, the master franchisee takes over many of the tasks, duties and benefits of the franchisor, such as providing support and training, as well as receiving fees and royalties.

**Table 3** List of business format franchising companies in Fiji

<i>Type</i>	<i>Example</i>
Fast food	McDonalds, Burger King, Fatburger and Chicken Express
Beverages	Gloria Jeans Coffees, Chatime, Donut King, Esquires Coffee House, Lavazza Café, Moochi, Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Foster's beer
Service	Hertz, Avis Rent a Car, Budget Rent a Car, Rentokil Initial Ltd. and Supercuts
Restaurants	Nandos, BBQ Chicken, Hard Rock Café, Sitar Restaurant & Bar and Eagle Boys Pizza
Lodging	Radisson Blu Resort Fiji, Intercontinental Hotels, Shangri-la Fiji Resort, Holiday Inn, Novotel, Fiji Marriott Hotel, Hilton Fiji Resort & Spa, Double Tree Resort, The Westin Denarau Island Resort & Spa, Sheraton Fiji Resort, Nanuku Auberge Resort and Studio 6
Other retail	New World IGA, WH Smith, Missha Fiji, Diadora and The Hot Bread Kitchen

In Fiji, there is a mix of single-unit and multi-unit franchises, e.g., single-unit franchises are highlighted in Table 3. Under lodging/hotel industry in which there is only one franchise unit or location for the following hotels – Radisson Blu Resort Fiji, Intercontinental Hotels, Shangri-la Fiji Resort, Holiday Inn, Fiji Marriott Hotel, Hilton Fiji Resort & Spa, Double Tree Resort, The Westin Denarau Island Resort & Spa, Sheraton Fiji Resort, Nanuku Auberge Resort and Studio 6. Novotel, on the other hand,

has two single-unit franchises – one in Lami and the other one in Nadi. Multi-unit franchise is common for the other business format franchising such as fast food, beverages, service, restaurants, and other retail.

This section provides a few examples of multi-unit franchising in Fiji. Additionally, Table 4 provides a detailed illustration of the various multi-unit franchise arrangements in Fiji. It is interesting to note that The Hot Bread Kitchen (HBK), Pizza King Ltd. and Chicken Express are three of the popular local franchisors who have entered in to multi-unit franchising within Fiji and the South Pacific.

**Table 4** List of multi-unit franchising companies in Fiji

<i>Type</i>	<i>Franchise</i>	<i>Multi-unit locations</i>	<i>Owner</i>
Fast food	McDonalds	Suva CBD, Laucala Bay Rd., Nadi, Lautoka	1 for all 4 outlets
	Burger King	Suva, Nadi Town, Nadi Airport	1 for all 3 outlets
Beverages	Gloria Jeans Coffees	MHCC, FNPF Center, Tappoo City Foyer, Tappoo City Level 4, Damodar City, ANZ Bank Suva, FBC, Total Service Station Flagstaff, Total Service Station Laucala Beach, Tappoo City Lautoka – ground floor and Life Cinema Foyer	1 master franchisee owns all 11 outlets of which ONE, Gloria Jeans at FNPF Center, is sublet to another operator under the master franchise agreement
	Chatime	MHCC, Tappoo City	1 for all 2 outlets
	Esquires Coffee House	Suva, Nadi Airport	1 for all 2 outlets
	Donut King	MHCC, Tappoo City, Damodar City, Lautoka	1 for all 4 outlets
Service	Hertz	Nabua, Nadi Airport	1 for all 2 outlets
	Avis Rent a Car	Suva, Nadi, Airport, Denarau, Nausori, Sigatoka, Labasa	1 for all 6 outlets
	Budget Rent a Car	Walu Bay, Nausori Airport, Nadi Airport, Port Denarau, Sigatoka, Lautoka, Labasa, Savusavu	1 for all 8 outlets
	Rentokil Initial Ltd.	Suva, Lautoka	1 for all 2 outlets
	Supercuts	Damodar City, Vanua Arcade, Kinoya, Mead Rd., FNPF Center	1 for all 5 outlets
Restaurants	BBQ Chicken	Nadi, Lautoka	1 for all 2 outlets
	Nandos	Suva Town, Laucala Bay Rd.	1 for all 2 outlets
	Eagle Boys Pizza	Damodar City, FNPF Center	1 for all 2 outlets
Other retail	New World IGA	Damodar City, FNPF Center, Nakasi, Votualevu Nadi	1 for all 4 outlets
	WH Smith	Denarau, Nausori Airport, Nadi Airport, Tappoo Lautoka	1 for all 4 outlets

### 2.3.1 Examples of multi-unit franchising in Fiji

Firstly, Motibhai & Company Ltd. engage in the fields of imports, wholesaling and retailing, food manufacture and distribution, real estate, and hospitality in Fiji. The company entered into a master franchise agreement with Burger King Asia Pacific and has been awarded exclusive rights to develop Burger King Restaurants in Fiji (Burger King Fiji, 2018).

Secondly, the master franchise holder for Gloria Jeans Coffees in the South Pacific, Ariel De Asa, is successfully operating 12 Gloria Jeans' outlets in Fiji and hopes to expand operations to other Pacific Island countries. Gloria Jeans is a good example of multi-unit franchising whereby the owner has sub-franchised one of its twelve outlets.

Thirdly, HBK owner and franchisor, Mere Samisoni, has sub-franchised a few of her outlets to her children to operate and manage. Her children are franchisees of her successful business. Mere opened two HBK franchised outlets in Hawaii and a franchised outlet in Solomon Islands. She has expanded further in terms of franchises and company-managed shops (Fairbairn, 2006).

Fourthly, Pizza King Ltd. has grown into Fiji's largest restaurant franchise with over six major locations across the island. As a locally owned franchise, Pizza King has surpassed major food chains in Fiji making it undoubtedly the number one restaurant in its category. The franchisor, Ravindra Nath, started Pizza King in 1986 (Pizza King Ltd. Fiji, 2012) and has sub-franchised the Nausori outlet to his next of kin, Satendra Nath who oversees its operations (Lal, 2016a). The franchisor highlighted that potential franchisees from Lautoka, Labasa, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea have shown interest in the business however, he feels that it may be risky to operate the Pizza King franchise outside Suva given that the standard of their product will be compromised (Nisha and Krishna, 2017).

Moreover, Chicken Express owner and franchisor, Aswin Sharma, sub-franchised one of the outlets in Lautoka. Chicken Express was initially an Australian owned franchise that was established in Sydney, Australia in 1991 (*maiLife*, 2013). However, due to the business closure in Australia, Chicken Express is focused on expanding operations to all major towns in Fiji.

Additionally, there are a few franchises in fast food, beverages, service, restaurants, and other retail that have limited their outlet to one branch only. These include Moochi, Hard Rock Café, Sitar Restaurant & Bar, Missha Fiji and Diadora.

There are several reasons why these franchises chose to operate in a single-unit franchise and these are because:

- 1 Franchises like Moochi, Sitar Restaurant & Bar, Missha Fiji and Diadora are fairly new to the Fiji market and owners at this stage are still evaluating the response from customers in relation to their product offering.
- 2 Franchises like Hard Rock Café is only located in Port Denarau, Nadi (called the 'tourist town' of Fiji) is ideally situated near luxury hotels and is only a short distance from the international airport which is convenient for both tourists and locals.
- 3 Each of these outlets add their own uniqueness to the different territories they serve, e.g., Sitar Restaurant & Bar is unique to Nadi and its dwellers while there are similar

authenticities like Saffron, Ashiana and Yellow Chillies in Suva to cater for Suva dwellers.

Hence, similar product offerings are spread across the major towns and cities in Fiji.

### 3 Concluding remarks

There is a lot of potential for franchises to prosper in Fiji if they do it right. Fiji is a growing market with opportunities that many businesses can take advantage of and exploit. The present government has also made positive changes to some of its laws so that businesses can operate better. The government also welcomes foreign investors to invest in Fiji's economy so as to drive economic development and competition which in turn will improve the quality of products offered at low cost. Given that this paper is descriptive and the first of a series of publication that has focused on the retail franchising climate in Fiji, the next series of papers will be more analytically inclined to the topic.

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